

What's in a Name? By MARSHALL CRANE

DO FOLKS in general know what you mean, when you say that you are a "Georgist" or a "single-taxer"? If they do, you are luckier than I am. When I use either of these terms I never know whether I am going to be called a Red or a Tory. I have often thought that the lack of a good name for our movement is a genuine handicap to us, and beg to suggest that it deserves serious consideration.

Perhaps the choice of such a name is not easy. Prospective godfathers must always bear in mind that it is results that matter, and that these might well be influenced a great deal by the many people who are not exactly of our way of thinking, but whom we really should regard as our fellow travelers. The orthodox and puristic single-taxer may consider these other pilgrims as somewhat smelly company, but if he cannot tolerate them with their little heresies he certainly is not cut out for a social reformer. He had better just stick to his debating club.

Denmark offers an excellent lesson in this. The Georgists there have increased their numbers, and there has been a good deal of site-value taxation legislation. Nevertheless, most of the voters who passed it were not members of the Retsforbund, or Georgists of any sort. The platform of the Justice party won adherents here and there as its proposals seemed right and just, and it is still doing so. These adherents are anything but unanimous when it comes to economic theory, but the arms of "Justice" can stretch wide enough to embrace them all. Many of these voters are Georgists. I have no doubt that more of them will come into the fold. But they call themselves the Justice party, and they have certainly not libelled justice nor Henry George by using this title. Their works speak for themselves.

The foe was more obviously the great landlord in Germany, and there the single-taxers called themselves the "Bodenreform" [land reform] party. The name was self-explanatory, particularly to those who had personally suffered from rentier oppression. In a country so recently and so incompletely risen from the ashes of feudalism it combined expediency and aptness.

In this country, the title of the "Association for Economic Justice" recognizes the general principle of toleration of minor differences of opinion. The society's function, for the time being at least, is propaganda and education. When the time comes it may throw in its chips for some directly political organization. Perhaps "Association" is not a word to stir the blood of the voter at the polls, but for its present purpose the title is ideal, as it does not fight with existing party loyalties. And who does not honor the name of Justice?

Utopianism, ineffectiveness, and intolerance are the great occupational diseases of the doctrinaire. And the definitive labels he gives to his causes either frighten the passer-by or move him to scornful laughter. It is no accident that "isms" are unpopular. A great many have been wash-outs.

Shall we continue to call ourselves just Georgists? To us of course no name could be finer, but to people in general it has little or no significance. Neither all things nor all names are expedient. Fifty years ago the name of Henry George was that of an economic theorist, but even to those who had not read his books or heard him speak it was the name of a dynamic personality, of a tireless and fearless fighter for the cause of justice and equality, for the right of the underprivileged. Anyone associated with his name was identified indeed. Today, after two generations, even many students of economics have only a vague idea of what George fought for. It is a sad fact that now his memory can do less for our work than our work can do for his memory.

But what shall we call this work?

Well, any American will tell you, with a sigh of resignation, that "nothing is certain except death—and taxes." I have never met a person who was satisfied with our many taxes, or with our ways of collecting them. Everyone has his special personal grudge against the system. Listen to the sardonic laughter of the damned whenever the world "tax" is mentioned on the radio.

For seventy years the "single-taxer" has been the object of the indulgent contempt reserved for the fool and the dreamer. After all, why get all steamed up over the technology of larceny? You'll have to pay it anyway, whether it's single or multiple.

But it has occurred to me that if we were to proclaim loudly and persistently that the name of our cause is Tax Reform; that if we kept people constantly reminded that we are Tax Reformers, the reaction might be very different.

The obvious objection is that this name is vague, and that it may convey a dozen different meanings to as many people. This is perfectly true, but it may be as much an advantage as a disadvantage. And after all, the same thing could be said of such words as Right, Wrong, Christianity, Decency, Justice, Progressive, Democrat, Republican, or what you will. It will be up to us, as Tax Reformers, to give significance to our new name. If we cannot do that, we will not be able to do much for "Georgism" either.

Are nominations in order? Gentlemen, I give you—Tax Reform!

