

Cambodia Today

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Cambodian Refugees In The U.S.

Faced with a bewildering maze of problems. . .



CAMBODIA
A Cambodian girl in the street of Phnom Penh. Since the ouster of Pol Pot by the Vietnamese, some 400,000 people have returned to the city which was devastated by the Khmer Rouge during their 1975-79 rule.

A Background REPORT

Under the Communist rule in Cambodia, the Cambodians continue to suffer man-made famine, Khmer Rouge atrocities, and the Vietnamese occupation force which keeps the country under the tight control of its 200,000 troops. More recently, reports have reached the outside on the use of toxic chemicals by the Vietnamese masters on the Cambodian civilians and resistance fighters. According to other reports, Vietnamese civilians gradually settle in the Tonle Sap Lake fishing area, located in central Cambodia. Cities and town, too, are being taken over by the Vietnamese though the resettlement has not been noticeable in remote areas where insecurity prevails for the Vietnamese.

The Russians back the Vietnamese occupation of Cambodia with logistic support at a cost of between 2 and 3 million dollars a day. Furthermore, there is evidence that the Russians are beginning to deal directly with the Heng Samrin regime which was propped up in Phnom Penh by the Vietnamese in 1979 after they defeated the Pol Pot Communist "Government of Democratic Kampuchea." A number of Cambodians are being sent for training in the Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe.

The Search for a Solution

The search for a solution to the Cambodian tragedy also continues. Last year alone, the United Nations

called two conferences on Cambodia. Both conferences called for the withdrawal of the Vietnamese troops and a free election under U.N. supervision. Both conferences urged the continued international relief to the long-suffering Cambodian people. Talks have been held in Bangkok and in Singapore to rally the Cambodian factions fighting the Vietnamese into a "united front" under a "coalition government."

This effort, however, relies heavily on the Marxist dialectic of a "third force" designed to wrestle the leadership from both the Peking-backed Khmer Rouge and the Russian-backed Vietnamese. Furthermore, it draws its strength from an anti-Vietnamese sentiment and revolves around the central theme of a coalition with the Khmer Rouge Democratic Kampuchea. Despite its notorious human rights record and its lost control of the country to the Vietnamese, the Khmer Rouge is still recognized by the United Nations as the legal "government" of Cambodia and still controls a respectable fighting force of 30-40,000 operating in the jungle areas of the country.

Many Cambodians consider the proposed alliance with their erstwhile executioners to be suicidal. If allowed to materialize, they believe, it could defeat the legitimate effort of the Cambodian people to restore their freedom and to reestablish their national independence. Others view the move can be used by the Vietnamese as a pretext to justify and perpetuate their illegal presence in Cambodia while they proceed to the defacto annexation of the country: the population surviving the Khmer Rouge genocide of 1975-79 may choose the Vietnamese instead!

The Refugee Crisis

In the border area with Thailand, the refugee crisis remains acute. From April 1975 to September 1981, 100,620 Cambodian refugees were evacuated from Thai camps to third countries of permanent resettlement in the West. Nearly half of these, 40,645, were resettled in the United States and an additional 24,484 now in various refugee processing centers (RPC) in the Philippines and Indonesia are on their way to the U.S. During the same period of time, 19,449 went to France and 5,549 were admitted into Canada.

Since August 15 of last year, Thai authorities have taken various measures to deter further influx of refugees from Indochina into Thailand, an influx which has already caused a tremendous economic and security problem to the Thais. Those measures include sealing off camps from new arrivals and restriction on processing for resettlement in the West of those already in camps. By the end of 1982, all Cambodian refugee camps in Thailand will be closed, except Khao I Dang.

In the United States, the problem of resettling refugees has become increasingly more difficult. New arrivals tend to come from rural areas. Many are illiterate in their own language. Local sponsors have become scarce and early arrivals who are not yet well-established, often sponsor their relatives and friends themselves. Sponsorships sometimes break down, resulting among other factors in more and more new arrivals depending on public assistance.

A NEW BEGINNING

Against a grim background of a continued crisis in Cambodia, a group of Cambodian and American leaders founded SAVE CAMBODIA. It was incorporated in the District of Columbia on July 29, 1980 and received its tax-exempt status from the Internal Revenue Service on December 19. Beginning with the new year of 1982, it gained significant support in its effort to help resettle Cambodian refugees and to keep the Cambodian issue alive. Founders of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. worked hard to establish this organization as the clearinghouse for Cambodian affairs.

