Refugees Caught in Union Dispute at Coast Egg Farm

By ROBERT LINDSEY
Special to The New York Times

MOORPARK, Calif., Aug. 8—Phan Than Khiet stands less than 5 feet 6 inches tall. He is thin and wan, and his right arm is gone—hardly someone likely to aggravate a bitter labor dispute. But as he works in the sweltering California heat in a place they call Egg City, he is hearing a word for which there is no counterpart in his native Vietnamese.

The word—and it is always exclaimed emphatically—is "Scab!"

Mr. Khiet, to the people holding red picket flags outside the gates of Egg City, which says it is the largest egg production facility in the world, personifies the fears that many Americans have held about the influx of thousands of Vietnamese refugees to this country. He has taken—or so it is charged—the job of an American.

Such fears are especially acute among people at the low end of the wage scale here in California—those who seek sustenance in farm work and other fields with few requirements for skills, and in some areas, such as the garment industry, where some Vietnamese do

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Phan Than Khiet, who lost his right arm in Vietnam, sorts eggs in Moorpark, Calif.
Refugees Are Caught in Union Dispute at Egg Farm

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have skills.

In a large extent, the Viet-
namese have been caught in a
crossfire between two rival
unions—the United Farm Work-
ers, and the International
Brotherhood of Teamsters. The
unions have stepped up their
five-year organizational
battle in the California farmlands be-
cause of recently passed legis-
lation that will allow farm
workers, for the first time, to
form a union by secret ballot
when the law takes effect Aug.
28.

There are indications that the
Vietnamese at Egg are being
used as pawns by all sides in the
dispute. The United Farm Work-
ers appears to be doing whatever
can to exploit their presence as "strikebreak-
ers"; the teamsters union has
taken the Vietnamese looks as
assets it is doing a good
deed and the Egg City manage-
ment accommodates it to the
extent that it wants to give
refugees who want a chance
to work a shot at work.

Mr. Khoi, who is 35 years
old and 13 of his refugees
have been hired at the sprawling
polycolony center 50 miles north-
west of Los Angeles where 350 workers, mostly
of Mexican descent, walked off the
job April 10 after a popular
union leader was dismissed. And
more Vietnamese are on the
way.

Last night, the families of
some of the Vietnamese
arrived; six more Vietnamese
workers are scheduled to come
Monday to work as egg
collectors, sorters, checkers,
mechanics and in other
positions. The owners of the facility
have said they will hire
up to 100 more Vietnamese,
possibly as many as 200.

"We're strikebreakers," says
Eliseo Medina, an official
of Cesar Chavez's United Farm
Workers.

"I'm very, very happy," says
Mr. Medina, who worked as
a soldier in South Vietnam
and learned English as an em-
ployee for the American military
forces. "I badly needed a job
to take care of my family.
I hope to work here all of
my life.

The Vietnamese were
brought here from a refug-
ecamp in Northern Cal-
ifornia called Food for the
Hungry, one of several groups that
have been resettling Vietnamese.
Originally, six other workers were
hired, but they left after a
few days either because they
did not like the work or it
took too long for them.
"Mr. Chavez was trying to
organize the workers, but
"After a large group repre-
"senting the United Farm
Workers in Glendale early this
week, officers of the organiza-
tion told the Vietnamese that
it would probably be best if
they left. But officials of
Egg City urged them to stay
on if they wanted to, and the
remaining Vietnamese voted
unanimously to stay on the
job.

They are living in two
old houses near Egg City that
were rented by Food for the Hungry,
and they are using a van lent
by the company to get back
and forth to the job.

3 Million Chickens

The setting for the dispute is
an all but self-contained
world surrounded amid clo-
groves and rolling hills
in the early nineties.

Julius Goldman, Polish
engineer who had fled Nazi
Germany. Earlier, he had start-
ed an egg business in the San
Francisco Valley near San
Leandro with 3,500 chickens,
but was forced to move here
by an order of housing de-
velopments.

Now, with much of the
production automated, Egg City
produces eggs at an awesome
pace; more than 3 million

chickens lay 1.8 million eggs on
souis in anger at
the Vietnamese, Mr. Medina,
said, "We're organizing the workers to sup-
port not like a factory where you
port the farm workers in the
can turn off a switch and close
forthcoming elections to pick it down.
As it is, we have to sell
between the rival labor organ-
izations.

Calls Them Captives

"The problem with the Viet-
namese is that they're a captive
labor force," Mr. Medina,
the U.F.W. organizer, said. "They've
been through a traumatic
experience and are very
insecure. When the election is
held, they will have to take
the company's side and go with the
place to go. That's why it's impor-
tant—the election.

While some striking employees
are talking about

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