

Resettlement Nearing End, But Not Refugee Problems

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 23 — The resettlement of more than 130,000 Indochinese refugees, which officials agreed developed into the most difficult such resettlement in the nation's history, is drawing to a close. However, the related problems and complaints continue.

Officials involved with the program say it has been extremely difficult to place many of even the most highly skilled refugees in jobs that match their abilities.

Many officials also complain privately that few large corporations or labor unions have come forward to try to help. The resettlement agencies have had to depend largely on individual and community sponsor-

ships, church groups and some small companies.

Charles Sternberg, executive director of the International Rescue Committee, one of about a dozen voluntary agencies that have been in charge of the resettlement, spoke for many of those who have been struggling for months with the problem, not just of getting the refugees out of the camps and finding them sponsors in homes, but also of trying to place them in jobs that would provide an adequate living.

"I hope it's working out," he said in a telephone interview from New York. "It's a very honest effort, but we cannot

Continued on Page 23, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 2

claim a high degree of success."

Mr. Sternberg said he thought it would "be a critical period between now and spring."

"The problems down the road will be the first winter for people who have never lived through a winter—and the job situation," he said. "For this group, the timing of their arrival was bad. Never before has a group of such large size arrived in the United States at a time when the unemployment situation was as bad as it is now.

"Too many of the Vietnamese, if anyone can find a job for them, work at the minimum wage."

More than 121,000 some well educated or highly skilled, others peasants or fishermen with large families and no knowledge of English, have been placed in the alien society of the United States to begin the arduous process of assimilation.

Both to Close Soon

As the chill of an unfamiliar winter approaches, fewer than 9,800 remain in the refugee centers—about 7,400 at Fort Chaffee, Ark., and the remainder at Fort Indiantown Gap, Pa. In 10 days or so, the Pennsylvania center is expected to close and within a month, just before Christmas, the one in Arkansas plans to shut down.

Some critics complain that the resettlement has been too slow, forcing many refugees to remain for months in the military camps. Certainly it has taken far longer than the 90 days envisioned by the Government when the first of the newcomers began arriving at the end of April. That was a goal everyone involved now considers to have been totally unrealistic.

Other critics protest that it has all happened too fast, that thousands of refugees, many of them unskilled, have been sent into a strange new world with little or no language training and with no attempt to train them for jobs that are scarce at best.

Whatever their evaluation of the program, even among those who feel it has been relatively successful, it is generally agreed that this resettlement has far outstripped in problems the absorption of the Cubans and Hungarians, the other large groups that have arrived in recent years.

Officer Now a Waiter

While there have been some success stories, the job situation has often been critical.

A recent South Vietnamese Army chief of staff, for instance, is working as a waiter in a Virginia restaurant. A former colonel is employed picking over trash in a Georgia incinerator.

Both men, like many other skilled refugees, are reported to be content to have any work at all. But not all have been happy with what they have found.

Workers recruited for a poultry manufacturing company in Poughkeepsie, N. Y., have protested loudly over what they consider to be low pay for hard work and mistreatment by their employers.

Other groups also have encountered problems.

Nearly 140 ethnic Chinese sent to Sacramento, Calif., were given only part-time work in the fields by their sponsor. Almost 300 in Pomona, Calif., ran into similar difficulties with a company formed to hire them out as landscape gardeners. In Oakland, a program to train about 100 men as security guards fell apart, ostensibly, because of language difficulties.

On the Streets

In Los Angeles, where several thousand Vietnamese have settled, a number of women are walking the streets as prostitutes.

Although officials of the President's Interagency Task Force on Indochina Refugees

report that breakdowns of sponsorships have been running at only about 2 percent, there is some indication that the figure may be higher.

"It depends how you define it," said Mr. Sternberg of the International Rescue Committee. "There have been few catastrophic breakdowns. There are refugees who just couldn't make it in a place and had to be moved to some place else."

He said that his agency had had "several hundred" in that category among the 17,000 to 18,000 it is attempting to resettle.

"The unfortunate aspect of the breakdown is that it makes it look as if the refugees are being exploited by Americans when by and large Americans have been wonderful—98 percent of them," said Julia Vadala Taft, director of the task force.

"You're dealing with 130,000 personalities. Sometimes it's the re refugees, sometimes it's the sponsor. But whatever it is, it's still a very insignificant number."

68% Have Jobs

Mrs. Taft said that the most recent reports compiled by the task force showed that 68 percent of the adult refugees who had been resettled had jobs.

"But many of them are minimum wage, she said, "and it's hard to support a large family on that. So I'm sure some will need supplementary assistance."

She said that although she had estimated that as many

as 50 percent of the refugees would have to go on welfare for a time at least, task force figures showed only 14 percent receiving direct cash assistance.

"I would guess our next figures might show as many as 23 percent getting some kind of cash assistance," she added. "But that shouldn't have the same stigma as welfare usually does in this country of people unwilling to work. It's a transitional thing."

Responsibility to Shift

The task force will be phased out in January, and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare will assume the responsibility of keeping watch over how the refugees are faring under the sponsorships worked out by the voluntary agencies.

The voluntary agencies are in the midst of planning what

parts of programs they will set up to keep track of the refugees and to provide necessary assistance.

"We haven't heard the last of the Vietnamese refugees," said Dale S. DeHaan, staff director of Senator Edward M. Kennedy's Subcommittee on Refugees of the Senate Judiciary Committee. "I think down the pike there are going to be a lot of problems."

However, he acknowledged that the subcommittee was not hearing about many problems and was not planning any hearings or investigations into the situation.

An aide to the Subcommittee on Immigration, Naturalization and International Law of the House Judiciary Committee agreed that few complaints had been received, but said an overweight hearing was tentatively scheduled for next month.

Transition Period

"I think at the moment there's kind of a lull out there," Mr. DeHaan said. "We don't get complaints, but the refugees are trying to make a go of it. We're in a transition period."

He complained that "there has been a great deal of pressure to empty the camps."

"I'm a little skeptical about that," he said. "Once the refugees were out of the camps, the task force did not get involved in resettlement, depending on the voluntary agencies. I disagree with that."

"The basic support props have to come out of the Government. There are certain things that are not going to be done for these refugees which have been done for other refugees, because of the social policy of the Administration."

However a Government official who has been close to the resettlement program since its inception, asked: "Who ever said starting life over in a new country was going to be easy?"