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Leonard P. Liggio

Man of Peace

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MARTY ZUPAN AND PHILLIP W. MAGNESS

On October 14, 2014, friends of freedom lost a lifelong champion of classical liberal thought with the passing of Leonard P. Liggio at the age of eighty-one. A deeply knowledgeable history scholar, Leonard was also much more; he was a central figure in building the modern classical liberal intellectual movement in the United States and around the world. In a career spanning sixty years, he played a formative role in organizations including the Mont Pelerin Society, the Philadelphia Society, the Institute for Humane Studies, and the Atlas Network. He also taught at several universities and was an advisory scholar for many organizations within the liberty movement.

Born on July 5, 1933, Leonard traced his interest in political ideas to his childhood and his first classical liberal inclinations to his mother. He grew up in a political household in the Bronx that devoured multiple daily newspapers and radio commentaries. Whereas his father was an FDR Democrat, his mother favored sound money, lower government spending, and, as World War II loomed, Republicans' traditional noninterventionism and opposition to Stalin's Soviet Union. "The facts from 1941–45 led me to agree with my mother," he said (Liggio n.d.a, first paragraph).¹

His interest in peace and in the institutions of a free society that foster it would be an enduring theme of his scholarly and organizational career.

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1. The information about Liggio's life is drawn from his recollections in "Leonard Liggio: A Snapshot," a three-part blog he wrote about his life and influences (Liggio n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c), and from two recorded interviews: "The Intellectual Portrait Series" 2006 and Students for Liberty 2010.

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As a teen, he excitedly followed Robert Taft's efforts to win the Republican presidential nomination on a noninterventionist platform. And having heard a debate sponsored by the American Historical Association on FDR's taking the United States into war, he decided to go to college at Georgetown University to study history with one of the debaters, Charles Tansill, the author of *Back Door to War*.

Once at Georgetown, Liggio joined Students for Taft—providentially beginning a series of personal and intellectual contacts that would put him at the center of the budding classical liberal intellectual movement. He came to know Ralph Raico and George Reisman, the Students for Taft leaders in New York (who would go on to distinguished careers in academia). They introduced him to the recently formed Foundation for Economic Education (FEE), where he was welcomed by its founder, Leonard Read, and resident economist, F. A. “Baldy” Harper, and invited to seminars.

Through FEE, he read Frédéric Bastiat's work *The Law* and other writings. And along with Raico and Reisman he began sitting in on the graduate seminar at New York University hosted by eminent Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises, often spending his college breaks taking notes in the back of the classroom. Leonard recalled with fondness the interdisciplinary diversity of the discussions as Mises lectured from a draft of his book *Theory and History*, which would be published by Yale University Press and brought together historical theory, epistemology, and philosophy in a sweeping methodological treatise on the social sciences. The enrolled students went home, he recalled, “and the ‘real’ students stayed to discuss the seminar” (Liggio n.d.b, third paragraph). It was there that Leonard met Murray Rothbard, beginning an important forty-year friendship and intellectual association.

Back at Georgetown, Liggio established the very first chapter of a new libertarian student group, the Intercollegiate Society of Individualists, having collaborated with the well-known noninterventionist Frank Chodorov to start the organization (which evolved into today's Intercollegiate Studies Institute). He was also active in bringing guest lecturers to Georgetown as an officer of the International Relations Club and proudly recounted that he appointed himself president of the film society and showed Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead* every year. (Later, he would briefly be part of a circle that met in Rand's Manhattan apartment, but “since I was a theist, I did not continue to join the meetings” [Liggio n.d.b, second-to-last paragraph]).

The 1950s were a precarious time for classical liberals because at that time the interventionist economics of the Left had paired with the Cold War militarism that increasingly dominated the Right, producing an expansive welfare-warfare state. Research funding was hard to come by amid a public discourse that seemed to incentivize the call for government action. A notable and in some ways solitary exception was a philanthropic outfit called the William Volker Fund, which provided research support and sponsored the publication of classical liberal scholarly works. In its peak years from the mid-1950s through the early 1960s, Volker underwrote the reprinting of several classic Austrian works and funded new research by such figures

as Mises, F. A. Hayek, and Henry Hazlitt as well as Rothbard's opus *Man, Economy, and State*.

Liggio became involved in the Volker Fund when Baldy Harper left FEE in 1958 to assume directorship of the Volker Fund's publishing program and recruited him to work as a reader for its research program. As Leonard described the work, "The analysts read journal articles and books to discover any remnant of classical liberals in academia. If the article looked promising, we would send a report and copy of the article to the William Volker Fund. Its staff would follow up with contact or a visit. He or she might be invited to one of the summer seminars, and might apply for a grant for leave to write a book." (Liggio n.d.c, sixth paragraph).

Through this work and a Volker Fund series of political economy seminars starting in 1959, Liggio came to know a multitude of leading classical liberal thinkers, including Milton Friedman, Felix Morley, Israel Kirzner, Bruno Leoni, and James Buchanan.²

Meanwhile, Liggio had been pursuing his diverse intellectual interests in graduate studies—in law for one year at Columbia University and then in the history of international relations as well as medieval economic and political history at Fordham University. Outside his formal studies, his well-remarked encyclopedic knowledge was self-acquired from a lifetime of continuous reading sparked by the intellectual curiosities of a fertile mind. He had a particular penchant for absorbing historical detail and instantly drawing on precise points of reference from elucidating texts and events, no matter how obscure.

