In Memoriam, Stan Sapiro
By Dr. Mason Gaffney

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from the Henry George Institute

Georgist Journal

News & Views from the International Georgist Movement

In Memoriam, Stan Sapiro

by Mason Gaffney

We have lost a Great Georgist who was also a Great Man, rating a two-column obit in the *Los Angeles Times,* a newspaper he had often excoriated because it "never met a sales tax it didn't like". Stan Sapiro was Great as a Lawyer, as a Scholar, as a Family Man and as a Generous Friend.

Los Angeles knew him well as an activist in court. He had sued the Assessor of L.A. County to hurry up and raise the taxable valuation of Malibu lands held speculatively by then-Governor Ronald Reagan. Stan won, and Reagan's land taxes rose by a factor of six. When the California Supreme Court dawdled over the case, he sued Chief Justice Rose Bird to follow the Constitution and hurry it up, which she then had to do. In 1971

he sued the Assessor to hurry up and deny preferential low tax valuations to private country clubs that discriminate against Jews and other ethnic groups. In this case, amazingly, the State Supreme Court ruled the private country clubs may continue to exclude Jews and others, while still enjoying their low tax valuations. One of the most powerful Jewish communities in the country might have taken the lead, but private Jewish country clubs may also exclude gentiles, by inference. It took our man Stanley to bring a case in the general public interest, and challenge the whole notion of underassessing the land of any private country club.

As his last hurrah, Stanley sued the powerful Lincoln Foundation to make it carry out John C. Lincoln's will to propagate the ideas of Henry George as expressed in *Progress and Poverty*. Stan researched the case prodigiously, as was his wont, but by now his physical powers were waning and he had to turn the case over to others. It was an uphill battle fought on the defendant's home turf of Arizona; it finally stalled on a technicality. Through it all, Stan maintained friendly rapport with David Lincoln himself, just as he had earlier with Ronald Reagan. There was mutual respect there, and it is still to be hoped that Stan's earnest endeavors may have touched David's conscience.

The United States has more than one million lawyers. If just 1% of them were inspired to follow Stan's course in life, think of the revolutionary effect of 10,000 activist lawyers prompting public officials and eleemosynary directors to do their duties. Where now is the Divine Mold that cast Stan Sapiro? If it would strike some more in his image, what a great world this would be. As Stan showed, it's not just writing good laws or bequests, it is enforcing them that can save the world. Stan once sought

public office, too, but, like Henry George, found his higher calling in another kind of public service.

Readers of Stan and Marion's "Insights" in *Groundswell* know Stan as a researcher, too. He gave us opinions, but he backed up each one with facts, like the lawyer that he was, preparing for a trial. He wrote "Insights" from May, 1990, nearly to date — an op-ed so meaty that the whole series warrants publication as a scholarly book. Years of practicing law in a warren of world celebrities supplied his long antennae with extraordinary insights into land speculation by the rich and famous. Among his targets besides Reagan, to pique reader interest, were Bob Hope, the Disney Company and its overpaid executives, Marlon Brando, Dean Martin, Edie Adams, and Jack Benny. He also took on the major landowners of Orange County: the O'Neills and the Irvine Company. He exposed the "Redevelopment District" swindle, and porkbarreling of all kinds. He had the goods on their bads.

He linked the piquant and topical with vignettes from history, of which he was a deep student. His brain was his computer, with vast storage space for things most of us forget (if we ever knew them). He treated his readers to short courses in, among other topics:

- A history of the poll tax, back to King Herod
- A history of the Russian Revolution
- History and purpose of the Calif. State Board of Equalization
- Cuban land monopolists under Batista
- Child labor laws
- Economics in the Bible
- A history of income taxation
- The Oklahoma land rush of 1889

- Robert Mugabe's suppression of Georgism in Zimbabwe
- A concise history of the anti-trust laws
- The baleful effects of Proposition 13 in California

He saw both sides of issues. While hawkish at times, he wrote of how the IMF et al. subsidize tyrants who hold down wage rates while landowners pay no taxes; and he chronicled the life of a pacifist he admired, Leo Tolstoy.

Some critics tried to dismiss him as narrow, but Stan, reading widely, quoted from such varied writers as Goethe, Thoreau, FDR, Andrew Jackson, Jonathan Swift, W.S. Gilbert, Fred Allen, J.S. Mill, the Bible, Carl Schurz, Mark Twain, Adam Smith, Joseph Fels, David Stockman, Michael Boskin, Eddie Cantor, Andrew Carnegie, and John D. Rockefeller: some to extol and some to scorn, but all to edify and entertain.

Goodbye, Stan, I loved you well, as did many others. Your spirit lives on in the lives you have touched. It is now for us, the living, to take from your life increased devotion to that cause for which you gave the last full measure of yours.

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