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Habana, March 12, 1941

MEMORANDUM

Visit of Dr. Wilson Popenoe

Mr. Ambassador:

Dr. Popenoe called this morning to inform us that the survey party had returned from its latest trip to the Oriente Province. He said that some of the members of the survey, including himself, were leaving tomorrow for Pinar del Río to inspect some rice lands and that he expected that their field work would be finished this week. They intend to return to the United States on Thursday, March 20, with the exception of Mr. H. F. Blaney, the irrigation expert, who expects to stay a little longer.

Dr. Popenoe is of the opinion that the outlook for Cuba, agriculturally speaking, is exceedingly hopeful. He says that they have an overabundance of good soil and could support many times their present population. He said that the situation is quite the opposite from that of Puerto Rico, which he regards as practically hopeless.

It is Dr. Popenoe's opinion that Cuba's chief social problem is that of the sugar mill and cane-field workers and that if some program could be worked out for their subsistence during the dead season, a very definite step toward solving Cuba's economic difficulties will have been made. With regard to the Cuban farmer in general, as distinct from the canefield and sugar mill laborers, it is his opinion that his standard of living compares favorably with that of farmers in other Latin American countries. He does not think that they constitute a problem.

According to Dr. Popenoe, Cuba has two main handicaps in its efforts to diversify agriculturally for export. These are the fact that its soil is predominantly heavy clay soil suitable only for grass crops, including sugar cane and rice, and its social legislation which, however commendable, impairs Cuba's competitive position from an export angle compared with that of other Latin American countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, etc., where wage scales and living standards are much lower.

Dr. Popenoe

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Dr. Popenoe is of the opinion that rice can be grown successfully in Cuba and he said that there was no reason why Cuba should not produce all its rice requirements and more, if necessary.

He said that the general impression of the members of the survey, including his own, is that what Cuba needs most urgently and what would be the most practical contribution toward an improvement in the general agricultural situation would be the construction of a network of secondary and feeder roads to tap those agricultural regions which presently have little or no access to the market. He realizes, of course, that the Cuban Government is in no financial position to undertake this construction, but he hopes that if and when the time comes for some economic assistance on our part that a road building program can be included in the projects for which such assistance is extended, providing the construction of the roads could be undertaken under our supervision.

You will be interested to know that Dr. Popenoe is favorably impressed with Mr. Laguardia. He expressed the opinion that Laguardia has excellent judgment and that he has the proper attitude toward Latin America, in that he is sympathetic but practical. Dr. Popenoe said that he is very glad to have the occasion of working with a man of Mr. Laguardia's caliber.

He also expressed himself in very favorable terms of Mr. Shaddick, the agricultural rehabilitation expert, who recently returned to the United States. Dr. Popenoe said that Mr. Shaddick is one of the soundest young men he had ever worked with and that he was doubtlessly "a comer" in his particular field.

A. F. N.



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