

RELEGATION

Jean-Lucien Sanchez – Georges-Eugène Renault was born on the 16th of February 1874 in Auneau in the department of Eure-et-Loir. He was condemned on the 9th of February 1920 by the Lyon court of appeal to fifteen months in prison and to banishment to the colony of Guyana for a theft. While Georges had effectively already been sentenced on three occasions to eight months, four months, and another eight months of prison for thefts, these were each time minor offences. This is why it is these four sentences that led automatically to banishment in virtue of article 4 of the law on banishment of persistent offenders, dated 27 May 1885, that stipulates such a penalty if the condemned has four sentences of more than three months imprisonment on his criminal record. Georges therefore arrives in Guyana on the 13th of August 1921, under the registration number 12934. He has double club foot however, so he is an infirm and therefore straightaway interned in a new camp of convicts that is in fact a death camp where the colony administrators abandon all the colony's injured and moribund.

Now Georges had a rather different background from other relegated convicts, you know, relegated convicts who are basically workers and vagabonds with no real profession. He was something of a publicist, that is to say a sort of journalist, and as was indicated in the *curriculum vitae* that he slipped into the many letters that he addressed to the local authorities, he edited quite a few titles and reckoned to have founded newspapers such as *Le Rhône parlementaire* and *La Cote des Beaux-Arts*, also organisations such as the *Société amicale des officiers de l'Instruction publique*. The reporter Albert Londres states that he knows him when he meets him in Guyana in 1923 while conducting an inquest on the colony for the *Petit Parisien*. To quote: "It is a fellow journalist, a poor bugger seeped in chagrin and remorse. I remember him very well, oh, he didn't kill his father and mother, he is a maniac, a drunkard, he stole a parcel in a railway station, a chicken at a market and once, on a café bench, a parcel containing old newspapers, two candles and a knife. And he always used to return later on whatever he stole." And there you are, these minor thefts reveal someone who is above all a victim of mental problems and probably of kleptomania. Georges suffers enormously from being deported to a colony and in his letters does not cease to distinguish himself from other convicts from whom he feels himself to be very different. I quote: "if transportation is painful for all those who undergo it, even for wretches used to all privations, to all exhaustion, to all shame, to all baseness, to all humiliations, how much more so to a man who is educated and used to all the refinements of a life of work, honest companions, paternal love and conjugal affection. Ah, this life of perpetual bleeding containment and base cohabitation to which one is chained."

It is always a little bit tricky to verify the sayings of relegated convicts. Obviously, we often have the comments of the colony administrators on relegated convicts, but not what relegated convicts think of those who assess them, those who manage them, and those who guard them. Above all, we do not know exactly what they think of their situation and here the case of Georges is tremendous precisely because it puts down on paper a number of extraordinary reactions! This is a real communication without the filter of the penal administration.

The world of the relegated convict is a violent one, a world of individuals who suffer an extra stigma within the colony, as being, really, the lowest rung of the colony. While those condemned to forced labour may have committed blood crimes as, for example, with those who come from the criminal underworld, or may have committed a crime but only one crime, it is precisely the fact that they have not reoffended that lets them be seen as able to reinsert themselves more easily. Whereas the relegated convicts are really seen as petty thieves, marginalized, vagabonds, without impact. When the relegated convicts emerge from their prison to try to find a place in society etc., they are always mistrusted, because it is the repeat criminal who steals. So here is the repeat thief, the chicken thief! And that's just what nobody wants! Better take a criminal with blood on his hands, than someone who is likely to start stealing from you again! To go back to his old tricks! Nevertheless Georges gets to benefit in 1925 from a personal form of deportation, that is to say that he is allowed to leave the Nouveau Camp and to base himself in Cayenne where he manages to get engaged by some employers. And he then has several attempts at trying to get his penalty annulled but he never succeeds and so he dies in 1928 from physiological exhaustion at the hospital of Cayenne,

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