

ML 1040

Stalemate over steel

By TERRY JOSEPH

WITH just six days to the Independence Day deadline for the launch of a national steel orchestra, Pan Trinbago and Government are not even talking about the band anymore.

At a news conference held in his office on June 20, Information Minister, Senator Wade Mark promised a fully-funded orchestra by August 31. A contentious comment that Pan Trinbago would not be involved in either the formation process or the eventual management of the band, caused a standoff, which has effectively brought the project to a halt.

The *Express* now has in its possession, a sheaf of documents (correspondence between Pan Trinbago and the Culture Ministry on this same subject), dating back to February 17,

which not only proves that Pan Trinbago had indeed done all the work on the project, but that their efforts were ordered by the very Government, which subsequently denied them due credit.

Talks between the Culture Ministry and Pan Trinbago began almost immediately after the plan to form the band was announced in Parliament last December.

Although there was an exchange of correspondence in February, a letter signed by Culture Minister Dr Daphne Phillips and dated March 1 (but received at Pan Trinbago shortly before noon on March 18); reiterated the need for the parties to meet urgently to discuss the issue.

Of the many meetings held between the parties over the period, one convened at the Minister's conference room on

April 3 and attended by Senator Dr Phillips, her permanent secretary, the steelband development officer of the ministry and Director of Culture Dr Hollis Liverpool and top executives from Pan Trinbago; is perhaps the most crucial.

Minutes of that meeting contain exhaustive details about the formation of the band and recorded a concern from the organisation's assistant secretary that "certain statements were being made and Pan Trinbago's involvement was not sought".

At that same meeting, the selection process for the band's members was discussed and it was agreed that Pan Trinbago would undertake to process applications for employment, interview prospective players and select the required amount of pannists for the band.

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Tribute to pan

JEFFREY BEDDOE, representing the Orisha faith, blesses a commemorative stone laid five years ago in celebration of the declaration of pan as the national musical instrument of

Trinidad and Tobago, hosted by Pan Trinbago, the St Paul Street Sp

life over steel orchestra

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It was agreed to that a one year contract (subject to Cabinet approval) would be offered to players and that the band would comprise 50 players, ten support staff, two tuners, one musical director, one arranger and one manager.

Pan Trinbago offered its support staff to get the project going, for which the president demanded increased funding from the ministry.

A salary of \$5,000 was agreed to (public service range 46) for the manager, players were to earn \$2,500 per month and support staff would be paid under range 20, at \$2,000 per month. All money for mobilisation and salaries was to be put into a consolidated fund "probably under the direction of Pan Trinbago".

Even the fine detail of outfitting of the players was settled,

with each member to be given two pairs of pants, two blazers and two pieces of casual wear; all of which was estimated at costing \$1,200 per player. The Minister then asked Pan Trinbago to supply a list of the instruments that the band would need. On the venue for rehearsal, it was suggested that the former location of the Ministry of Culture on the Eastern Main Road, Laventille would be ideal.

Pan Trinbago then undertook to submit all costs associated with the formation of the national steel orchestra by April 4 and the names of selected players by the end of May.

