DEVIL'S ISLAND BLIGHT GONE:

French Guiana Held Land of Opportunity

Leon Damas, recently elected to the French Assembly by his party, Movement for the Renaissance of the French Guiana, outlined his program to improve the economic, industrial and educational status of his people to the AFRO while visiting in Washington Saturday en route to Paris to fulfill his duties.

For his 35,000 constituents, most of whom are gold miners and agriculturists, he wants to set up a Social Security System much like that in the United States. There is no sick or accident insurance available for the protection of these workers.

Wishes to Industrialize

Mr. Damas has just been elected to fill the unexpired term of his late partner and co-founder of the party, Rene Jadfort, who was killed in a recent airplane crash His program will be patterned very much after that of Mr. Jadfort who also wanted social security, it was stated.

The French statesman said he will seek legislation to secure funds in order that modern machinery might be brought into his country to end "backbreaking," primitive methods now used.

Needs Transportation

The great need in the French Guiana is modern transportation and communication systems.

For example, he pointed out, in one community that is only three hours from the capital city, Cayenne, it took two weeks to get the information that their only deputy was dead.

French Guiana, he admitted, "is the most backward" of the French possessions in the Americas. There is a dire need for electrification, which is practically non existent and schools, as there are only 18 in the whole country, he said adding:

"The tragic thing about life in my country is the fact that everything is centered in the capital, Cayenne. The outlying district is practically isolated.

No Roads, Telephones

"There is no telephone system, no connecting roads, nor any commercial ports or airplanes to serve the 90,000 square kilometers inhabited by some 35,000 people."

Mr. Damas said he could not place the blame for the deplorable conditions existing in the Guianas to the Mother Country, France, because millions have been appropriated for the development of this area but "most of the time the money got no further than the leaders."

The present prefect, Robert Vignon, he hastened to say, is young, aggressive, very popular with the people, and determined to improve their lot.

Points to Monnerville

Much of the blame for the plight of his constituents, Mr. Damas placed on Gaston Monnerville, now president of the French Council, an advisory body, who has represented Guiana in the French Senate for 14 years.

"The people finally woke up and thought of asking government representatives for an accounting of the funds. France has been appropriating for the work of the country," the statesman declared.

The assemblyman attributed the lack of interest manifested by outsiders to the country to the bad publicity it has been given through the years, as dreaded "Devil's Island," home of France's penal institution often referred to as one of the worst in the world, was located there.

"The place has now been closed and Guiana is now going to make a bid for their place in the world, said Mr. Damas.

The country has often been called unhealthy but that, too, is due to the Devil's Island stigma, but that is untrue the climate is indeed healthy, he pointed out.

The growing need in the islands is for doctors, technicians and businessmen. The country is rich in natural resources, but despite this, everything must be imported, including sugar from Martinique and coffee and cattle from Brazil.

The reason given for this was the lack of means for transporting the products. The people find it actually cheaper to import products than to grow or make their own, he said.

Desire Outsiders

Mr. Damas said he will strive to attract industrial outsiders to the country, particularly industrialists and medical people. In all the country to service the 35,000 inhabitants, 90% of whom are colored, there were four hospitals, two in Cayenne and the other in the interior.

The one in the capital is operated by the Department of Sanitation, another by private physicians; and the third is managed by the Army and manned by Army doctors.

He had nothing but praise for the latter, saying they have made great personal sacrifices for the people's welfare and health. "I regret I can't say as much for the private doctors," he remarked.

No Race Problem

Mr. Damas said one thing in favor of the Island is the fact that there is no race or class problem. The assemblyman said he hopes to modernize the school system to do specialized work.

"Heretofore we have gone in for the professions which means work with the most rudimentary tools and use primitive methods, he stated.

Mr. Damas is 35, and a native of Guianas. He was educated in Martinique and in Paris and became noted as a poet and journalist in France where he lived until 1946.

Then he went back to his native land and with the late Mr. Jadfort, organized the movement.

His party is now the most popular in the territory Monnerville represents the Radical Socialists, while Damas's group is more closely allied with the real Socialist Party in France.

Few Communists in Islands

The Communists, while there are few, have made no strides in the country, and Mr. Damas doubts that they will because Guiana is too closely tied to other countries than Russia for her support he observed.

While in Washington, Mr. Damas was the houseguest of Dr. and Mrs. Mercer Cooke, 124 W. St., N.W. He also visited Dr. and Mrs. Rayford Logan and Dr. Carter G. Woodson.

From here he will go to New York, where he hopes to visit with other American acquaintances, Langston Hughes, and Richard Wright, poet, and novelist respectively.

FAMILY REUNION—Mrs. Susie McEveen of 1810 S St., N.W., in Washington, was hostess at a family reunion recently at her residence. The affair was the first in 21 years which all members of the "Wigfall" family attended. Left to right: front, Mrs. Lulie Robinson, Richmond; Mrs. Bessie Malone, Detroit; Mrs. Mamie Mills, Baltimore; Mrs. Annie Edwards, Washington; Mrs. Inez Branes, Charlotte; standing, Michael Wigfall, Reading, Pa.; Mrs. McEveen, and Adam Wigfall, Richmond.

FRENCH STATESMAN — Leon Damas, recently elected to represent French Guiana in the French Assembly, visited in Washington and New York last week en route to assume his statesmanship duties. He heads the movement for the renaissance of French Guiana.

Booker T's Birthplace Postmistress Named

ROCKY MOUNT, Va. — According to S. J. Phillips, president of the Booker T. Washington Birthplace Memorial, Mrs. Ada Chappell of South Boston, Va., has been appointed postmistress at a special post office at Booker Washington's Birthplace, Va., which will be opened on Feb. 12.

Plans are under way to make the inauguration of this U.S. Post Office an outstanding event of Negro History Week, since it marks the first time in the history of the

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Discussion on Home Rule Plan for D.C. to Be Broadcast Sunday

WASHINGTON — Rep. John Allen (Rep., Calif.), and Belford V. Lawson Jr., local attorney, will be the principal speakers on the round-table discussion of the Auchincloss proposals for home rule that the "American Forum" program will air Sunday on WQQW.

Disclosures of hitherto unpublicized findings of the Auchincloss committee's investigation of district home rule will be featured by Representative Allen, member of that group.

The broadcast will underline hearings scheduled to start Monday on the simmering matter which may be chief local issue in this Presidential election year.

Representatives of citizens' associations and Federal employees unions will also appear on the program. They are William A. Eisenhart, president of the Rhode Island Ave. Citizens' Association; and Mrs. Esther Coppock, wife of a government official.

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