steelband ME 1640

Plan to obtain year-round employment for steelbandsmen

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THE NORTHERN Region of Pan Trinbago is spearheading a move to bring about greater year-round employment of steelbandsmen in Trinidad and Tobago.

The group intends to approach Government and the private sector for aid in its venture.

It feels the Government and moreso, the private sector, could effectively tap the many and varied skills available in the steelband movement to ensure that "panmen" are employed not only at Carnival time.

Mr. Barry Yeates, Public Relations Officer of the Northern Region, said yesterday the organisation was prepared "at a moment's notice" to carry out a survey, if necessary, of the type of labour potential existing in the movement.

He said that according to present statistics of the estimated 20,000 persons who were directly or indirectly involved in steelbands in the country, about 80 per cent were unemployed throughout the year.

Mr. Yeates said: "While we appreciate that the unemployment affecting the steelband movement is a reflection of the enormous unemployment problem affecting the whole community, one must also appreciate the disastrous effects it is having on the steelband, which is considered to be one of the most outstanding art forms in Trinidad and Tobago, the Caribbean and indeed the world.

"We find that because their members cannot obtain jobs except at Carnival time, more and more steelbands are being forced to fold up; or they are forced to keep their practising to such a minimum that there is a critical drop in standards."

Mr. Yeates said the situation was in such an alarming state that the very existence of the steelband was threatened.

He said that apart from making efforts to have steelbandsmen absorbed in industries, the Northern Region of Pan Trinbago will approach businessmen to have them used in advertisements and commercials.

Mr. Yeates also appealed for some arrangement between Pan Trinbago and business organisations in the country whereby essential steelband material and equipment could be purchased at special discount prices.