

Portland's homeless, jobless highlighted

by Nathaniel Scott

Portland's third annual Hobo Parade and a forum on "The Plight of the Homeless," highlighted the needs of Portland's homeless and unemployed people last weekend.

The parade, with some 200-plus participants, was led by a five-man drum corp from the Jazzmin Marching Band. An estimated 800 to 1,000 people enjoyed the festivities, which included floats, marchers, music, food, refreshments and one elected official, County Commissioner Caroline Miller.

Louisa R. Stark, professor of Anthropology at Arizona State University at Tempe, Arizona — a board member of the National Coalition for the Homeless — was the forum's keynote speaker.

She said there is a rise in the nation's homeless "two-and-a-half million," and cited two things that drastically affect the plight of the homeless: war and the economy. "Whenever we have had a war in the United States we have had a rise in the homeless," she said. "The second big cause is economic conditions."

She emphasized that a lot of the homeless and jobless are alcoholics and chronically mentally ill persons and added that there are "a lot of Vietnam veterans on our streets." The mean age, she said, is 34 to 36 years.

Traditionally, the problems of the homeless have been handled by church groups which, at best, have been "bandaids," she said.

Furthermore, "We need programs to help people get back the entitlements they have lost. . . . The homeless, in reality, are people who should be getting entitlements, but are not getting them."

Stark's solution to the problem hinged on people. "Across the country there are thousands of groups working with the homeless," she said. "The stereotype in the United States is that the jobless don't want to work. Most employers, when they look for someone to

work, look for people who live in houses — not the homeless." Wanting a job and being able to hold a job are two different things.

Jim Anderson, from St. Andrews Catholic Church, took issue with Stark's job outline. "Finding jobs is not a very practical solution; that's a futile activity," he said. "What we need to do is create work where work is not being done."

Mark Davis, of the mayor's office, commented that "of a \$650,000 community budget, approximately \$500,000 goes to programs related to providing housing to poor people."

Davis said the city is involved in several activities that provide housing for poor people. The basic two programs are "to create affordable housing (and) to provide people who are poor the means to afford housing for the poor has become increasingly scarce. Michael Stoops estimated Portland's homeless to be 3,000.

Single Room Occupancy (SRO), for which Portland is a national demonstration city, is a "\$100,000 per year program" that provides housing for certain low-income people, Davis said.

"There are many more homeless people (in Portland) than we realize (e.g.) families living in cars," Genny Nelson, co-founder of the Sisters of the Road Cafe, said. "There is a high rise in the disabled. . . . The three needs of the homeless are jobs, jobs, jobs."

"The answer is jobs. Somehow or other we have to provide jobs for people," Doug Rodgers of Sno-CAP said. "We (Oregon) have the highest unemployment since the Great Depression. And the (1983) legislature basically did not do a damn thing. With a \$3.2 million budget, the state legislature said 'We couldn't help people in need.'"

Rodgers said this is "an unloving society." And he added, not dispassionately, that "we need to change our attitudes towards the homeless and the jobless."

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Bishop Tutu speaks here

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is a moral issue as much as it is an economic one. Don't let people get away with that baloney that they are there in South Africa for our benefit. They are there to make the maximum profit."

He called the Sullivan principles useless. "The Sullivan principles moves in the direction of desegregating the work force. However, they are useless for changing apartheid. They are used to make apartheid more comfortable. The Sullivan proposals are asking no more than what a good employer should be doing."

The strength which empowers Bishop Tutu to say his home "has one of the most vicious systems

since Naziism," is his spiritualism and faith in what he calls "the church of Our Lord Jesus Christ."

"Can you imagine what happens in a situation where people have their dignity as human beings trampled underfoot. We are created in the image of God. Don't walk around apologizing for your existence. You are God's victory."

"The book South Africa should have banned was the Bible. The Bible is the most revolutionary, subversive thing when you have injustice, oppression and exploitation."

Bishop Tutu concluded his address with, "There is no doubt that Black people in South Africa are going to be free. The question is when. The question is how."

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