

Robert Tideman

Landlords Collect Rent On Land Bought With Blood

MARCHERS and spectators alike wept as 1000 Americans and Filipinos early this month commemorated the Bataan Death March in which 7000 to 10,000 men died 25 years ago. Altogether, 20,000 men lost their lives defending the Philippines.

The bitter fruit of their brave sacrifice was savored recently by a Filipino journalist. "In some provinces," he said, "we have wealthy landowners who gamble \$1000 on the make of an approaching car... But in the fields a few yards away, peasants live in grinding poverty, often with a per capita income of \$130 a year."

FOXES HAVE HOLES...

A favored few now treat as their exclusive property land soaked with the life's blood of 30,000 defenders. Many of the men who fought and bled for the territory have not even a square yard of it on which to rest their heads. By the laws of their country they are virtually locked out of the land they won unless they come to terms with a landlord.

To such a landless Filipino it makes no real difference whether the rent he pays is consumed by his countryman on the islands or by a Japanese in Tokyo. His countryman gets all the rent he can; a Japanese could get no more. So far as he is concerned, the Japanese might as well have the islands back.

I wonder if it occurred to any of the men who fell in the Philippines that the land they fought for would be rented out a few years later by an absentee landlord who would bet \$1000 on whether the next car down the road would be a Ford or a Chevy. Did the men who died there know that the land was claimed, even at the moment they lay dying upon it, by someone who would come along after the fight was over and demand rent from whoever wanted to use it?

Does an American soldier who falls in Vietnam today ever wonder, "Who holds title to this parcel on which I now lie dying?" If any mortally wounded soldier ever asked the question and got a straight answer, he probably would not die happy. More than two-thirds of the Vietnamese are landless laborers or tenants who rent the land they farm.

Reprinted from

The Pacific Sun

May 5, 1967

Most of the good land is held by absentee landlords who contribute, as landlords, nothing whatever to the economy of Vietnam. Capital equipment—tractors, barns, machinery, tools—depends for its existence upon someone's investment, someone's willingness to postpone consumption. Land does not. The ownership of land goes back simply to the parcelling out of the soil by earlier conquerors.

KEEP THOSE BULLETS FLYING

Observers report that many rackrented Vietnamese peasants fear peace, for while the bullets fly the landlord stays away and the peasant keeps the whole produce, but when an area is pacified by American arms along comes the landlord who wants his back rents. Many peasants prefer the hazards of war to the certainties of what we call peace.

Too many Americans believe that such predatory systems of landownership are an essential feature of "The American Way." They think government ownership and control is the only alternative. They are wrong. The third alternative is the taxation of land values. Admiral Spruance recommended this to the Islanders on his retirement as our Ambassador. Under this system, which is applied in some measure throughout the United States, private titleholders pay annual taxes, which offset their special privileges. Land revenue flows into public coffers. Land titles stay private. This practical land tenure system should be our No. 1 export to underdeveloped nations like the Philippines and Vietnam.