His depth of knowledge was a marvel unto itself in any case, and many of us fondly recall that although he had a remarkable tendency from an early age to appear to fall asleep during a lecture or discussion, he would "awaken" at the end and recall its contents in ensuing conversation with greater insight and attentiveness to detail than anyone else in the room. He possessed an empiricist's gift for observation, recollection, and reflection, and those of us who had the good fortune of his company invariably gained from the vast knowledge behind his insights.

Liggio held academic appointments from 1968 to 1977 at the City College of New York and the State University of New York–Old Westbury and later taught legal history at George Mason University's law school for nearly two decades. He penned several dozen scholarly and popular articles on subjects ranging from medieval law to the fall of communism, Austrian economics, and the history of American libertarianism (Liggio n.d.d). Between 1978 and 1982, he likely wrote the unsigned editorials that appeared in each issue of *Literature of Liberty*, a journal published under his editorial direction first by the Cato Institute and then by the Institute for Humane Studies (see Liggio 1978–82). And he collaborated on the research for Rothbard's multivolume historical work on early America, *Conceived in Liberty*.

On top of his legacy as a scholar, though, Leonard will be remembered for his central role in building an intellectual movement. Although we are admittedly partial

2. More about the role of the Volker Fund can be found in Doherty 2007.

to this legacy because it includes the Institute for Humane Studies (IHS), it is also difficult to understate his role in the institute's founding and development as an organization.

Liggio had been working with Baldy Harper at the Volker Fund and helped him draft the plan for IHS, founded in 1961, and execute the vision of creating an intellectually robust institute to foster learning and scholarly research in the classical liberal tradition. He organized a series of scholarly conferences for IHS in the late 1960s—a legacy that led directly to the famous Austrian economics conferences a few years later, brought Hayek to IHS for a summer residency after Hayek received his Nobel Prize, and continued to attend IHS seminars and academic conferences until the end of his life.

After a decade in academia, Liggio returned to IHS in 1978 at the request of then president Louis Spadaro, another old colleague from the Mises circle of the 1950s. He succeeded Spadaro as president two years later and oversaw an ambitious effort to begin cultivating a next generation of classical liberal academics, taking a big step beyond the Volker Fund's efforts to identify and sustain the remnant. Midway through the 1980s, he oversaw the institute's move from Menlo Park, California, to affiliate with George Mason University in northern Virginia, joining with existing groups at George Mason to create the world's largest university-based locus of classical liberal research, education, and talent development. Stepping down from his role as IHS president in 1988, Liggio remained a Distinguished Senior Scholar, taught at IHS seminars for many more years, and annually attended its board of directors meeting.

Leonard played a similarly large role in dozens of organizations and research institutes both before and after his time at IHS. His involvement with the Mont Pelerin Society is illustrative. He served on the society's board from 1996 to 2008, including two years as president, but his earliest association was as a guest at the very first general meeting in the United States, held in 1958 at Princeton University and organized and funded by Jasper Crane, a vice president of DuPont. (In one of the many intimate connections in the movement, Jasper's brother Edward was head of the book publisher D. Van Nostrand, which published the Volker Fund Series in the Humane Studies.)

In 1994, Liggio joined the Atlas Network (then the Atlas Economic Research Foundation) as executive vice president of academics, formalizing his long-standing role as builder of bridges between scholars and think tanks around the world. At Atlas, he also directed the John Templeton Foundation Freedom Project.

A few other seminal contributions to movement organizations are worth mentioning. He was involved with the Cato Institute from its founding in 1977, serving as its first executive vice president, and remained on Cato's editorial board until his death. He held an early fellowship at the Liberty Fund, where he organized a series of events for Hayek and Austrian economist Ludwig Lachmann, served frequently as a discussion leader for Liberty Fund colloquia, and eventually joined its board of directors in 2005. He served on the governing boards or advisory boards of numerous organizations, from the Philadelphia Society, the Acton Institute, and the

Competitive Enterprise Institute in the United States to the Centro Interdisciplinar de Ética e Economia Personalista in Brazil, the Fundación Burke in Spain, the Hayek Institute in Austria, the Institute for Economic Studies–Europe in France, and the Social Affairs Unit in the United Kingdom.

Leonard’s tireless efforts, lifelong commitment to intellectual pursuits, and fostering hand in the formation of the modern liberty movement earned him the moniker “Johnny Applesseed of Classical Liberalism” (Atlas Network n.d.). In 2007, the Association of Private Enterprise Education recognized him with the Adam Smith Award, “given to an individual who has made a sustained and lasting contribution to the perpetuation of the ideals of a free-market economy as first laid out in Adam Smith’s *Wealth of Nations*.”³ Four years later he received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Society for the Development of Austrian Economics, and the recently formed group Students for Liberty interviewed him as “the original student for liberty” (Students for Liberty 2010).

It is fitting to close a tribute to Leonard Liggio by noting his ever magnanimous and accessible demeanor. Libertarians are a sometimes fractious lot, with vigorous personalities and the factions, camps, and intellectual schisms that can accompany them. Yet he was always kind, accessible, and encouraging to all—not only to fellow classical liberals but also to intellectual opponents. A true scholar, he was a man of ideas and action, not of personalities.

As a junior figure at first and then as a senior figure in a blossoming intellectual community, Leonard was a friend and mentor to multiple generations of classical liberal scholars. He never married, he had no children, but he directly affected the lives of untold thousands of students of liberty. And he played a large role in building the vibrant liberty movement we know today.

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