The stated goals of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. are (1) to assist in the resettlement of refugees, (2) to seek solution for restoring rights and dignity to the people of Cambodia, (3) to foster a humanitarian international policy for the people of Cambodia, (4) to assist in the preservation of Cambodian art and culture, (5) to serve as a central source of information on the plight of the Cambodian people, and (6) to perform studies relating to the Cambodian crisis.

The work of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. is supported by an active **Board of Advisors** composed of: the Honorable **Robert Dole**, U.S. Senator; the Honorable **Stephen J. Solarz**, U.S. Congressman; Professor of Political Science **Angelo Codevilla**; Attorneys **Alfred S. Regnery** and **Michael J. Horowitz**; Administrator **Louis A. Wiesner**; Public Policy Specialists **Robert Reilly**, **Jeffrey Gayner**, **Robert L. Downen**; and Humanitarian Leader **Leo Cherne**.

Its **Specialized Committee** is composed of Cambodians trained in business, science and technology: **Sovan Tun**, Ph.D. in Economics; **Kim Touy Khu**, Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering; **Renee Pan**, Master of Science in Computer Science; **Yimin Ngan**, Master of Science in Education; **Tek Hong Taing**, M.D.; **Pauline Tan**, Doctorate in Science; **Limhuot Nong**, Master of Science in Agriculture; **Pheng Kol**, Master of Arts in Economics; **Meng Srun Sin**, Ph.D., in Economics; **Yinam Ngan**, Ph.D. in Marine Biology; and **Heng P. Sambath**, Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering.

The **Refugee Committee** of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. is composed of a broad spectrum of concerned citizens and refugee leaders: **Sitha R. Lim**; **Ok Soeum**; **Seng Kim Heang**; **Kem Sos**; **Seng Sa-In**; **Sar Butha**; **Savathly Sar**; **Kim E. Chantarit**; **Chum Thery**; **Vanpchang Srey**; **Meas Chan**; **Din Buntha**; **Pen Phean**; **Ou Sisokhon**; **Kheau Bengchoan**; **Sokho Kasem Bou**; **Khitech Tea**; **Suzanne Brannan**; **David and Anita Cooper**; **David Crocker**; **Judith Stubbs**.

Activities of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. are directed by **Chhang Song**, Chairman; **Sipo Dan**, Treasurer; and **Sin Mao**, Secretary. The staff is composed of **Donna Strauss**, Administrative Assistant; **Alex Kennedy**, Area Manager.

