

Haiti — The People Rise Up

by Bob Lothian

Most of the baseballs used in the United States are made in Haiti under conditions of extreme exploitation, according to Dr. Monica Gordon.

The average wage for a worker who sews up the baseballs is about \$1.50 a day, said Gordon, a native of Jamaica and professor of sociology at the University of Oregon.

Such conditions made Haiti one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere, and led to the insurrection last fall which ended the dictatorship of "Baby Doc" Duvalier, Gordon said. Gordon spoke at a public forum on "Haiti, the People Rise Up" at the King Neighborhood Facility last Thursday. She was joined by Jean-Phillipe Charles, a Haitian student at the University of Oregon.

An audience of 60 listened as Gordon and Charles described the poverty and oppression that characterized Haiti under the rule of the Duvalier family. They also spoke of the new hope that has come with the overthrow of the infamous "Baby Doc."

Haiti, according to Gordon, is "a country that when it is described statistically, is at the very bottom of everything."

Haiti has the highest illiteracy and infant mortality rates in the region, "and all this after an attempt has been made to bring Haiti up to modern standards," she said.

Under the 30-year reign of the Duvalier family, power and privilege were concentrated, and the majority of the population, mainly poor peasants, were kept intimidated by the extensive police apparatus, Gordon said.

She described life under Francois "Papa Doc" Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude ("Baby Doc"), as "30 years of constant torture, oppression, political murders, and economic exploitation."

"The majority of the people were left out of the power structure," Gordon said.

In spite of such conditions, she said, an underground nationalist movement grew until it broke out into insurrection last fall. Under pressure from the United States and France, Baby Doc stepped down.

"After 30 years of systematic oppression people finally had the courage to say 'No!,'" Gordon said.

Removing the dictator was a minimum condition for democracy in Haiti, but the repressive structure of the Baby Doc government remains largely intact, according to Gordon. The new leader, Henri Namphy, was the head of the army under Duvalier, for example, she said.

"Duvalier's spirit is still down there, there's no doubt about that," said Charles. "The rich are getting richer . . . terrible exploitation is still going on down there."

Charles said that Haiti is poised on the brink of revolution. "It's looming all the time." But the popular movement is confused about how best to bring democracy and freedom from exploitation to the country, he said.

"The question is, what are we going

to do with the church, the constitution, and what are we going to do with the government?" said Charles.

"I really can't provide you with answers," said Gordon. "Haiti is in transition. I do not agree that because Duvalier has departed, there is freedom to say and do."

But a man from Haiti in the audience disagreed. "Freedom does not exist," he said. "How do you know?"

"It's beautiful to sit and talk about Haiti," but better than talk would be to go and help build the country, he said. "I intend to go and try," he said.




Dr. Monica Gordon (R) and Jean-Phillipe Charles (L) discuss the poverty and oppression in Haiti under the Duvalier family.

Photo by Richard J. Brown

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Youth Volunteer Rally Approaches

Do you know a teen whose summer vacation will most likely mean daily consumption of T.V. game shows or reading a book? Why not tell them about Red Cross volunteering!

The American Red Cross is sponsoring a Summer Youth Volunteer Rally on Thursday, June 26, from 1:30 to 4:00 p.m. at Red Cross Headquarters, 3131 N. Vancouver Ave. This annual event offers young adults (minimum age of 14) the chance to find out what summer volunteer opportunities are available through Red Cross, and an opportunity to sign up for activities.

Red Cross summer volunteer opportunities offer job experience, confidence building, reference for future jobs, and new friends.

Red Cross has something for everyone. For more information contact Red Cross Youth Services, 284-1234, ext. 176.

3rd Annual Community Team Challenge

Rose City Connection, Inc. will again be hosting the third annual Community Team Challenge on Saturday, June 28, at Delta Park. Teams of 12, 6 males and 6 females can enter into the competition in events such as the egg toss, softball toss, relay race, football, obstacles course and tug of war. The entry fee is \$120 per team (\$10 per team member), and the proceeds go to support Rose City Connection's scholarship fund.

Since 1984, Community Team Challenge has become an annual tradition in the community. Once again, CTC will be taped and televised on Rogers Cablesystem Channel 23.

Application forms for teams can be picked up at the Portland Observer newspaper 1463 N.E. Killingsworth, The Scanner newspaper 2337 N. Williams, The Urban League, 10 N. Williams or by calling 285-2065. The deadline for entry is June 13, 1986.

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