

Tourist Board told move now to promote steelbands

A COMMITTEE on Employment Opportunities for Steelbandmen has recommended that the Tourist Board move immediately to promote the steelband as an art form, and has suggested four avenues by which it could do so.

These avenues:

- Ensuring that a steelband is available to play on the waterfront on the arrival of tourist ships;
- Encouraging hotels to have steelband performances;
- Promoting tourist tours to existing steelband centres;
- Employing steelbands on package tours, especially at beach parties.

These were among short-term proposals recommended by the Committee headed by Labour Minister Errol Mahabir.

The Committee was appointed on Monday — the opening day of the three-day National Consultation on the Steelband which concluded yesterday at the Chaguaramas Convention Centre.

The Committee also made these long-term proposals:

• There are over 100 active steelbands in Trinidad and Tobago. The Caribbean area is totally inadequate to support financially the cultural activities of these bands in such a way as to provide adequate income for their continued existence.

We believe, therefore, that we should seek markets in other overseas countries particularly those that are sympathetic to our progress and development.

Areas that immediately come to mind include Latin America, Europe, Africa, North America.

In this regard, Government should initiate steps through the Tourist Board and through our overseas Missions to promote such opportunities.

In the case of the latter we recommend that this should be done with the appointment of Cultural Officers in the appropriate Embassies.

The Tourist Board should also be requested to promote opportunities for steelbands to obtain contracts to play on cruise ships.

• With the initiative from the steelbandmen themselves, co-operatives should be formed

to undertake activities for the development of the steelband and in other types of legitimate commercial and social activities making full use of Government's incentives in regard to Co-operatives.

• In consultation with the appropriate steelband associations, sites should be selected, and arrangements made, to set up steelband centres to be operated on strictly business lines and provide year round entertainment, and employment for steelbands alongside other aspects of local culture.

As far as possible, the steelbandman must be used in the construction of these centres. These centres should also provide tourist facilities including the sale of local handicraft and articles which are relevant to the development of the steelband.

The funds for these centres which should be operated by the appropriate steelband associations, should be made available by Government, possibly through the Tourist Board and the Carnival Development Committee, and amortised over a reasonable period.

EXPORT PLAN

• As soon as technology can be developed and the necessary feasibility and other studies undertaken, the full-scale manufacture of steelband instruments should commence to supply the local demand for these instruments, and to exploit export opportunities.

Arising out of the manufacture of steelband instruments will be the manufacture of a number of ancillary products, for example, carrying cases, sticks and stands.

• An attempt should be made to gear pan tuners to undertake contract assignments overseas to countries to which we have exported steelband instruments.

• Steelbandmen should be encouraged to improve their versatility, that is, to do as much as possible in the context of their cultural performance in addition to the actual beating of the pan.

• The Tourist Board should take immediate steps to assist

in the promotion of the steelband as an art form by:

- Ensuring that a steelband is available at the ports in Trinidad and in Tobago when cruise ships call. It is understood that the Tourist Board expects approximately 175 cruise ships to call during 1973.
- Encouraging hotels to have steelband performances more regularly on their entertainment agenda.
- Promoting tourist tours to existing steelband centres.
- Employing steelbands on package tours, especially at beach parties.

• Government should provide steelband music at all official functions where the playing of music is considered appropriate. The selection of the band should be done through the appropriate steelband associations.

• Government should have arranged and recorded for official distribution, the National Anthem performed by a steelband.

• The art of playing steelband instruments should be put on the curriculum of all schools. Teaching of the art should also be conducted in community centres. Wherever possible, appropriately qualified steelbandmen should be contracted to provide the training. This would enable the creation of a greater identity between the steelbandmen, the steelband, the school and the community.

• Complete prohibition should be placed on the importation of advertising material for radio and T.V. from outside the CARIFTA area, and local talent, including steelbands, should be utilised in the production of advertising material.

• Licences to operate radio stations should include a provision for regular programmes of steelband and other indigenous music.

• Greater use should be made of steelbands for television shows. Because of the technical problems posed by percussion instruments in indoor recordings, T.T.T. should be encouraged to accelerate its

efforts to record outdoor steelband performances.

• Steelbands should be appropriately paid for performances on radio and television.

• All steelbands should be encouraged immediately to become members of the Performing Rights Society.

• A training programme should be started immediately to upgrade the skills of the nucleus of the steelbands since the steelbandmen are part of our human resource potential, and their talent should be developed to the fullest.

The Committee is satisfied that there is latent managerial talent in the ranks of the steelband movement.

The Committee recommends that those steelbandmen who are involved in the organisation and management of the bands should be exposed to management training courses preferably special ones organised for them at one of the Government training units.

POSITIVE ROLE

• Sponsors should be requested to give special attention to members of the bands they sponsor in the provision of employment and training opportunities. In this region the Chambers of Commerce should play a more positive role.

• In order to ensure the stability of steelbands, employment should be provided for the leading members of the band as a matter of urgency. In this regard, Government should take immediate steps to have this implemented.

• It should be noted that of the 14,000 workers employed on Special Works projects there are some 2,400 unskilled workers who claim they are steelbandmen.

In addition to these, there are 4 area foremen, 30 charge hands, 98 checkers, 250 skilled workers employed on these projects and who are steelbandmen.

It must be borne in mind not all workers in the labour force are able to perform skilled jobs, so that employment of steelbandmen at the unskilled level on Special Works projects should not be scoffed at.

The Committee is of the view, however, that every effort should be made to provide training opportunities for unskilled workers on these projects to develop skills.

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Photo by Vic Ramlochan

PRIME MINISTER Dr. Eric Williams (right) discusses improvement of the steelband movement. Left

PM and panmen

to right: Mr. Curtis Pierre, leader of Dixieland; Mr. Roy Augustus, President of

Pan Trinbago and Mr. Peter Aleong, Public Relations Officer of Pan Trinbago.

* Government should take all steps necessary to bring back all leading pan tuners who are living and working abroad to make their experience available for the development of the steelband movement. Foreign assignments should only be on a contract basis.

* The Government, through the appropriate organisations, should encourage greater use of steelbands at all functions where large numbers of persons are in attendance, for example, sporting events.

The Committee wishes to draw attention to the fact that discussion took place concerning the operation of the tourist facilities at Maracas Bay for which the National Union of Government and Federated Workers' Co-operative has the concession.

The President of the Co-operative who is a member of the Committee, has given the undertaking on behalf of the Co-operative, that it is willing to share this concession on a 50/50 basis with Pan Trinbago. It is also understood that Pan Trinbago is very keen on the idea.

The Committee recommends that the Tourist Board take the necessary steps to facilitate this arrangement.