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23 Sept 1954

"Emergency" Placement of Refugees in Provinces of SVN

Tuesday's visit to the Bien Hoa area reaffirms my earlier impressions that much of the refugee effort now being expended in that and similar areas must be looked upon as a temporary expedient and not as a permanent resettlement solution.

Bien Hoa is normally thought of as a non-agricultural province. For the most part, its agricultural resources are marginal if not submarginal in comparison with other areas in South Vietnam. I should like to point to the historical lack of settlement and development as proof of its marginal character. Bien Hoa is used here only as an example of situations which are similar in other eastern provinces.

Nonetheless, we must accept the necessity of employing these marginal, and even submarginal, areas for emergency utilization in view of the totally unsettled problem in the South. There are probably upwards of one million displaced people already in the South, without considering the influx from the North, and possibly from the Center, as the result of the several years of civil war and insecurity which caused the rural peoples to flee to the relative security of the village and provincial centers. Every such sector is already bulging over with displaced peoples who will return to rural life as soon as security is re-established along with some semblance of re-established governmental police and administrative services, and the wherewithal is available to enable these destitute peoples to return to agriculture as a means of livelihood.

There is probably no better alternative available at the moment than to channel the northern refugees into the marginal agricultural provinces. There, there is room and some few resources which can be immediately exploited - firewood, charcoal, other forest products, and the seasonal possibility of undertaking some culture of upland crops from now on for upwards of four months (peanuts, soybeans, cassava, corn, tobacco, cotton, some vegetables, etc.), depending upon soil and moisture conditions, which may contribute to the temporary self-sufficiency of the refugees, but from the middle of December on until the beginning of the next rains the soils will be too dry to support seasonal vegetative growth. As a result of the concentration of the present "village" efforts in a rather limited area, within a matter of months the firewood and charcoal resources will have been completely exploited. Forest products will not reproduce quickly enough to insure continued exploitation and support of the population concentration. Water resources are such that domestic and household purposes will be sorely tried without trying to think about supplemental water for garden or crop production.

My point in advancing this problem at this time is that we in the Mission should resolve our thoughts and understandings to the fact that much of the effort will have to be duplicated at an early date when the deficiencies of the area are more fully appreciated and alternate areas are available. It would be more appropriate, according to my thought, to regard these present efforts merely as "secondary reception centers". "Permanent" placement of the refugees will take a considerable period of time and clarification of numerous problems which prevent the utilization of more attractive possibilities.

I would further urge that present Mission efforts be restricted to assistance of a most temporary nature - avoiding durable permanent buildings and other similar improvements which may have to be abandoned at a later date, or which may tend to perpetuate their habitation and use when other factors dictate abandonment of the area.

I trust that early opportunity will be afforded to elaborate on these simple facts so that Mission policy may be properly directed.

cc: Stelly
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