

Getting to Know Your Neighbors

MAX FLECHNER is with the New York Department of Highways, but when he came to the banquet he spoke for himself as an individual and a Georgist. He has been interested in Henry George ever since he and his schoolmate, Robert Clancy, were wearing knickers. During the time he was in service he talked earnestly of this basic philosophy and says he preceded the army orientation program by about a year.

But he wanted to shift his approach from the ivory tower to the grass roots and in so-doing he presents an interesting story of accomplishment. He moved into a cooperative apartment in a section near the Navy Yard in Brooklyn, very convenient to downtown Manhattan. The cooperative formed its own management and also had a community association. The neighborhood became one of wide imbalance when the city threw all the problem families into this section. But earlier residents had an equity and realized they had a stake in the community. They had to better it if they wanted to continue living there.

Because of this challenge the New York City Housing Authority encouraged the formation of a neighborhood council which would take in various representatives of schools, colleges, religious and institutional groups. The cooperative is now six years old and the challenge remains — for there are still owners of slum properties who fail to cooperate.

But if one is a Georgist, says Mr. Flechner, one is not discouraged. His council soon joined a larger organization called the Association of Neighborhood Councils, and after a time he

was asked to become head of the housing committee. He demurred, saying he had his own ideas and others might not agree with him. But they told him to go ahead. These ideas got some national publicity through The Henry George News.

The members of the council were getting to know each other very well. Identification is important — you may start from trying to fix a hole in the street, or putting a light where a light has to be — and from these incidents you get acquainted and your neighbors rely on you to help out, no matter what your philosophy is. If you are a Georgist you do a great deal of listening and bide your time.

Just as Henry George believed in something and fought for it, so Mr. Flechner is following the same pattern. He has had a great deal of discussion with his local district leader and other officially elected persons, and he attends many workshops and forums pertaining to housing. Sometimes he will put a question to the planners — what is the good of all these plans if you haven't gotten to the root of the problem? Then he suggests, simply, taxing the slums out of existence.

Slowly but surely the groundwork is being laid as more and more people listen seriously to this point of view. The district leader listens and is interested as he's told about Henry George's views, and especially when he is shown articles from Fortune and other responsible magazines to prove the relevance of this method for the modern city. With so many people listening, Mr. Flechner thinks, "maybe one of these days it'll happen."

Robert A. King of Chicago mailed the April HGN with front page article by Knut Tholstrup referring to LVT in Vietnam, to General Westmoreland. He was intrigued and incredulous on receiving a seven-line reply saying the matter of full land value taxation was under active consideration by the government of Vietnam and was "of course encouraged by the United States mission."