

EVENTS MOVE FAST IN NEW CALEDONIA

Special to "The Listener"
by
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THINGS have been moving in New Caledonia, and what has been achieved warrants the attention of other Pacific peoples.

Almost immediately on my arrival in Nouméa, for instance, in August, 1939, I met Mr. Lewis, local Pan-American Airways manager, who invited me over to Ile Nou to watch the coming of the trans-Pacific Clipper on its first experimental flight. That made history, and flying developments have since accelerated so fast that the music of seaplane engines, civil and military, is to-day the background of our lives.

Like other Pacific islands, the colony is also preparing its land base—work I was able to inspect recently during a visit by Governor Sautot. Such bases will complete the transformation of Pacific communications. To-day we are neighbours—Nouméa to Auckland 1122 miles; Nouméa to Brisbane not quite 900. In the other direction, you cross the International Date Line, so that you can leave Nouméa on, say September 25, and arrive at Canton on September 24 — which sounds rather like Alice-in-Wonderland.

Interesting Visitors

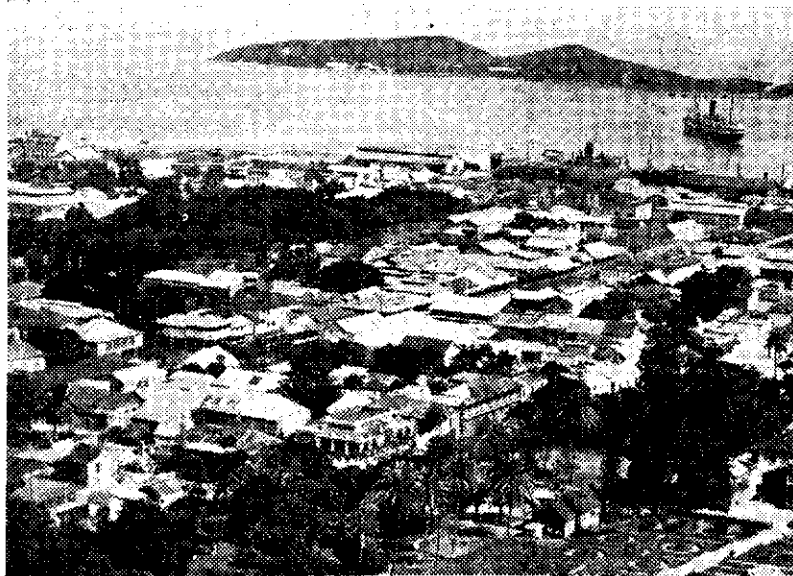
The regular trans-Pacific service started in July last year. Two of the first passengers were Brigadier-General Walter H. Frank and Lieutenant-Commander Cornwell, technical observers of the United States Army and Navy. Significant also, but among this year's events, has been the appointment of an experienced American Consul to Nouméa—Mr. MacVitty. Famous people like Noel Coward have passed through, and one extraordinary week even saw the passage of four Dutch and two New Zealand Cabinet Ministers, as well as the Prime Minister of the Commonwealth.

A year ago, the 'plane bore away a Governor rejected by the Colony, and recalled by Vichy. This was Georges Pélicier, whose reign had lasted ten months. His predecessor, Governor Barthes, who came solely to get money for the defence of France, holds the record for shortness of stay. He was here only one and a-half months. Even so, his period as Governor was to be lowered by Pélicier's successor, Colonel Maurice Denis. It was only three unhappy weeks before the Colony, on September 19, 1940, ousted him and declared for Free France and Henri Sautot.

Denis was a weak and colourless man. I interviewed him both as troop commandant and as governor. But the day of his downfall, he excused himself. His head, his secretary explained with an eloquent gesture, was as big as a melon.

Frequent change of Governors even in normal times seems to be a habit with the French Colonial system. Whereas the British insist on five year appointments, New Caledonia has had 27 Governors in the past 43 years.

A Colony Where They Change Governors Quickly And Often



A PORTION of the town and harbour of Nouméa

I landed back from a visit to Sydney early last September just in time to witness the overthrow of the Vichy regime. It was an exciting time. Sautot walked up to Government House from the quay—he had only arrived that morning from the New Hebrides — and ejected the unhappy Denis.

Other Changes

One of the new Governor's acts has been the replacement of the General Council, which lost popular support, by an Administrative Council, half of whose members are ex-servicemen. A large part of its work has necessarily been in the economic field. The Colony, which had a record year in 1939, has since courageously faced such matters as restrictions on nickel and chrome exports to Japan. It has looked to Australia and to the United States for a continuation of its economic life—and not in vain. As I write, Nouméa smelters are going full blast on a nickel order for the Commonwealth, which will take three months to fulfil. American ships are now calling more regularly to land goods and ship minerals. As a result, we are smoking Australian and American cigarettes, while Australian and Californian wine and other products are on every dinner table. To New Zealand we look for cement in exchange for guano, and shipping facilities would lead to other trade.

We have had a visit from a representative of the Australian Shipping Board, and the Commonwealth Government is always in touch with the local administration through its Nouméa representative, Mr. Ballard. The appointment of a local New Zealand representative, paid or unpaid, would be welcomed as a friendly gesture.

For news, we rely on the radio, particularly VLQ and New Zealand, and outside these, on the BBC and American stations. Honolulu has put on one or two special performances for New Caledonian listeners.

Big Event of the Year

The big event of 1941 has been the departure of the first contingent of New

Caledonian and Tahitian volunteers early in May, news of whose doings has been eagerly awaited. Sydney had an opportunity of welcoming them before they left for the Middle East.

Nor must I forget the New Caledonian and Loyalty Island sailors who have left to join the Free French Navy. They are the sort of men who, in normal times, man ships like the nickel colliers, of which the Notou (since sunk by a German raider) was one.

De Gaulle's Envoy

The visitor this year who got the biggest reception in Nouméa was de Gaulle's envoy, Governor-General Brunot, who last year rallied the Cameroons to Free France.

This brief sketch would not be complete without reference to important work finished this year. The port of Nouméa, enlarged and concreted, is now worthy of this magnificent harbour, which dominates the approaches to New Zealand and Eastern Australia. Roads have been improved and extended. One winds through New Zealand-like rain-forest complete with tree-ferns and cascades. Tourists will find it out one day. I hope they will remember the man under whose first year as Governor it was made — Henri Sautot, the man denied French citizenship by Vichy because his whole effort is for the liberation of France. The man who built it is Monsieur Carryquiriborde, a Basque, chief engineer of the Public Service Department—he, likewise, is a Caledonian official "dismissed" by Vichy for being loyal to his job, but he carries on just the same, realising in his humorous way that we are living in strange times.

What Would You Give Mr. Gandhi ★ On His Birthday?

WHAT do you give a nudist on his birthday? Thanks to Gracie Fields, the problem is an old and trite one, but members of Wellington's Indian community have recently had to face something similar when raising money for a birthday present to Mahatma Gandhi. Mr. Gandhi, of course, is not a nudist, but his life is simple in the extreme, and his material needs are few.

Being admirers of Gandhi and of the work he is doing, Wellington Indians are not giving him a birthday present in the conventional sense of the term. They are sending money to assist him in his social work among the many millions of India's lower castes. Last year, they raised approximately £50; this year, although some money is still to come in, a considerably larger sum has already been collected. Auckland Indians are making a similar collection for Gandhi.

Gandhi's birthday was actually on Thursday, October 2; he is 72 years of age. According to the latest Year Book,



MAHATMA GANDHI
Gracie Fields has no answer

there are nearly 1200 Indians in New Zealand. Most of them are in Auckland and Wellington.