A NEW BEGINNING

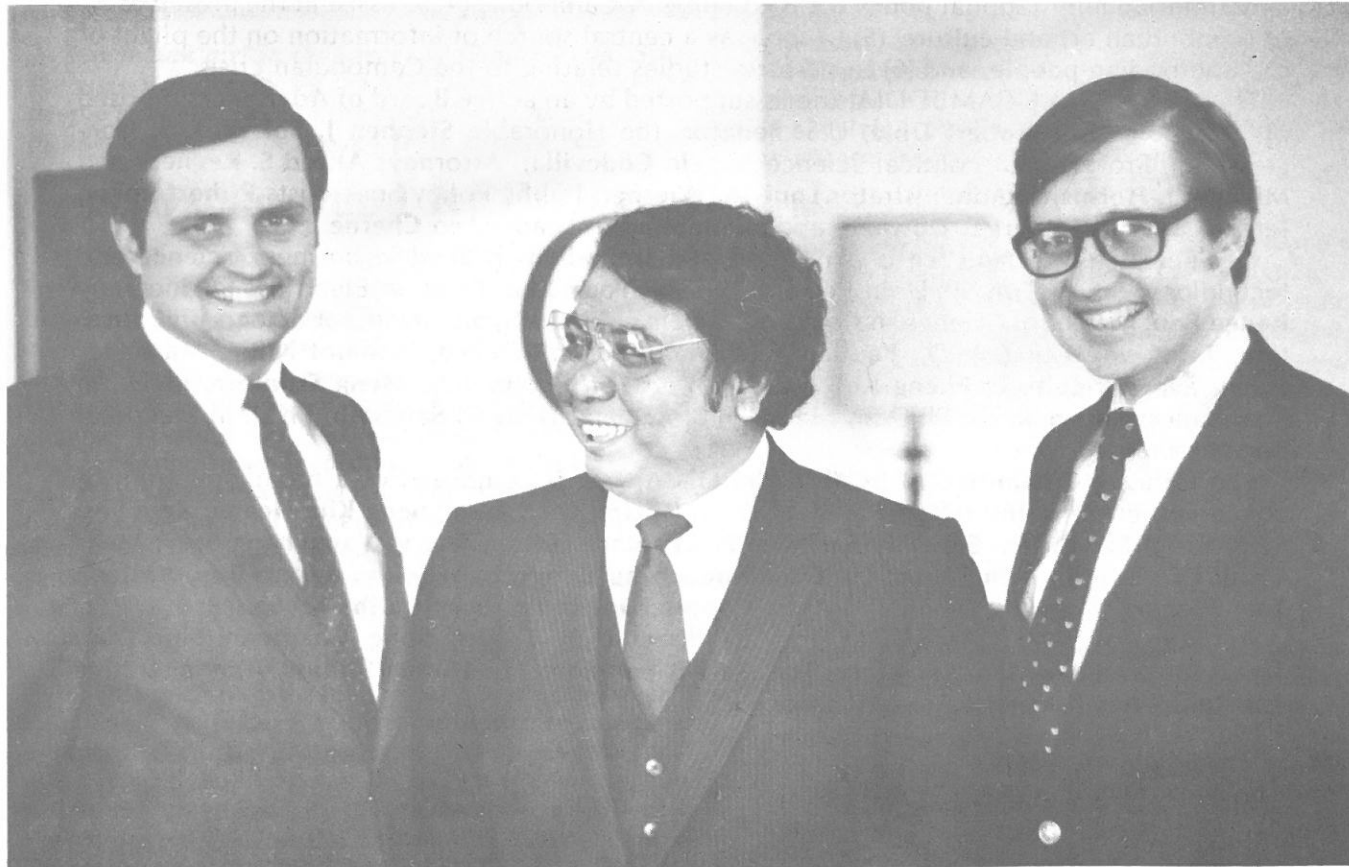
Voluntarism and Refugee Resettlement

A broad spectrum of people were represented at a meeting of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc., with the majority being established leaders in the American-Cambodian community in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Three saffron-robed Buddhist monks blessed the gathering at the newly-opened office of SAVE CAMBODIA.

Chhang Song who chaired the meeting, briefly explained that the purpose of the occasion was to inaugurate a pilot voluntary program designed to help resettle Cambodian refugees in the U.S. with emphasis on employment and job creation. To reach this goal, Cambodian and American leaders were urged to help mobilize voluntary effort among both the American and established Cambodian communities.

Concerned citizens and Cambodians have so far generously volunteered their time and talents to help resettle the thousands of refugees now in the U.S. However, with this new project, SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. proposed to establish an organizational structure to sustain, promote and recognize this valiant contribution.

Richard English, Assistant Deputy Director of the ACTION Office of Policy and Planning, addressing the Cambodian leaders at the meeting, emphasized that voluntary action did hold great potential on resolving problems and issues of refugee resettlement. Following are remarks he made to the Cambodians:



Tom Pauken, Director of ACTION; Chhang Song, Chairman of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc.; and Richard English, Deputy Assistant Director of ACTION, met recently to discuss the progress of the Refugee Employment Support Project. ACTION, which made the grant to SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc., is the federal agency established to promote voluntarism.

Each of you enriches the United States of America by your presence. From the very beginning the United States was a country of many, many cultures. People from all over the world have come to America, and each of these groups has brought with it a new culture. This is also true for the Cambodians who have come to this country for the last five years.

America holds many opportunities and promises for you. It is also a land where you can retain your culture and enrich the rest of the people by serving as a representative of that culture—as well as being an American.

The grant that the United States government has made to SAVE CAMBODIA, INC. is one way in which officials of the United States government have expressed their confidence in Chhang Song and his organization. With your help, he and his organization can do a great deal to aid in the assimilation of the refugees in the United States. It is very important to us at ACTION, which is the federal agency for voluntarism, to have this project be a success.

In the United States, there is a sector, a part of our society which some people call the independent sector, which other people call the volunteer sector—which is not part of government and which is not part of the business community—in which people join together and organize to achieve some serious and very important purposes. SAVE CAMBODIA, INC. is a representative of that sector. This is the part of our society where people contribute their personal talents, their skills, their time in order to promote causes and things they believe in. This is the basis of the government agency called ACTION.

The purpose of ACTION is to promote voluntarism, and one of the areas in which we have found that voluntarism can be effective is refugee resettlement. We have awarded a grant to SAVE CAMBODIA, INC. to accomplish some very important purposes. The most important of these purposes is the problem of employment. Employment is the key to making progress in the American society, for each individual and each family. As you know, there are many opportunities that this society offers, many good jobs, many businesses... Any person can go into business if he can get together the means to do so. It is very vital to people to obtain opportunities.

