

Is a Georgist a Republican or a Democrat?

By MARSHALL CRANE

ONCE when I was a small boy a large, jovial, silvery-haired gentleman told me, "Sonny, they call it Leap Year because it's the year when nobody knows which way the cat will jump."

Though I did not understand his joke I smiled politely, flattered to receive so much attention from a real, live Congressman, who lived in the nation's capital, and, no doubt, for-gathered habitually with President Taft and other exalted personages.

The Henry George School is chartered by the University of the State of New York and, very properly, does not go in for party politics. Still, no citizen who takes his political responsibilities seriously can be without political opinions, especially in an election year. And it is not the duty of anyone who searches for truth, whether as a student or a teacher, to stand passively neutral as the political cat crouches for its periodic leap.

For some reason, good or bad, we favor the "two party system" in this country. An outside candidate is seldom much of a threat. We have had only one since the Civil War who was at all important in a presidential election. In view of this it seems not unnatural to ask in an election year, "Is a Georgist a Republican or a Democrat?"

It is a simple question, and no doubt the answer to it would be simple too if one could say definitely just what a Republican or a Democrat is. In fact, about all one can say with any assurance of either is that he opposes the other!

A glance at their histories will convince anyone that both parties, as circumstances have dictated, have carried the banners of freedom and of special privilege, of local government and of centralization. When it has been convenient both have championed the causes of labor, of agriculture, of the big industrial interests and of the "small business man." And the fact that neither has ever spoken for free trade when it was in power would seem to indicate that it would be unfair to call either the party of protectionism.

One cannot honestly claim that either has consistently supported any general political principle throughout the years, and at the present time neither is in substantial agreement on any major issue even within its own ranks. The common, or garden, Republican or Democrat wrings what small comfort he can from the thought that the political pundits "on the inside" are just as confused about things as he is.

Few will quarrel with the axiom that it is our civic duty to vote, but during the coming campaign many thoughtful souls may be tempted to wonder why.

We shall hear a great deal about taxes. In the welter of double talk it will be easy to lose sight of the fact that the government of the world's richest nation has been spending more than its income for many years. Candidates for office somehow do not get around to reminding

their listeners of such things. They find it easier to sound off about our great American heritage of freedom, but it is just as easy for them, and for us too, to forget that these precious rights are only ours so long as we accept and fulfill their corresponding obligations, one of which is surely the responsibility for the debt which our government incurs in our name.

I imagine that we shall hear a great deal about foreign policy. A lot of it will be just recrimination, and a lot more will merely confuse issues which lie nearer home. We shall be fortunate indeed if we hear even one clear definition of any foreign policy, our present one or any other.

We shall hear a great deal with which we do not agree from candidates on both sides, and all too little of a definite, concrete nature from anyone. As Georgists, we shall do well to reconcile ourselves to the fact that we shall have little opportunity to speak directly for our political and economic creed next November. We may not recognize the few Georgists who run for office on major party tickets as such. And at best they will be scattered very thinly indeed among the thousands of assorted candidates throughout the country. Most of us will not have a chance to vote for even one. The perfect candidate is as rare as the perfect husband or wife.

The outlook may seem somewhat discouraging. But I believe that the voting machines will post the names of many men for whom we can vote without having to feel that we have sold our political and economic principles down the river; men of good will and intelligence; men who firmly believe that it is morally wrong for our government to waste our children's substance, wrong for it to conscript, for any purpose, good or evil, the toil and sweat of the unborn; wrong for it, by its extravagance, to bequeath to them a miserable choice between bankruptcy and peonage.

Such men will deserve our most earnest support, no matter what party label they bear. There is no more immediate and vital issue facing us now than that of the collection and expenditure of public funds, monies which represent the labor and livelihood of every American citizen.

I need not say that I believe our present fiscal policy and the political and economic doctrines on which it is based to be all wrong. Nor do I expect them to be corrected soon. Even the most sanguine Georgist knows that that will be a long and gradual process.

As a member of a political minority I confidently expect to cast my vote for men with whom I disagree in large measure. But I feel that even in backing them I shall have a very real chance to express my opinions, both as a Georgist and as an American, when I go to the polls on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. I shall be there.