

Rich Amazonia Area Waits Development in Brazil

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Brazil's vast Amazonia region — embracing nearly a fourth of South America—remains largely an area of economic stagnation.

Little is being done to develop its undoubted riches for the benefit of its 5½ million people. Amazonia's principal products—rubber, Brazil nuts, jute, lumber, and manganese—employ only a tiny percentage of the labor force. It is not nearly sufficient in food production, with a variety of meat and foodstuffs constituting the largest portion of imports from other regions.

There is widespread resentment in Amazonia over what has been called exploitation and discrimination against the region by the rest of Brazil. Heard from all classes and occupations are such remarks as: "Amazonia is a Brazilian colony" and "We are paying a high price to remain Brazilians."

Some young intellectuals warn that the choice should be either integration or independence. None of this sentiment or grumbling has expressed itself in any form of political organization, however.

Complaints Aired

Amazonians are quick to point out that since the development of the natural rubber industry in the last century, the extraction of natural resources has chiefly benefited wealthy Brazilians in the cities of the southeast coast and has gone to build up the country around São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro.

They complain that successive governments have ignored their needs for schools and public works, in particular electric power facilities, highways, and communications.

They note that most of what they consume has to be "imported from Brazil," often, as in the case of pharmaceuticals, at exorbitant markups.

Example after example is related about how impotent their Congressional representatives are when confronted with the much larger number of representatives from the populous coastal states bent on having their way. They view sullenly the predominate control of newspapers, television, and radio stations in Belém and other cities by a chain based in Rio de Janeiro.

Government Aware

Actually, the federal government has been aware of the special problems of the region for many years. The Brazilian Constitution, in Article 199, explicitly reserves 3 percent of the total annual federal tax receipts for the relief and development of Amazonia. In 1953, the Superintendency for Planning the Economic Improvement of Amazonia (SPVEA) was established for this purpose.

Jurisdiction of SPVEA covers the states of Pará, Amazonas, the four federal territories of Amapá, Rio Branco, Acre, and Rondônia, the northern section of the states of Mato Grosso and Goiás, and the major part of Maranhão. The area totals 59 percent of the country and 7 percent of the population.

SPVEA has been involved in promoting development on a broad number of projects including agriculture, manufacturing industries, transportation, health, and education. It tries to encourage immigration, establish agricultural colonies, and give financial assistance to new industries processing fish, timber, or foodstuffs.

It supports directly agricultural research and experimen-

tation which have shown the agricultural potential of the Amazon Valley to be much greater than hitherto believed. Recently, a large portion of its funds were devoted to building the Belém to Brasília highway.

While SPVEA's endeavors have covered a large variety of worthy objectives, the resources and personnel at its command are considered woefully deficient. The agency employs only 500 people to carry out its plans on a budget that last year amounted to some \$13 million. Congress consistently cuts its budget to about two-thirds of the constitutionally specified percentage.

Some of the agency's non-politically appointed personnel complain about the, politically inspired alteration of budget items by Amazonia federal deputies to please constituents capable of delivering blocs of votes in future elections.

Reputation Stained

In Brazil, SPVEA has a wide reputation for having been raided by corrupt Amazonia politician-tycoons. These men are in the infamous tradition of predatory barons whose huge lands, enterprises and, often smuggling, permit them to wield great power.

Men of this kind have made a profitable career out of exploiting local resentment against the rest of Brazil in order to solidify their position and divert attention from their oppressive grip on the region.

Thoughtful Amazonians hope a national conscience will develop to help their region much like that which occurred toward the northeast. Carrying the analogy further, they admit that another radical Francisco Julião in their area would speed up the termination of their secondary status.