The purpose of this, more specifically, is to create a volunteer program called "Refugee Employment Support." And this involves counseling a person who is seeking a job in order to help him or her interview for that job properly, to appear at the employers' place of business and to

discuss the skills and qualifications which that job requires with the employer. As Chhang Song just said, this is the key to assimilation. I know there are other problems that your fellow Cambodians experience in the United States. Learning a new language is one of many. But the key is still getting a good job. And obtaining jobs is important for any age group, from 16 years old and up into later age in life. In addition, it will help solve problems that people face in coming into the United States.

I have been impressed by the dedication that Chhang Song has shown. I want to wish him the best of luck in conducting this project, and I hope that each of you will give him your fullest support. This is absolutely necessary if it is to be a success. I know that each of you is a leader in the Cambodian community in this area and has many contacts and many friends. I'm sure you'll do all you can to help make this project a success. ■

VOLUNTARISM AND REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT

State and local government representatives from all over the country met with corporation heads and voluntary program leaders, in the first of the WHITE HOUSE/ACTION National Workshops on Voluntarism held last December on the Lone Mountain Campus of the University of San Francisco, in California.

They discussed the numerous programs that had been founded and were being administered through public/private sector partnership. SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. Chairman Chhang Song addressed the workshop panel on refugees and demonstrated how concerned citizens and established refugees could volunteer in future refugee resettlement work. With a new emphasis on employment, he provided the following guidelines:

•••

Those of us who help resettle refugees in this country realize how traumatized they are, afflicted by the recent loss of loved ones, torn between the tragic past and the brutal realization that life must go on. Traditionally, the refugees who are admitted into the U.S. are resettled by private, non-profit groups of concerned citizens who pool their efforts in response to this human crisis. They are more commonly known as the Mutual Assistance Associations (MAA) and the Voluntary Agencies (VOLAG). The bulk of the refugee resettlement work is accomplished by Volunteers who reach out a helping hand to the poor, the oppressed, and the dispossessed.

(Continued on next page)

Presently, because of a new and steady influx of refugees into the United States a massive voluntary effort is critically needed in the field of **Refugee Sponsorship**.

From the day they arrive at the airport, the refugees face a bewildering maze of new rules and regulations, of health requirements, of language problems, of transportation and the like. . . Concerned citizens would have to step forward and take the refugees by the hand, to serve as guides, friends, and counselors through the daily tribulations of their adjustment.

Housing is the biggest problem for new arrivals. Landlords have become increasingly reluctant to rent to refugees, not because refugees are credit risks nor because they are irresponsible tenants, but often, the Cambodian refugees, for instance, have **large families**. It is not uncommon to find a couple who looks 20 years of age to an American, has 4 or 6 grown-up children. Moreover, the Cambodian family is usually close and members are very frightened to move into separate housing units.

New arrivals need to be told how to turn on the gas, how to use electricity for heating and for lighting, how to dial the telephone, how to write a check, how to flush the toilet. People have clothes to donate, and volunteers are needed to collect **clothing** for refugees. Volunteers are also needed to provide **transportation**, to take refugees to stores, to help refugees apply for social security, jobs and the like. Someone would be needed to **translate** for them. Although arriving refugees have received a clean bill of **health**, my experience has taught me that they are not that healthy. Some may have traces of tuberculosis. Venereal diseases can be found in others. The most common health problems among new arrivals are: intestinal parasites, anemia and dental care. These refugees often need to be taken to clinics or hospitals soon after their arrival. They need to be told what to do and what not to do.

We realize that **language training**, in particular English as a second language (ESL), and **cultural orientation** are problems that have to be solved. However, I believe this phase of refugee resettlement can be ac-

(Continued on page 8)

THE VOLUNTEER



Volunteers need to take refugees by the hand and go with them through their daily tribulations. Above: Kim Heang Seng, a volunteer for SAVE CAMBODIA, INC. shows new Cambodian arrivals how to use the METRO.

When Kim Heang Seng and his family of 9 persons were evacuated in 1975 from a Thai camp to the United States welfare was practically non-available for refugees. They were housed in the military barracks at Indiana Town Gap, Indiana among thousands of Indochinese refugees. Some 20 days later he and his family moved to Phil and Darlene Lewis's, their sponsors in Peru, Indiana.

Kim Heang, with no formal English training, went to work immediately in a nearby factory. Six months later he and his family moved to Washington, D.C. where he got a manual job in an area hospital. Both Kim Heang and Sa-In, his wife, are hard working and generous.

