

the Henry George News

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A Lasting Influence

THE Hon. S. James Clarkson, a recently elected district judge, gave two reasons for accepting the invitation to speak at the HGS banquet in Chicago—to thank the Henry George School for all that it had meant in his life, and to give a reassuring report on Southfield, Michigan.

Without the influence of Henry George, he said he never would have run for a public office. With the help of many loyal Georgists who contributed to his early campaigns he was ultimately elected to the state legislature. During that time the young representative introduced a bill leading to investigation of the effects of a higher differential rate of taxation on land values as compared to improved values of real property.

In 1961, still campaigning on the issue of LVT, he won a close election as mayor of Southfield, then a two-year-old suburb of Detroit. Within two years he had made strides toward taxing land into use and buildings out of use by easing the assessments on residential property. His law practice prospered concurrently, and he remained the city's widely praised mayor for eight years. He is proud to have had a small part in making Southfield what it has become.

Aside from the early trials of establishing the assessment reform, he said certain other experiences were very

frustrating. He recalled when Ted Gwartney came from California to Southfield to be the nation's youngest assessor. He wanted him to buy a certain piece of property, believing that it would double in value from \$6,000. When Ted didn't buy it at \$7,000, someone else did, and the price has since gone to \$52,000. "I'm sure Ted shares this frustration," said Judge Clarkson.

But what about Southfield? That was the question many had been asking, since it was rumored that newly elected officials were not willing to attribute the city's phenomenal growth to the increased assessment of land values. This view was discounted by Clarkson, who affirmed "there's nothing more powerful than an idea—nothing can erase an idea as strong as Henry George's — it is in Southfield to stay. There will be some retrenchment, but no one will take away those values that have been placed there by Ted Gwartney, my most recent assessor."

The doubting Thomases have come to Southfield, he said. The economic agnostics are out to disprove LVT, but the buildings are their own evidence of what was done. We know the

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a depression. Should we continue to teach land value speculation as the chief cause of depressions when we know the tremendous power of the Federal Reserve Bank to influence the economy? Shouldn't we stress money power as well as landowner power?

Can we offer as the answer to housing problems only land value taxation and gradualism? Restrictive union practices, local building and zoning codes, high cost of money, zooming construction costs due to inflation (a money problem), delays and favoritism from government, all will keep new houses deteriorating faster than they can be built. To offer as the remedy, LVT with gradualism, is to be faced with a repudiation of our reform if the cities do not react as expected, unless we are wary enough to point out many other necessary measures to free our economy.

Can we permit Henry George to be remembered merely as having written *Progress and Poverty*? His works are like an opera, a great drama of many parts in which he presents justice and equality constantly being menaced by the evils of privilege. To free labor and true capital he wrote that all economic privileges must be rescinded. Eliminating monopolies in any form through corrective measures, be it land monopoly, credit, money, franchises, unions, patents, subsidies, tax preferences, tariffs — these are the steps to cure poverty and stimulate production.

Concentrating on land reform only instead of revealing the whole score, is not to reach the multitudes who understand vaguely that there are many evils surrounding them which keep them in poverty and subjugation to the few. Let's do the whole job. Let's shout against privileges.

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"Nothing will fully interest men unless it also interests women."

— Henry George
(Courtesy of Dorothy Sara)

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Southfield success is due to land value taxation. It's true the city is in the path of development, but the Southfield side of the highway dividing it from Detroit is flourishing, while the other side still remains a slum area.

As for his good fortune in having been elected a district judge, he quoted the late Judge Fuchs of Texas, who said "just because I've donned the robes I have not lost the taste for what LVT has done." He was encouraged in the afternoon session with the report by John Nagy of San Diego on recent surveys in California. He said sta-

tistics like this make us know that we are accomplishing what Henry George wanted to accomplish. He is sure John Nagy, Robert Tideman and Irene Hickman of California all feel as he does about the influence of the Henry George School on their lives.

Two of Judge Clarkson's sons were in the audience because, as he said, they wanted to find out how Henry George had influenced his life and how he had personally benefited. "It's sure refreshing to break bread with Georgists and understand the simplicity of what Henry George was trying to tell us," he said. "It will be always my debt that I can never repay."

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"We don't make Georgists, we find them." — Seymour Rauch