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Steelband issues

BERTIE FRASER, former education officer of Pan Trinbago, analyses the present plight of the association. Mr. Fraser was one of four Pan Trinbago executive officers who resigned their posts during a stormy convention sitting on September 23. The convention resumes on Sunday.

WHY SO MUCH DISHARMONY IN THE STEELBAND MOVEMENT? He says:

- Too many member bands have lost faith in the whole idea of an organisation.

- Suspicion threatens the life of Pan Trinbago.

- Too many individuals have been rejected because they were non scruters.

By **BERTIE FRASER**

RECENT developments in the steelband movement have been high-lighted in Press. It is unfortunate that certain points of fact have either been omitted or de-emphasized in the arguments.

The last Pan Trinbago National Executive chose not to use the media to explain its position on a number of highly complicated issues. Most of these issues are clear to a large number of panmen, and in fact have been clarified through several discussions among them. But many others and the general public may not be conversant with some of the more important points of interest.

If the majority of panmen must develop confidence in their organisation, they would do so only if they could be brought to understand what has been taking place on their behalf. Besides, as an important aspect of our national culture, the steelband movement has not, and cannot hope to operate outside of the focus of public attention.

The purpose of this article, then, is to examine the issues behind the apparent blunderings of a movement which has for the most part been silent, and which, when exposed to the public eye, has developed an image of doubtful positive value.

Each steelband in Trinidad and Tobago is entitled to representation on a Regional Executive according to Pan Trinbago's constitution. Each band is also entitled to representation by two delegates and one observer, at national conventions. At these

conventions, a national executive is elected, to which each of the five regions are supposed to appoint two of their regional officers. The regional divisions are East, Central, North and South Trinidad; and Tobago.

Certain observers within the movement have contended that the regions were never functional. This subjective and conveniently extreme view is not entirely true, but it remains a fact that the lack of a link between the national executive and the individual bands has been a major problem for the movement.

In respect of Tobago, the majority of bands withdrew into a Tobago Association, independent of the Trinidad Executive. They were approached by the last national executive in the interest of merging into a united body. Two major problems confronted the merger.

The first was the previous acceptance by the Trinidad Executive of a band which was ousted by the Tobago Association on disciplinary charges. The second was the lack of a tangible guarantee for equal recognition of the Tobago Bands, based on the fear of a traditional negligence of the Island. These were the points advanced by the Tobago delegation.

IRONIC SITUATION

On the other hand, Tobago had proved to itself that it could not go it alone, and that unity with Trinidad was desirable, if not necessary. Tobago therefore appeared willing to give in to the disciplinary case, using this concession to bargain for guarantees of equal recognition and benefits.

The negotiations seemed poised for conciliation. The good intentions of Trinidad, were demonstrated in the gratis provision of leading Trinidad Bands for the Discovery weekend blockorams at Le Coteau, and this helped the situation immensely, despite minor complications.

By the time of the September 23 Convention, Tobago-Trinidad negotiations were well advanced.

In respect of the Eastern region, an ironic situation arose.

First, there was a decision by the National Executive to get the Eastern region on its feet. The responsibility was delegated to the Public Relations Officer of the Executive, to set up a meeting of all bands in the East.

On the historic night, about 70 per cent of the Panmen present came from two steelbands, even though the total attendance repre-

sented about 40 per cent of the Eastern bands. A majority decision was carried, to hold elections for an Interim Eastern Region Executive.

The following facts about the meeting have affected the relationship between the region and the national executive:

1. The Public Relations Officer of the National Executive represents an Eastern Band, and he has not been personally popular on the National Executive.

2. The meeting raised a number of issues pointing to a lack of faith in the national executive.

3. The Secretary of the National Executive, as chairman of the meeting, placed a considerable part of his defence on the absence of functioning Regional bodies acting as links between band and the national executive.

4. The President and Vice-President of the National body were absent from the meeting.

5. One member of the newly-elected Eastern Region Executive belonged to a band outside of the region, and was therefore unconstitutionally put into office.

Second, the next meeting of the National Executive interpreted the Eastern elections meeting against a background of suspicion, based on the biased representation of bands, the election of certain officers not provided for in the constitution, the definition of the East/North (Port-of-Spain) boundary, and the calculated attacks on the National Executive.

This suspicion of dissidence was heightened by the zealous actions of the newly elected officers, interpreted to contravene the interests of Pan Trinbago.

Officers of the national executive differed on the matter of how to deal with the problems presented by this relationship between themselves and the Eastern body.

A SCUFFLE

The third major contribution to this strained relationship was an incident, at the National Headquarters, which involved the Public Relations Officer, and the rest of the national executive. The presentation and reiteration of a redundant issue ended in a scuffle between the PRO and three other officers present.

This incident was interpreted by the Eastern Region Executive as an assault on a member of their flock, and an attempt to forcefully silence what they thought was a just cause for concern.

Based on reports from the PRO, the Eastern Region made the matter public, calling for disciplinary action against the three other officers.

This is the latest development in relationships between the National Executive and the most functional Regional Executive.

TO BE CONTINUED.

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