Presently Kim Heang spends at least 2 hours per day doing volunteer work with other Cambodian refugees. He has personally sponsored 4 families of 14 persons, and found jobs for 12 other refugees. Kim Heang has also assisted his four brothers and sisters through high school, and one of the four in his first year of college. Sa-In cooks excellent Cambodian cuisine and frequently volunteers her cooking talent to provide meals at various Cambodian functions.

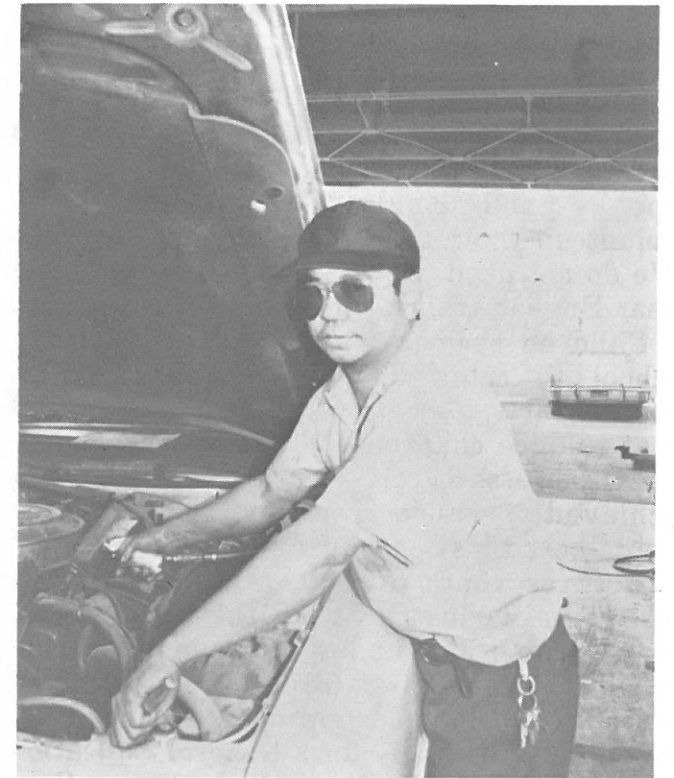
THE GARAGEMAN

Krithny Horn, a Cambodian refugee who now owns a garage in Southern California, is known to his customers and friends only as Ny, and keeps himself quite busy, 15 hours a day, 7 days a week running his newly purchased garage and used car dealership.

When Ny, his wife, and their 2 children were evacuated from a Thai camp in 1975, he worked hard for the Americans, first as an assemblyman in Santa Anna, then in a food processing plant. They had so little a time to study English in the evening. Yet, they never knew the welfare payroll.

He spoke only broken English, "the way the Chinese used to speak Khmer in Cambodia!" Ny said with a smile. "The hardest thing is to make myself understand," said the garageman who never had a formal English training. "But I guess it's all right now," he went on, "as people are always willing to try to understand me."

Some 200 new arrivals come and live in cluster around Ny's. They have heard he was affable and helpful to those in need. Amidst his time spent with his business, Ny still finds time to help other refugees. So far, he has sponsored 10 families of 80 persons, and has helped 30 other refugees find jobs.



Cambodians fleeing Communist regimes in Cambodia attempt with all their remaining strength to reach Thailand, across mine fields, Khmer Rouge and Vietnamese patrols, pirates, and finally (above) Thai border guards and barbed wires. There are presently 90,000 Cambodian refugees in refugee holding centers in Thailand. Another 200,000 Cambodian escapees stay in various encampments located along the border area. Of this number, France has agreed to take 8000 while the United States will take only a few hundreds. Moreover, in order to deter further influx of refugees from Indochina into Thailand, Thai authorities have begun closing camps in Thailand. By the end of 1982, Khao I Dang will remain the only refugee holding center open to the Cambodians who are already there. Photo by NATION Review/Bangkok.

Voluntarism (Continued from page 6)