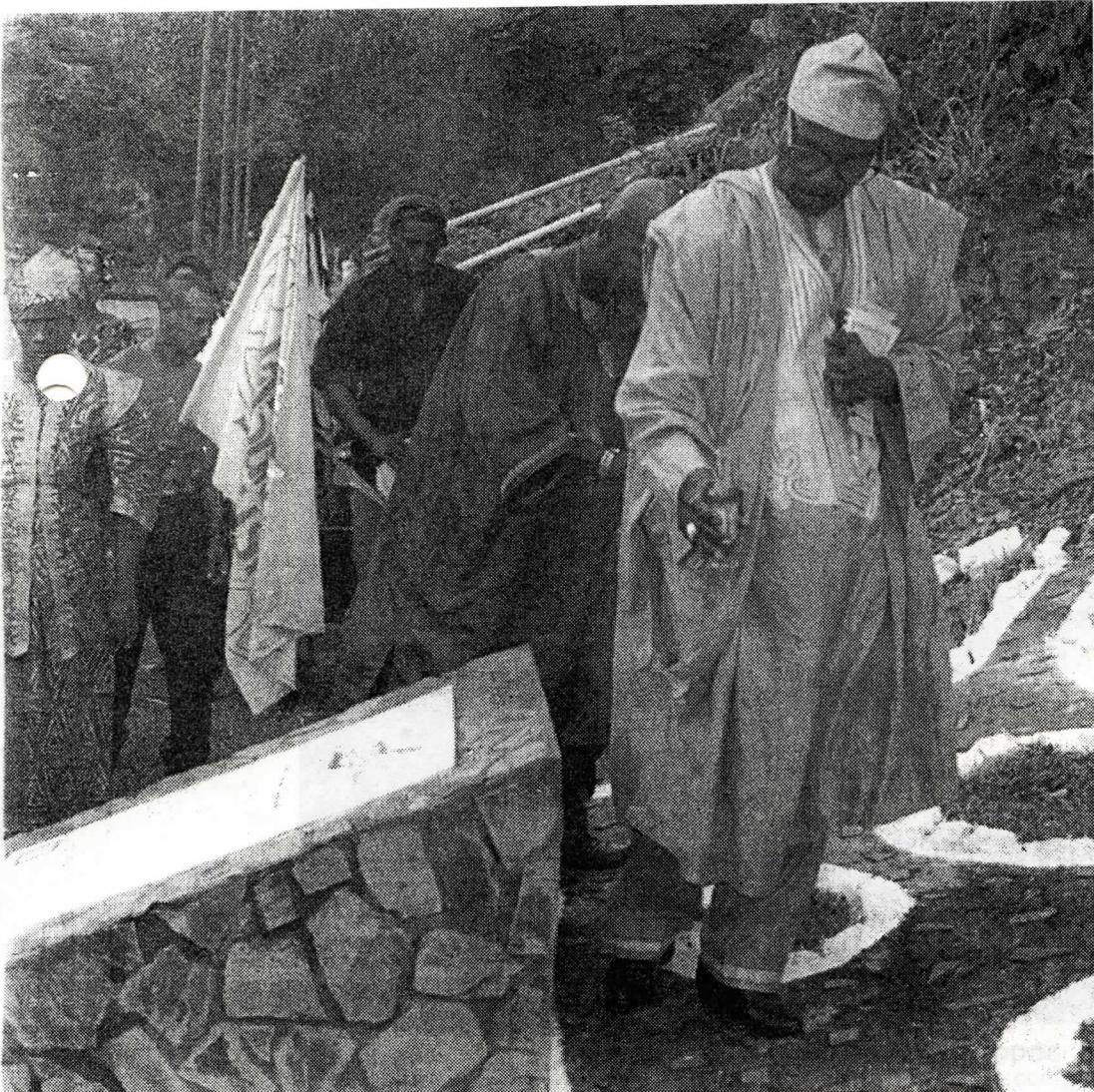
On May 23, Pan Trinbago submitted a four-page plan for the establishment of the band and suggested the launch-date of August 31 (Independence Day). The correspondence also set out the terms of reference for the band, listing national celebrations, all Government functions and all overseas events at which this country is represented as mandatory performance requirements of the national steel orchestra. Pan Trinbago also demanded that ongoing programmes in music literacy, diplomacy, public speaking, self-presentation, history and the development of Trinidad and Tobago should be compulsory for the band's members.

The letter also proposed that the manager of the band reports weekly to Pan Trinbago and monthly to the Director of Culture, implying that the Ministry had agreed that day-to-day management of the band would be the responsibility of Pan Trinbago.

Up to June 12, when a letter from Pan Trinbago to Dr Morgan Job, Minister for Tobago Affairs, repeated the terms of the one sent to Senator Dr Phillips, all systems seemed to have been going well and the Culture Ministry was proceeding in close concert with Pan Trinbago.

At that time, funding for the formation and operation of the national steel orchestra was expected to come from a combination of corporate sponsorship, engagement fees, fund-raising performances, band subscriptions and "other".

The formation of the orchestra was one of the promises listed in the 1995 election manifesto of the United National Congress.



JEFFREY BEDDOE, representing the Orisha faith, blesses a commemorative stone laid five years ago in celebration of the declaration of pan as the national musical instrument of

Trinidad and Tobago. The Interfaith Service, hosted by Pan Trinbago, was held yesterday at the St Paul Street Sports Complex.

Photo: STEVE MCPHIE