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# 'Give Pan its due'

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CARNIVAL has come and gone and the steelband remains to languish in the land of its birth.

The steelband and oil are the two most important natural resources of this nation and both have been thoroughly misunderstood and misused by government and people alike.

I recently had to reply to a suggestion by a very prominent member of our society at the Berger prize-giving ceremony.

Everyone was lamenting the gradual corrosion of the steelband's role in most aspects of carnival, while complimenting Berger Paints for its attempt to restore the traditional 'Las' Lap' steelband activity through their competition when this gentleman, in offering solutions to the steelband problem, suggested that collection boxes be placed throughout the savannah at carnival time to help the steelbands raise funds.

I found this idea not only naive, but revolting in that the steelband has paid its dues over the last 50 years and has progressed from being a pariah in its own society, to be internationally acclaimed as one of the most exciting musical discoveries of this century.

The steelband, more than anything else, is universally identified with Trinidad and Tobago. Those high-ranking officials who wish to display their national consciousness never appear in public without some pendant, medallion or

brooch depicting pan, notwithstanding that most of them care nothing for the art form except to use it for their own convenience at every given opportunity.

The following opening paragraph from an editorial in one of our leading daily newspapers is one of the reasons why I have to put pen to paper to explain some aspects of the functioning of Pan Trinbago in the wake of some unwarranted attacks against our organization.

The article begins thus: "Mrs Marilyn Gordon the Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs, has challenged the steelband movement to become a progressive movement, one capable of undertaking its own affairs. Her speech at the prize-giving function of Pan Trinbago relating to Carnival 1984 came in the wake of government's decision to stop paying for nine executive officers of the organization from public funds."

Mrs Gordon went on further in her speech at the prize-giving, in a thinly veiled attack against the movement and steelbandmen as a whole, to demand that panmen get their priori-



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ties right and decide how they want to spend their money, saying "you cannot have your cake and eat it too."

The Minister then quoted substantial sums of money which she claimed had been provided to the steelband movement by her ministry. She also challenged the organization to stop the *gambage* and ol' talk and to make positive and meaningful contributions to the marketing and export of the steelband industry.

Mrs Gordon's delivery was a classic example of "double speak," to coin a phrase from George Orwell's novel '1984'.

The speaker has succeeded in distorting and disguising the facts until they seem to represent a completely different story. I wonder if the Minister has unwittingly set up a Ministry of Truth in true Orwellian fashion?

Her remarks did not go unnoticed by the daily press who all gave coverage to her utterances and this led one enterprising editor to launch a full-scale attack into the functioning of Pan Trinbago without getting any information from reliable sources, but using the Minister's comments

and observations as the gospel truth to show how inefficient and incapable panmen are of running their own affairs.

Here are some more excerpts from that editorial: "The directionless movement of the steelband organization has not made it possible for most steelband activity to pass the talk stage.

"Worse, it has led to the deterioration of the status of the steelband to a two-day concert phenomenon each year in its birth place, and it's being virtually banished from the dance halls and the other centres of organized entertainment."

He concludes: "If steelbandmen are only capable of wringing their hands at the cruelty of the government in depriving them of administrative help in a sudden way, they cannot be good for much else but such futile action."

The accountability of the organization has been put to test by Mrs Gordon's disclosure of fantastic sums of money which she alleges are given to the steelband movement by her ministry. She has not explained to the public that much of this is recurrent expenditure and as such does not pass through the hands of the organization.

The average panman does not realize this and to be told suddenly that the Ministry is supplying millions of dollars to his organization, the end result of which he cannot see, must lead him to be suspicious of wrongdoings, what with the

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classic examples of corruption and mismanagement of public funds exhibited at the highest levels of our society.

Pan Trinbago has its headquarters in a shabby little firetrap of a building at 111 Queen Street, Port of Spain. The building was once used by the Electrical Inspectorate but had been condemned and is now used by the Steelband. There is a permanent staff of five including a secretary at our San Fernando office.

The regular staff is increased on special occasions such as the Panorama and Music Festival competitions. The total upkeep of the office, including payment of bills and salaries is our responsibility, with no financial help from the authorities except for the waive of rental.

This situation can be compared to the CDC, NCC and Prime Minister's best Village Division, all of which occupy luxurious office space and are staffed and furnished at government's expense, but whose productivity ratings pale when compared to Pan Trinbago's annual performance.

Contrary to a certain trend of thought, Pan Trinbago is not a Panorama organization. We organise a major Steelband Festival each year, alternating between the established steelbands and the school bands on a biannual basis. These competitions are organised, promoted and administered by Pan Trinbago with financial and managerial assistance from firms in the commercial sector.

The Ministry's contribution is restricted to costs of transportation, security and rental of venues. Money is not allocated to the organiza-

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tion to cover these expenses, rather they are transferred to the relevant Ministry or department. This is one of the recurrent costs that Mrs Gordon has quoted figures for, money that does not pass through the organization or its employees within the steelband movement.

Pan Trinbago also organises major shows of national importance during the year which incorporate our brothers and sisters in the arts such as "Champs in Concert" and "Pan Through the Eyes of the Calypsonian". The "Champs in Concert" show is subsidized by the Ministry of Culture through the rental of the Queen's Park Savannah facilities, rental of chairs and payment of extra services to firemen and policemen.

