

THE STRAIGHT SHOT

NONSENSICAL ECONOMY & CHAMPION GREENBACKS

by Jess Hardin



I have to tell you, there's something wrong with an economic system that depends on a constant increase in production, spending and debt just to avoid complete collapse. Here's how it works, just in case you didn't know: The economy suffers even if we spend and produce exactly the same amount as the year before. It requires not only that we buy ever more stuff, needed or not, but it also needs us to go into debt, the economy's health depending increasingly on our purchasing things we cannot yet afford. It's sounds like something out of a bad science fiction movie, the ponderous creature that must constantly grow or die, needing to kill and eat ever more in order to remain on its feet. All the frightened townsfolk need to do is figure out a way to slow it down and it will get sick and begin to die... but in the case of the ever expanding economy, if it sickens, we all suffer. This is frankly nonsensical, and not a very promising model for doing business in a world that is of measurably limited size, created and then gifted to us with a finite amount of water for drinking, a specific number of acres suitable for farming, a still undetermined amount of minerals for industry, and at best only just so many salmon for sushi not matter how you shake your rod.

President George Bush said that spending was patriotic, and his mantra was to "buy, buy, buy." Current President Obama is mortgaging future generations by his monstrous swelling of the national debt, spending a mint in the emergency room trying to save the life of a sick patient that had never done anything to contribute to its own long term health. Such approaches stand in stark contrast to the sentiments and strategies of our national past, with frugality and savings being an aspect of the American spirit since the founding of the country and the sensible proclamations of co-founder Benjamin Franklin. President Theodore Roosevelt came from a wealthy family and was militarily an unapologetic expansionist, but he was also a conservationist who wanted to see wildlife, coal and oil reserves conserved, and a conservative who believed in Americans saving their hard earned money so we would be well prepared in

case of future hardships. Even later President Franklin Roosevelt, who's "New Deal" initiated the first Big-Brother management of social services in an attempt to crawl out of the economic depression of the 1930's, still preached the importance of conserving and recycling precious materials like steel, and instead of being encouraged to dump their few dollars at the nearest strip mall, they were told that the most sensible and indeed American thing they could do was to grow a "Victory" garden and learn to generally make rich lives with less.

If there are any advantages to our system the way it works, it's that it can fuel innovation and contribute to diversification. And it's great the way buying gives us a degree of individual and collective power. We wouldn't have to sign up for organized boycotts to start working in unison to influence the world we are in. You don't like a certain political leader? Then refuse to give your business to any businesses associated with conglomerates that fund them. Might take a little education on our parts, mercy sakes, but then we could start making every expenditure an informed decision. Tired of work being contracted overseas? Simple, pay a little more and buy American made. Better yet, buy locally whenever possible, and be part of the solution for your own local economy. If we want products that are made well and last long, instead of engineered to need regular replacement, then we need to research and buy the best made items we can afford. We need to know what we need and want, and then search out the best as well as the best priced, instead of going for the cheapest possible at WallyWorld, or making impulse purchases of crap that we'll soon pitch in the closet or garage and never look at again.

I believe I'd really have enjoyed being alive at an earlier date when both words and money were spent carefully, when meaningful conversation was of more importance than accumulation, when free time for having fun was seen as more valuable than owning more toys, when a good friend was considered worth more than a thousand investors, love more precious than gold and one's word more bankable than a lawyer-

penned contract. That said, if cash is to be "king" like the classified ads often claim, then we might oughta consider making every purchase a frigg'in' royal decree.

Whether we make conscious spending decisions or not, we verily decide the culture we are a part of, not only who will lead it but what it will look like. We could be equipped by vehicles that run for years without repair, long lasting tools powered by wind generators or who knows what, stores stocked with hard goods from somewhere besides China, our homes furnished with real wood and lovely if sometimes pre-owned material, if we only we insisted upon it and spent our all-powerful dollars accordingly. The fact that our political leaders range from puppet dolts to scheming paternalists, that 2/3 of what's on the variety store shelves could be considered disposable, that multinational corporations are expanding while small town businesses close, that new cars only last a few years and come with tacking plastic body parts, is all determined by the spending choices we together and separately make.

If I feel guilty and out of sorts going into that monolithic, many-tendriled discount store, saddened at the sight of the resigned blue-vested workers, shuddering under its flickering fluorescent lights and all-seeing cameras, it is not just because of the low wages paid its laborers, the jobs lost to China when it orders its merchandise almost entirely from there, or the laid-off American workers now struggling to pay even the discount store prices for the food their family needs. If I feel sickened, it is also because I know this particular monster - no different than our national economy - has to endlessly eat and expand its repulsive bulk if it is to survive... and I, in my haste to get a bargain on imported raspberries and an air cleaner for the Jeep, have helped to feed it.

As I learn more, I increasingly intend that my scarce but powerful dollars speak loudly in support of individual liberties and my own personal values, that they impact the world I am a part of, if not always to an evident degree. I no longer see the few computer encoded greenbacks in my wallet in the same light I used to. They are my weapons of justice, agents of love and good taste. They are my champions, few but now purposeful, directed and dedicated.

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