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Commentary

Over to you, Arnim Smith

By JOHN K. HOYTE

PAN TRINBAGO and associate sponsors — the Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago and Kirpalani's Ltd — must be congratulated on the very impressive and successful staging of "Pan Rising — Pan is Beautiful 4" Steelband Music Festival which again displayed pan-musicianship at its very best.

Regrettably, crowd response was generally low and imminent is the great measure of dissatisfaction among steelbandmen over the administration of Pan Trinbago.

Now that the Festival is over and Pan Trinbago and its associate sponsors and the successful steelbands are rejoicing, it is time to ask Pan Trinbago's president, Arnim Smith, to clear the air on a number of vital issues which are of serious concern to steelbands in particular and the public in general.

Firstly, there are more than 100 conventional steelbands registered with Pan Trinbago that are constant participants in the annual Panorama competition. Why, for example, did less than 40 steelbands participate in this year's Festival?

Secondly, among the pan-around-the-neck steelbands, out of more than 20 registered, only three took part in the Festival. Why?

Thirdly, is Pan Trinbago fully satisfied that the test piece selected for the Festival was in accord with the wishes and concurrence of the majority of the registered steelbands?

And fourthly, did all the participating steelbands in "Pan Rising — Pan is Beautiful 4" Steelband Music Festival submit their music score sheet in accordance with regulations governing the tune of choice?

These are only some of the many questions being discussed by steelbandmen and concerned members of the pan-loving public. Without proper straight forward answers, Pan Trinbago is being accused of partisanship and indifference to some steelbands, and general mal-administration.

Perhaps it may be pertinent to draw attention to what happened during the "Pan is Beautiful III" festival held in 1984. As the sponsor and public relations officer of a steelband, I have first-hand information of certain matters.



Pan Trinbago president Arnim Smith

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In the pan-around-the-neck category of the 1984 festival, TCL Skiffle Bunch won from the 1980 and 1982 champions, Hoytonians, despite a protest letter to Pan Trinbago indicating that TCL Skiffle Bunch did not submit the music score sheet for their tune of choice, *Dance of the Douens*, in accordance with the stipulated regulations, and therefore ought to be disqualified. The protest letter was treated with utter contempt by Pan Trinbago, not even an acknowledgement.

It is now more obvious than before that there was no music score sheet for the tune *Dance of the Douens* in 1984, as the popular local arranger, Len "Boogsie" Sharpe, said recently in the media that Phase II Pan Groove was having "financial difficulty" in paying for the music score sheet of the said tune which it wished to play in this year's festival.

Certainly, had the said music score sheet for *Dance of the*

Douens been available to TCL Skiffle Bunch in 1984, Phase II Pan Groove would have had little or no difficulty in obtaining the tune in 1986.

One is left to the inescapable conclusion that something was amiss in 1984 and Pan Trinbago's silence on the subject is most pronounced.

Another most amazing factor in the 1984 festival was the fact that TCL Skiffle Bunch scored 223 points to the Hoytonians' 310 in the preliminaries. But in the finals TCL Skiffle Bunch performed a "miracle," amassing a stupendous total of 490 points (yes, 490 points, a mere matter of 267 points more than what they secured in the preliminaries) to defeat the Hoytonians' final round score of 481. Naturally, there was an uproar among panmen and pan lovers. There was utter disbelief that a steelband, playing the same piece (without submitting a music score sheet) in the same competition within a few days, could more than double its preliminary points.

Of course, the Hoytonians sought, and rightly so, an explanation, but to no avail. Pan Trinbago, as usual, remained silent.

The obvious conclusion: Pan Trinbago's favouritism of one steelband and the victimisation of another. Where is the fair play by the national steelband representative organisation, Pan Trinbago?

Of significance that very year (1980) during the Panorama finals, Pan Trinbago was contemptuous of its own rules when the said TCL Skiffle Bunch was permitted to play at the end of the competition and not in accordance with the number originally drawn. Of course, there were protests from the other steelbands, including Hoytonians. Believe it, Pan Trinbago remained silent. Strange when president Arnim Smith seems to be so vocal!

The call goes out to Pan Trinbago to clear the air on the issues raised in this memo so that the dissatisfaction expressed by steelbands regarding the overall administration of Pan Trinbago and the accusations of favouritism etc. may be clarified or appeased.

No wonder the serious talk of the formation of a new truly democratic organisation to represent steelbandmen in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago now fills the air. Only Pan Trinbago can avoid this through proper communication and explanations among its members.