

Hyper Consumerism – The Real Cost of a Bargain

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We in developed countries have finally reached the point of Hyper-consumerism – a state where old reliable brands built on reputation, quality, durability and service are being swept aside by a feeding frenzy of cheap throw-away goods brought to us by mammoth retailers, who source their goods in the lowest wage countries – and sell them to us on one simple proposition – lowest price. To achieve these low prices, the big retailers squeeze costs at every point along the supply chain, resulting in ever lower wages in their factories and stores, devastation of smaller competitors and traditional town centres and, destruction of local manufacturing.

To keep growing and surviving the big retailers must not only kill the smaller competition, they must also knock out their large competitors and around the world we have ‘battles of the giants’ with the result now that many older and well known chains in western countries have also fallen victim to the power of retailers like Wal-Mart in the US, Tesco in the UK and The Warehouse in New Zealand. But what about the social consequences of such a massive shift in the way things are made, sold and used, and massive increase in affordability of goods. And what about the ecological consequences of longer energy intensive supply chains, manufacturing in countries with low environmental standards and retail sprawl? And are the Mega retailers going to come up against limits to their continued reach? My talk will address these questions, show how new forces are emerging that may now challenge and threaten the Mega Retail model and the forced Hyper-consumerism it is predicated on, and what can be done to foster this challenge.