

4-14-74

# The Land Question

4-14-74

If there has been any deep rooted local antagonism against the military it came about during the sometimes hectic days immediately following the war, when the Pentagon, realizing the importance of Guam in the future of the Pacific, bought up a great deal of the island land from the Guamanian people.

Each individual case varies. Some of the local people were happy to sell the land to the American military, who they viewed as their "saviors" and "benefactors." Others weren't that anxious to sell their land because of the tremendous importance all islanders place on mother land. Land is more precious than any other thing. It isn't to sell, but instead, to pass on to their children. But, in those days the Guamanian people had only the military to look to, for legal advice, for government, for jobs, for food. If they wanted to leave the island, they needed permission from the military authorities. If they wanted to go on to school they needed permission from the military.

In some cases there was outright opposition to selling their land. But, such pieces of property were needed by the Department of Defense, and thus, condemned. Judges, of course, were military appointed. In any event, the cards were certainly stacked against the Guamanians with the government, the judicial branch, and the economy dominated by the military. The land--nearly one third of the island's land--was taken away from the local people.

Land prices in those days were, naturally, just a fraction of what they are today.

Now, 15 to 25 years later, the U.S. government has a chance to rectify any inequities made in the land purchases on Guam following the war. Congressman Antonio B. Won Pat is to be

congratulated for his efforts in making Washington realize that some mistakes and omissions were made. He is currently on Guam to preside at hearings for a bill which could eventually reduce military land holdings on Guam, or which would compensate those whose land was taken without due process. Won Pat, arriving on Guam, declared that he's "not against the military" in his bill. "I'll never object to their (the military) using land," but said that military holdings lying unused should be returned.

Won Pat's bill would grant successful claimants a choice of two remedies: Just compensation from the time of government acquisition or an exchange for surplus U.S. government land of equivalent value. The date used to ascertain just land value will be Aug. 23, 1962, by which time most of the transactions had been concluded. The land prices of 1962 were nowhere near the figure they are today.

We can't see where the military people on Guam today can be upset about the hearings. This happened long before they were involved in the island. They certainly can appreciate the fact that the average Guamanian of that time, under military governmental control, without even a civil lawyer on the island to represent them, had few rights, and was forced into the land sales.

We believe that the hearings are important, and we hope they are well attended. We would like to see this one area of possible friction between the local people, and the military settled for once and for all. Our military friends will be on the island for a long time to come. There is no room on this tiny island for mistrust, and grievances, however long ago. Let us hope this matter is settled promptly, to the satisfaction of all. JCM.