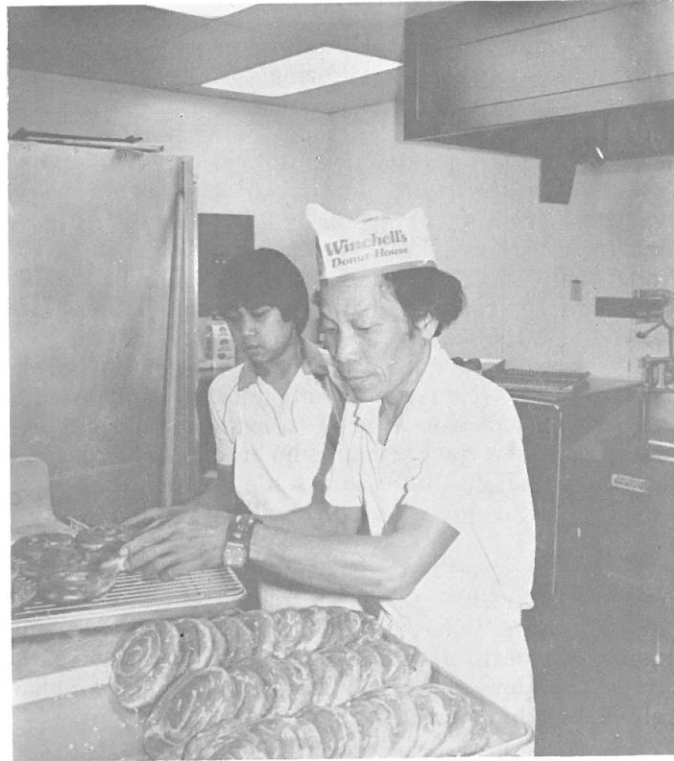
completed by concerned citizens, retired teachers, student teachers, or refugees who speak good English themselves, who volunteer their time teaching new arrivals. We do not need to set up an elaborate three-year English training program for refugees...

Children need to go to special sessions of school to catch up with their American counterparts. Many of you have already noted that refugee children do quite well in school. This success, I can assure you, has been achieved because someone has quietly volunteered his service and time.

Refugee youth of sixteen and older have lost years of education when they lived in sub-human conditions under the communist rule in which schooling was Taboo. They should be placed on jobs and gradually coached by volunteers to qualify for a **General Education Diploma (GED)**. The **Youth Employment Support (YES)** concept must be applied to refugee youth. The core concept of the Youth Employment Support Program is that volunteers can effectively guide youths in solving their employment problems by counseling them individually or in small groups. In the **YES** program, volunteers are assigned to refugee youth in order to guide them (1) in obtaining employment and (2) in continuing in employment with a minimum of problems.

Counseling is daily needed. Professional counseling is needed in the fields of **Employment, Mental Health, Business, and Family Affairs**.

I have been joined by a group of established Cambodians and American leaders and, together, we founded last year the organization called **SAVE CAMBODIA, INC.** Recently, we opened our office in Arlington, Virginia. Furthermore, we plan to mobilize a volunteer effort in both the American and established Cambodian communities to help resettle the 25,000 Cambodian refugees who are being admitted into the United States. We plan in particular to mobilize this effort to place Cambodian refugees on jobs as we have come to realize that **employment is the key in a speedy assimilation**.

