

PROCEEDINGS OF THE JOINT SESSION OF THE COLONIAL COUNCILS for St. Croix, St. Thomas and St. John.

(Continued from yesterday's Avis.)

The purchase having taken place almost simultaneously with the entry of the United States of America into the World War, the disturbed economic and political conditions of the world and particularly those obtaining in the United States incident to the prosecution of the war and as a natural aftermath thereof, have resulted in the Virgin Islands being little known to the public in Continental United States to this day, either as to the reasons for which they were purchased or as to what their future will be.

Since the purchase, the Federal Government has contributed generously towards extending and increasing the educational facilities of the people, towards greatly improving and expanding hospital facilities and towards inaugurating and maintaining modern sanitation systems.

While we are deeply grateful for the financial assistance afforded us by the home government, it is our earnest desire and ambition to be as self-supporting as possible, and therefore, when His Excellency, the Governor of the Virgin Islands, in his letter of October 20, 1923, suggested that we meet together in an effort to evolve definite recommendations as to what we might do to better our economic situation towards the end that we might increase our prosperity and thereby lessen the Federal financial aid now required to maintain the Government, we gladly seized this opportunity, and now present for the consideration of the Government the following proposals which, to our mind, would aid materially towards the betterment of our economic situation:

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(1) That there be established under the Civil Government of the Virgin Islands a Department of Agriculture, Commerce and Labor, to be headed by a Director, whose duty it shall be to investigate and advise of the fundamental economic problems on the entire Virgin Islands.

Agriculture: The island of St. Croix, the largest of the group, has always been agricultural, the main industry being the growing of sugar cane. This industry is a highly technical one and therefore requires the most expert advice obtainable regarding the most modern methods of cultivating, processing and marketing. It is generally conceded that St. Croix might easily grow many other marketable agricultural products if it were known definitely what could be grown and where they

could be marketed. The island of St. Thomas, was in past years largely agricultural, but has almost ceased to be so, the inhabitants having come to depend almost solely upon the activities of the beautiful harbor for their livelihood. Depending entirely upon the commerce of the harbor is too uncertain, and ways and means of getting the inhabitants, at least partially, to a dependence on the soil should be seriously considered.

Commerce: In addition to the activities of the Harbor of St. Thomas, which are considerable, there should be possibilities in both islands of manufacturing exportable articles as evinced by the fact that there are at present small quantities of articles manufactured from mahogany. This industry appears fully capable of expansion. There must exist other similar possibilities of development.

Labor: Labor problems are real and vital. On the island of St. Croix the question of labor for the cultivation and harvesting of the sugar crop is always a matter of serious concern, mainly for the reason that, when it becomes evident that a given crop will yield below the normal output, the tendency is for labor to migrate, and if in the succeeding year the crop is normal or above, there would apparently result a shortage of labor. Again, on the island of St. Thomas, when the commerce falls off to any considerable extent, the tendency is towards emigration and when business picks up, a shortage of labor is likely to occur. These three fundamentals of agriculture, commerce and labour might very materially be assisted by the establishment of a department for dealing with them and the establishment of such a department is accordingly earnestly recommended.

(2) The establishment of permanent water supply systems for the three towns of St. Thomas, Christiansted and Frederiksted.

There is apparently no natural subterranean water, artesian or otherwise, in the Virgin Islands. What subsurface water there is comes from the rainfall and is collected in shallow wells and springs. These wells and springs go dry in periods of drought which are frequent. Hence the population of the Virgin Islands has for generations, been compelled to depend almost entirely on rain water which is collected from the roofs of houses and stored in cisterns. The poorer classes are unable to store up sufficient water to last them over a dry spell and they accordingly suffer intensely when their supply runs out. Even the people who possess much more adequate facilities for preserving water frequently exhaust their supply and in times of acute drought all classes suffer. Not alone is this limited to the human population but the animals are the first to feel the shortage in the water supply, and, in times of

drought a great many die. This is no new problem. For many years prior to the purchase of these islands by the United States, means were sought to remedy this condition without avail and from the moment of purchase this matter has received most serious consideration. So far, however, nothing concrete has been developed. All authorities are apparently agreed that the formation of the islands with regard to the subsurface rock strata eliminates artesian well drilling as a means of securing a permanent and adequate water supply and the consensus of opinion is that the only practicable solution is the building of large sheds for the collection of rain and the storing of rain water in large cisterns. The water so stored to be used after the individual private supply is exhausted. A solution of this problem would, in our opinion, do more toward the uplift of the population generally than any one other single factor and it is earnestly recommended that the Government renew its efforts in this respect.

(3) That ways and means be devised to impound water for agricultural purposes.

As previously stated, the Virgin Islands suffer periodically from drought. The island of St. Croix, which depends merely upon its sugar crop, becomes the greatest sufferer when, by reason of drought, the crop proves a failure. For the past three years a period of intense drought has caused such a lessening in the output of sugar as to reduce the island almost to a state of destitution. If, therefore, it were possible to store up water during the rainy season, which might be utilized during periods of drought, the sugar crop which would otherwise perish, could be saved.

(4) That the Public school system be extended to include adequate courses in Manual Training.

The instruction of the youth in manual training has become so general in the Continental United States that its value needs no explanation. The institution of manual training courses in the public schools of the Virgin Islands would greatly tend towards the eventual establishment of manufacturing industries as a profitable source of income to the people and of revenue to the Government. Mahogany grows on the islands and much more in the neighbouring islands. Cabinet making has always been a minor industry and it might well be expanded. With the economic growth of the islands, artisans of all kinds will be in great demand. In conjunction with the Manual Training program of the public schools, it would be perfectly possible to form outside classes for the instruction of adults.

(5) That the Tariff Commission be requested to include the island of St.