

'Mafia' taking over island?

PROVINCE

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Reuters

LONDON — A British government minister, run off the tiny Caribbean island of Anguilla, charged Thursday that the self-proclaimed "acting president" is being backed by an American and said gangster-type characters are holding the island in subjection.

William Whitlock, a junior minister at the foreign office, also charged Americans were involved in demonstrations which forced him to leave the island Wednesday.

Whitlock went to the island as a special emissary of Prime Minister Wilson to help resolve its rebellion and secession from an island federation set up by Britain.

He declined to say what Britain, which is responsible for the island's defence and foreign affairs, would do about the situation. But the British government has in mind consultation with the U.S. government, he said.

On his way home from Anguilla, Whitlock was reported from Barbados as saying a

Mafia-type organization exists on the island.

He said Thursday he has no proof the gangster-type elements on the island are members of the Mafia. But there are fears throughout the Caribbean that they may be, he said.

He said his impression was that these elements controlled "president" Ronald Webster and "he is now a very frightened man."

The minister, who spent about four hours in Anguilla, said proposals he made about

the island's future in an airport speech were cheered by the 500 persons there.

His visit was a calculated risk as it was known that there were rifles and machine-guns on the island. However, Whitlock had received a safe-conduct promise from Webster to put the British proposals to the people.

Later, when attempting to leave a house where he had lunch, Whitlock was halted by

Continued on next page
See MAFIA

From page 1

Mafia

a roadblock and a group of armed men.

Webster then said he could not guarantee his safety and told him to leave the island.

Some "pretty tough characters" waving rifles were in a crowd on a nearby hill shouting insults and four shots were fired, Whitlock said.

Whitlock said he was accompanied to the airport by tough-looking characters, jeering and shouting. Behind them was a white man wearing American-type battle-dress.

The British proposals provided for a commissioner appointed by the Queen who would administer the island "as long as the difficult situation continues."

In pursuit of a settlement, Britain is consulting Caribbean governments concerned about reports of outside elements which want to set up huge gambling casinos with Anguilla as a jumping-off ground, Whitlock said.

Tiny Anguilla and its 6,000 people rebelled in May, 1967, against the rule of the central government of the federated islands of St. Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla. It declared independence earlier this year.