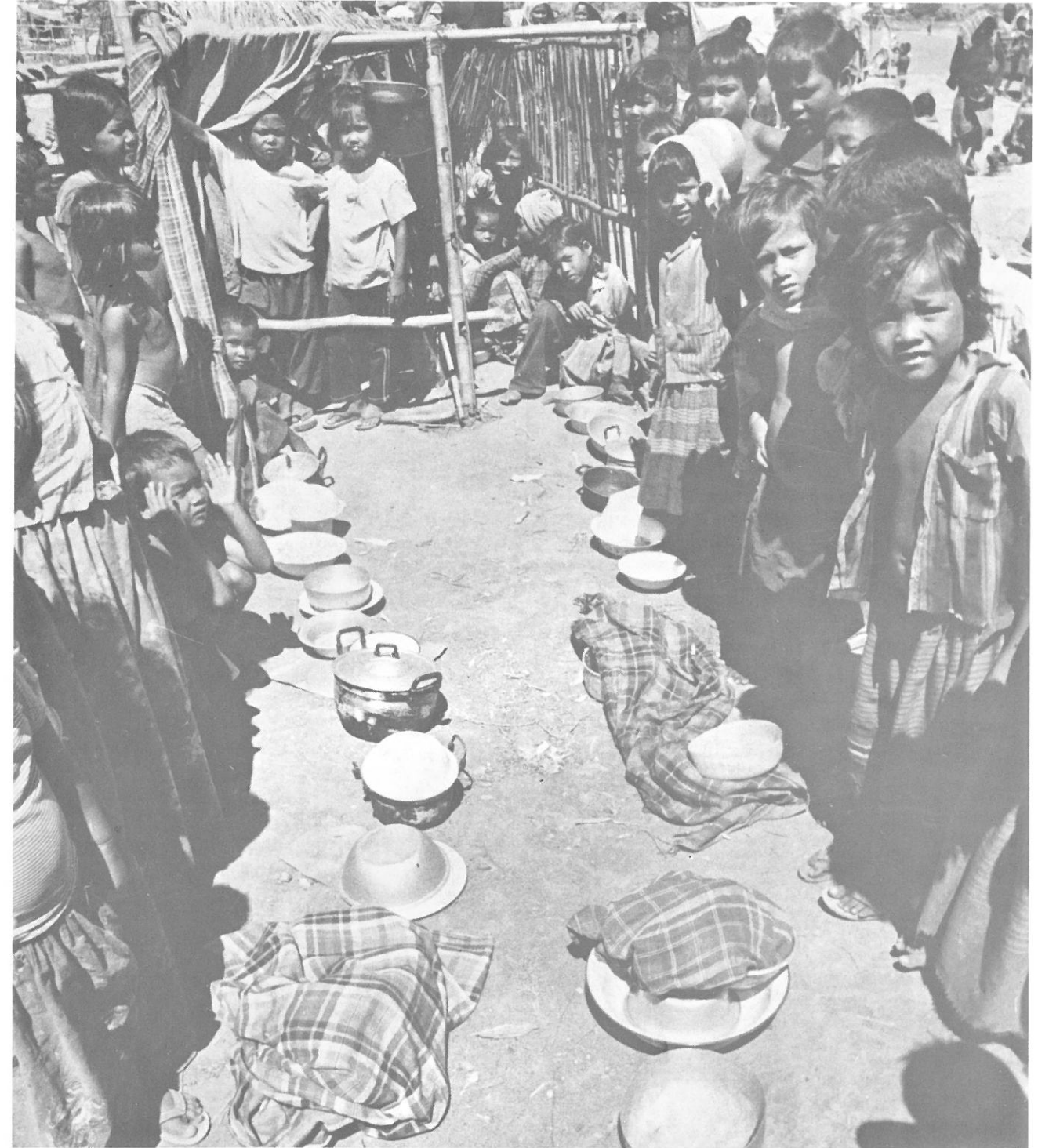


Keo Chanthan, a 39-year old former Cambodian paratrooper, works between 14 and 15 hours a day, 7 days a week at a Winchell's Doughnut House in Southern California. Many other Cambodian refugees who arrived in 1975 on the West Coast were also attracted to the doughnut business.

After being evacuated into the U.S. in 1975 Chanthan first worked as a typewriter repairman to support his wife and their 4 children. With only six weeks of training Chanthan mastered the craft of the doughnut business.

Chanthan not only finds time to teach other Cambodians in this craft, but also has been able to sponsor 5 refugee families of 30 persons, and help 5 other Cambodians find jobs. Neither Chanthan nor his wife had formal English training. They were never on the welfare payroll.

I believe it is time to chart a new course, to rethink the work of refugee resettlement in terms of actual employment, in terms of creation of jobs, in terms of voluntarism to be provided by concerned citizens and established refugees, instead of in terms of government hand-outs. This proposal is only a beginning, a modest beginning, indeed, but as the Republicans say, it is also a new beginning, an attempt to reduce and eliminate all together the welfare state mentality which exists in some refugee communities.



Cambodian refugee youth wait with pots and pans in a Thai camp for food to be distributed to them during a meal time. There remain presently 700 Cambodian youth in refugee Children Centers in Thailand, referred to as "unaccompanied minors." U.N. refugee authorities are reluctant to allow these youngsters to be resettled in foster homes in the West, pending more accurate information on the fate of their parents and relatives. Of the initial group of 3000 youngsters, the International Rescue Committee (I.R.C.) has been able to reunite 1500 with their parents in Thailand and in Cambodia through an elaborate tracing program. The rest have gone to third countries for resettlement or have returned to Cambodia. Photo by NATION Review/Bangkok.



A Cambodian youth who arrived recently in the U.S. registers for employment at the Office of SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc. In the U.S., youth of 16 to 21 years of age comprise 22% of the total Cambodian refugee population. Many have lost years of education when they lived under Communist regimes in Cambodia where education was taboo. Volunteers are urgently needed to coach these youth in job placement, in maintaining jobs, and in giving these young dispossessed a background of a general education. For more information, write or call SAVE CAMBODIA, Inc.

Leo Cherne



*Executive Director
The Research Institute of America, Inc.
589 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10017*

January 4, 1982

Dear Chhang:

I would have written more promptly than this but no sooner had your letter arrived than I was on my way off to Central Europe to deal with the International Rescue Committee's response to the Polish situation.

