



Al Rodda, RIP

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Al Rodda, RIP

BY MASON GAFFNEY, ON JUNE 18TH, 2010

Dear Georgist historians, and other good people

We have lost former Cal state Senator Al Rodda, senate leader and Georgist stalwart. Perhaps it was time: he lived his 3-score years and 10 plus 27 more, but he left footprints in the sands of time. Anyone caring to write him up, start with www.thebackbench.blogspot.com.

Al graduated from Stanford in the year when Law Prof. Jackson Ralston was beginning his series of campaigns for LVT in California.

Very likely, some of this rubbed off on young Al. At any rate when Al got to the Calif State Senate, and became head of its finance committee, and a major leader, he kept introducing initiative and other proposals for a statewide tax on land values. You may be sure this raised the consciousness of other statesmen, even though he failed. He also worked with Senator Mills of San Diego, who fought to finance BART and other muni transit systems with benefit taxes on the affected lands.

I first heard him speak to a Georgist group in the Bay Area in the 1960's. Among those present was Perry I. Prentice, Editor of *House and Home* Magazine in the stable of TIME, Inc. Rodda scolded us for not doing more politically – I confess I resented his attitude then, although I learned later that is a professional hazard in Sacto. Anyway, Prentice, a man not accustomed to being scolded, rose to lead cheers, and second Rodda's remarks. LBJ was President, preaching of The Great Society – it was another age, scarcely believable to those not living then. Lunch counter sit-ins were chic; MLK Jr. was preaching, Vatican II was underway ... a time of hope and excitement when people dreamed.

In 1976 we moved to California – Jerry Brown was Governor. Time to dream some more! "Appropriate technology" was the rage, with E.F. Schumacher and Amory Lovins drawing crowds. Reforming water law was thinkable. Rodda invited me to testify before the Senate Finance Committee on his latest move for a statewide land tax. I most vividly remember a nasty heckler and sandbagger, Senator George Deukmejian, a harbinger of times to come. I remember him because he did not want answers to his "questions", his mind was made up, don't bother him with facts. As we morphed into the Reagan Era I ran into more and more people like that, including Deans Lowell Lewis and Shannon and Fatso the chemist at UCR, and various entomologists consulting for Monsanto, and physicists consulting for General Atomic, killers of the dream. Pretty soon instead of Al Rodda we had Howard Jarvis and the dark night of despair. California began its long slide downhill into the abyss of Alabamization.

Al Rodda, after 22 years a Senator, went down in the Reagan landslide of 1980. So what good came of his hard work? A good deal, I think. Rodda was a product of the era when California had a magnetic tax system – a way of raising ample public revenues without repelling jobs and capital. An object lesson for the world. It was far from perfect, but a student of its nuances, like our friend the Assessor Ted Gwartney, could see its relative virtues a mile away. With the State and nation mired in a new "underemployment equilibrium", the stage is set for a renaissance of the old values that built the State before the calamity of 1978. God bless you, Al, and if there is a Reincarnation, send Al back in the body of an ambitious young politician!

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