

Casual Death Is the Way of Life for Haitians

People, but Not Wide Poverty, Vanish

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PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti, June 10—In a land where the biazze has long been commonplace, few Haitians find the currently tense political climate notable. Many people vanish here in the best of times, visitors are told.

Because of malnutrition, disease and political conditions, most of the people of Haiti, the hemisphere's poorest country, have a tenuous hold on life. Had the world been flat, Columbus would have gone over the edge here.

The latest series of disappearances began May 8, when President François Duvalier, who is commonly known as Papa Doc, was stricken by an undisclosed affliction. In the weeks that followed, while Government officials offered few clues whether the 62-year-old President was dead or alive, scores of Haitians vanished.

Many of these were last seen entering a small building near the capital's waterfront—Fort Dimanche (Sunday), a political prison, which, like other jails here, is named after a day of the week.

Report of Killings

On June 2, *Le Nouveau Monde*, a semiofficial newspaper run by a Frenchman, René de Catalogne, reported that 22 Communist leaders had been killed in a suburban hide-out. Those who saw the bodies the next day said privately that 20 of them were badly decomposed and were the remains of those who had vanished into Fort Dimanche. All the dead were exhibited at the prison.

It is quite usual here, observers say, for enemies of the regime to be accused of being Communists. "Papa Doc thinks this makes it easier for Washington to swallow the mess," one diplomat explained.

The deaths evoked a response from a group of Haitian exiles in Florida on June 4. With an American crew operating an old four-engine aircraft, six exiles flew low over the city, firing machine guns and dropping a dozen 40-gallon drums of inflammable material.

One drum fell between the presidential palace and the army barracks behind it, causing no damage. Some drums fell into the sea. One exploded in a particularly wretched slum near the Notre Dame Cathedral, killing the six-month-old daughter of a gardener for the United States Ambassador Claude G. Ross. An undisclosed number of people were also killed or wounded in the ensuing panic.

Censorship Tightened

One effect of the raid was that censorship of press reports was tightened, and Mr. de Catalogne spent a busy period helping foreign newsmen stay out of jail.

Another effect was that President Duvalier spoke publicly for the first time since his illness. In a 12-minute address June 5, he blamed Cuban



President François Duvalier, who fell ill early last month

Communists for the raid and asked for United States military aid.

All United States direct aid to Haiti was ended in 1962 by President John F. Kennedy, who found the Haitian regime odious. The cutoff has embittered even the elements most opposed to the Government. They say that Washington is actually punishing the most wretched people in this hemisphere.

However, Washington has been giving a small but growing amount of food, medicines and other materials through the Organization of American States and the United Nations.

Aid Bypasses Regime

Such aid has had a profound impact on this land of four million people with a per-capita income of \$40 a year. Although the aid groups working here are reluctant to mention figures, they stress that the help bypasses the Government and goes directly to the people.

A side effect has been a rather orderly economic program and budget developed by the Government to husband its gross income of some \$40-million a year, mostly from customs taxes. Partly because of a growing tourist flow, Haiti has an enviable record of monetary soundness and prompt payment of her debts, although her currency—the gourde, (five to the dollar)—is unacceptable in foreign markets.

The aid groups operate quietly, mainly in rural areas because the 400,000 destitute people of Port-au-Prince, the capital, are considered better off by comparison.

An increasing number of industries are springing up here. Taking advantage of the going wage of 75 cents a day, manu-

facturers are producing underwear, baseballs, footwear and other export items, using completely imported materials. The more progressive manufacturers, many who came from Puerto Rico, pay \$2 a day.

Economy Is Boistered

These higher rates are paid even to women, who are generally the family breadwinners in Haiti, and the impact of new industries has been keenly felt by the economy.

The manufacturers are impressed by the charm and dexterity of Haitians and by their artistic creativity.

Despite her poverty, Haiti is free of street crime and drug

Restricted U.S. Aid Bypasses Regime

addiction. The people boast that despite the political disappearances, the average person can walk about undisturbed without fear of violence.

The only ones with such fears have been the Tonton Macoute, or bogeymen, who are the secret police. An increasing number of them have been killed recently.

Some say that Dr. Duvalier ordered the killings to reduce their threat to his rule, which began in 1957 and which he proclaimed in 1964 would be for life. Others lay the killings to the "Phantom," who is believed to be one Gerard Brisson. The Phantom and his men have won wide respect by attacking the secret police. Although the Government said that the Phantom was killed in the June 2 attack on the alleged Communist group, a considerable number of Haitians do not believe it.

Belief in the Supernatural

In rural areas of this island country of 10,714 square miles, about a fifth the size of New York State, life is rarely affected by political conditions. About 10 per cent of the population is literate, and almost all Haitians believe in the supernatural.

This belief is being used by foreign aid teams to combat disease and to improve farming. Medical groups are using voodoo leaders to help them fight tetanus. Malnutrition, tuberculosis and tetanus are the leading killers in Haiti, where half the children die before the age of 5.

One reason for the high death rate from tetanus is the belief that newborn males are infected with the Devil's spirit. Shortly after birth, male babies are cut on the arm to permit the evil spirit to depart; since the wound is then sealed with earth, it often becomes infected.