In fact, I had the opportunity to read your statement on the plane going over and want to tell you that I cannot recall a more vital statement, more eloquently and persuasively prepared than yours. Needless to say, I agree with every word and am passing along the statement to Carel because I know he will wish to bring it to the attention of the heads of the other voluntary organizations.

Warmest wishes to you for the new year.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Cherne

Mr. Chhang Song
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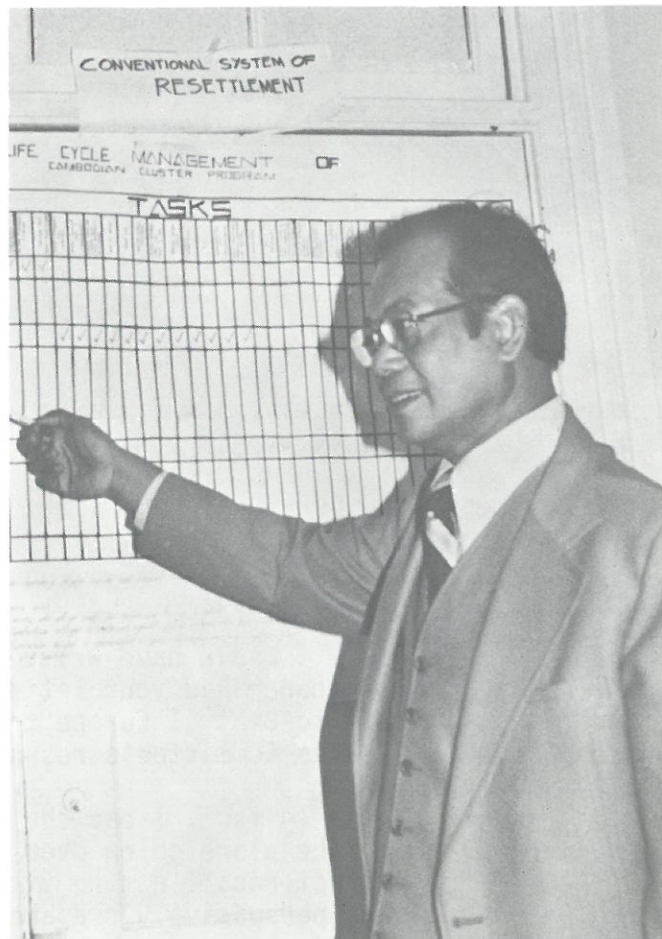
THE ORGANIZER

Numerous statistical charts, graphs, and slogans ranging from the conventional systems of refugee resettlement, number of refugees arriving each day in Richmond to the Buddhist "Eight Noble Paths" adorn the walls in Robert Thach Poch's conference room. If the room at first appears strange, there is also something unique about the man and the program he runs in Richmond, Virginia.

After the fall of Cambodia in 1975 Thach Poch organized the Cambodian Association in Richmond, Virginia. The purpose of the Association is to help mobilize a volunteer effort among the Cambodian community to assist new arrivals in the resettlement process. With his insistent efforts, the Cambodian Association of Virginia was able to entertain a close collaboration with the Catholic Diocese of Richmond which provided the Association with a six-room house. This six-room house serves as both the Association Headquarters and as a welcome house for the new arrivals to stay until they locate permanent residence. With assistance from the Catholic Diocese, Thach Poch and his wife are able to work full-time on the program, and mobilize a volunteer effort among the early Cambodian settlers in Richmond.

Thach Poch's program is strangely enough reminiscent of that of a "general mobilization in the war time." He divides Richmond into 8 areas according to refugee concentration and designates each area as a "Kaneak Kamakar Phum" (KKP) which is represented by a Cambodian leader.

New arrivals must spend 2 weeks in the Association Headquarter's house known as Sen Monorom during which Thach Poch and his staff will give them accelerated English training and cultural orientation. The cultural orientation emphasizes the work ethic of the American society. During their stay in the house a type of deprogramming is done to each refugee. This consists of restoring dignity and self respect to the refugee by altering the mystic belief that welfare and cash assistance are just rewards. Thach Poch programs the refugees to believe that anyone can rise as high as their work ability will take them within the competitive American society.



Robert Thach Poch, President of the Cambodian Association of Virginia shows the progress of his refugee resettlement program to visitors.

Julia Cotter, Director of the Refugee Resettlement Office of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond, said that the success of the Cambodian refugee resettlement in Richmond depended largely on Robert Tach Poch and his unique program. This success is manifested in the fact that the 700 Cambodian refugees in Richmond are practically independent of public welfare.

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