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The Land and the Peace

by KNUD THOLSTRUP

THE war in Vietnam is occupying our minds here in Denmark to a great extent. Leftists all over the world are doing their best to create an anti-pathetic feeling towards the United States. Personally I am very thankful for American efforts in Vietnam to meet and conquer communism, and I am realistic enough to see that the U.S. cannot give up, because that would mean that in a few years the free world could no longer include the Far East, no matter what the opinion is.

I wonder however whether the U.S. is at the same time sufficiently tackling the question of land in Vietnam. General MacArthur did a wonderful job in Japan when he introduced a land reform, but such a reform is also badly needed in a great many other countries. This troubled state of affairs has often proved to be the real background for revolution against the privileges which the rich people have, especially the big landowners.

In order to win the war in Vietnam it is necessary to make the issues very clear. We should not forget that Communists also talk about land reforms. Their means, however, of carrying through a land reform would include killing the rich landowners and letting the state take over the land so that the poor peasants would merely get a new and possibly more cruel "landlord."

A land reform based on "fuld grundskyld" (full land value taxation) would naturally be the best solution. It does not mean confiscation of land from the rich, but it puts a pressure on them which would inevitably lead to the desired result. It should be introduced right away where the U.S. already has control, so the Vietnamese could benefit from it in practice.

If there were no war this would be impossible because you would have to work for a democratic elected majority before the plan could become effective, and that would take many years. However, the United States forces are already in the war and can press things through more quickly. Viewing the conflict today it can easily appear that the rich landowners stand to gain more than the rest of the population. The U.S. should make its official position clear if it favors justice and freedom for all.

Could not a detailed frame for a land reform be drawn up, built on the Georgist principle, which could be published and distributed widely, perhaps all over the world? I think the Henry George movement has a grand opportunity now to help rebuild the good will toward the U.S. and clarify the issues in the tragic Vietnam struggle which is disturbing people all over the world.