

My view

# Toward a rational economy

By JEFFRY HAMILTON STEELE

When was the last time you seriously considered living the life of your dreams? Can you remember a time when the pressures around you were so few that you had space to reflect — to ask yourself if your life was a true expression of your highest hopes and values, your spirit's true nature?

How many times have you stopped yourself from taking a risk, cutting a new path through the woods, because a voice (from within or without) told you: "No way can you succeed at this!...It's best you stick with what's secure and familiar!...You could end up on the street?"



Steele

We live in a society based in fear. So long as we keep each other scared, nobody wins. It creates a vast marketing opportunity — whether you are selling insurance, security systems or a political candidate — when you can count

on the populace's terror. Talking to people's fears gets them acting as one organism (like a school of fish) while staying divided. Talking fear preys on lack of self-worth — which most of us experience in varying degrees — and forces us to compromise our vision of where we would like ourselves, and the society at large, to be.

Wherever we are in the economic strata, the fear-based system can keep us from living our dreams. I knew a CEO once who, pressured into taking over the family business, always felt frustrated that he'd never developed himself artistically. He would sit down at the piano and play the first eight bars of "The Moonlight Sonata" expressively, but never learned anything beyond that. He managed his company well, made tons of money, and began drinking scotch the moment he got home from work — falling asleep shortly after his wife, or maid, cleared the dinner plates. His wealth could not free him from the psychological imprisonment in which he found himself. The richer one gets, the more isolated one becomes and the more one starts believing that his financial assets are all he amounts to.

Since civilization began, feelings of insecurity (both personal and political) have driven rulers to expand their borders and economic base. To insure the success of the enterprise, slaves were deemed necessary. William Walker, in the 1850s, foresaw the end of slavery in the United States and pursued a vision of enslaving Central Americans for use by North American industrialists.

Today, particularly since the Reagan years, do we not see a disguised movement back to a slave economy? It creeps up on us slowly, making it hard to step back and see the overall decay in our expectations. We lose a school art teacher position one year; we lose a factory another. Prices go up but our wages, in real dollars, do not. Forced to work harder, we spend less time with our families. We have lost so many jobs to corporate downsizing, "free trade" and the like that we are scared of losing what work we have, especially if it includes health insurance.

Fewer jobs have any benefits at all, as companies use us on a "temporary" or "consultant" basis. We hesitate to complain because there will always be someone behind us they could hire for less. Those with the highest incomes pay less in taxes than ever before, while the rest pay more.

What happens in a slave economy? The owners must, in their own minds, de-humanize the slaves. Others are often put in the middle to carry out the owner's agenda without appearing to be owners. Are not a slave economy and our own kept in place by a numbing fear that keeps us all from speaking out on behalf of our brothers and sisters when they are being exploited?

When we remove the blindfolds placed on us by this system that doesn't truly — in the spiritual sense — benefit anyone, we can begin to envision a rational economy, where none of this would take place. In a rational economy, everyone would have equal access to their inner wealth. A rational economy would enable every one of us to discover our inherent worth. We would expect to succeed at whatever our spirits pulled us toward, and we would hold out high expectations for one another. No one would need to amass great fortunes to prove themselves, and no one would need to go hungry.

Having left you with this collection of my thoughts, I encourage you to come hear how current economic trends are affecting the lives of other Cape Ann residents. This will be the topic of a timely public hearing this Sunday afternoon at Gloucester City Hall from 4 to 5:30, titled, "Where has all the money gone?" Personal and professional testimony about diverse economic experiences and issues will be followed by responses from candidates running for public office in the November elections.

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