This is another example of money being credited as contributed to Pan Trinbago, when in fact it does not pass through a single steelbandsman's hand.

The steelband is in reality the major drawing card in our tourist industry but is sadly underutilised by our Tourist Board. This fact bears itself out in that the

Panorama competition which a few years ago was accommodated in a little corner of the Dimanche Gras programme on Carnival Sunday night, is now the major show on the CDC programme and takes up no less than five nights of the CDC carnival calendar.

The CDC is a statutory board set up by government for the sole purpose of handling the affairs of carnival, our national festival. The state provides a grant each year to be utilised by the CDC for the running of the carnival celebrations.

Some of this money is allocated to regional competitions at borough and county council level but the vast majority is spent on the competitions held at the Grand Stand of the Queen's Park Savannah which has become the centre of all major carnival activity and has even been renamed "Carnival City" by the CDC.

Panorama has become the biggest show on the C.D.C. calendar and a Joint Management Committee comprising four C.D.C. and three Pan Trinbago executive officers is formed each year to handle the competition — Pan Trinbago being the only cultural organization which has a serious input into the running of its affairs at carnival time.

All the panorama shows and most of the other C.D.C. events attract a capacity crowd, yet a profit is never recorded for any of these shows; another example of misuse of public funds by a government body.

Prize money for the carnival celebrations

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bago has accumulated the sum of \$150,000, which represents the profits of the last two Steelband Festivals. We have several substantial offers of assistance by influential people in the business community, and we patiently await some decision by the relevant authorities in identifying and releasing a proper site.

The Pan Factory is an "on again, off again" joint venture which was initiated by the late Dr Williams since 1973. Some progress was made last year when a team comprising Cariri engineer Richard McDavid, Pan tuner/researcher Bertie Marshall and our president, Mr Arnim Smith, travelled to Sweden in order to check out technology and to test presses with machinery which we intend to purchase for use in our factory.

Cabinet passed a vote of \$50,000 to cover expenses for that particular venture some years prior to the undertaking, so that by the time it was decided to take action the cost had exceeded \$50,000. Pan Trinbago then had to subsidise the venture to the tune of over \$9,000 from its coffers, in order to avoid the long delay which would have resulted in the reallocation of funds by Cabinet.

Pan Trinbago, in its negotiations for increased carnival prize money in 1983, succeeded in gaining an overall increase of \$200,000.

The representatives of steelbands at a general meeting unanimously agreed to forego an increase in their prize money so that the \$200,000 would go directly to the Pan Factory.

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ry.

The Ministry of Culture now has in trust for Pan Trinbago \$400,000 which represents the increases for 1983 and 1984 and is a significant example by the steelbandmen of self-help. Talk about "having your cake and eating it too."

Another example of panmen deciding what they want to do with their money took place this year when, at another general meeting, a decision was taken to donate the money received for the rights of making a pre-carnival Panorama long-playing record to the Capital Investment Fund.

This represents a further contribution of \$20,000 by panmen towards their own affairs and must clear up the misconception that the steelband movement is not prepared to put its money where its mouth is in achieving its own goals.

The Minister also revealed that Pan Trinbago is this year receiving a subvention of \$165,000, which is welcomed by the Association after all this time.

She did not explain

how this money is to be spent. It is broken down into areas such as \$26,000 for office furniture and \$40,000 for the Festival, so that when we approach them for assistance for "Pan Is Beautiful Three" we may well be told that money has already been allocated and it cannot be duplicated.

We might very well have to pay for rental of the Jean Pierre Complex, security and transportation from the \$40,000.

Now that we have dispelled the myth which the Minister was trying to create, that the government is pouring money into the steelband movement, we ask why not?

Surely a government that can spend \$1.3 billion on ISCOTT, which is losing more than a million dollars of taxpayers money each day, can spend a few million in setting a world renowned cultural movement on its feet and benefit in return by receiving an influx in its foreign exchange.

The Jamaican Government has recognised the value of the reggae phenomenon and has turned it, financially, to the benefit of the state. Oil-rich Trinidad and Tobago cannot see the commercial value of the steelband which Amral Khan tried to show them some years ago in his own unorthodox way.

A speedy and efficient start of the Pan Factory would result in the immediate depreciation of the cost of steelband instruments and would leave room to develop other areas, which were restricted by financial restraints. There is a lucrative foreign market

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for steelband instruments once these can be mass-produced at a high standard.

The Minister herself stated at our prize-giving function that "there must be an aggressive approach to the promotion and export of the steelband."

The steelband owes this country and this government nothing, rather it is the other way around. The social implications of the movement are very obvious. One only has to examine the role that Desperadoes plays in the most heavily populated community of this country.

The strength of the steelband movement as a political base has been exploited over and over and will continue to be. The steelband cannot survive in its present impoverished state; it must be supported both morally and financially by citizens and state alike.

The business of running an office for the steelband movement cost Pan Trinbago over \$140,000 for the years 1982 and 1983 in payment of salaries to office staff, stationery and equipment and maintenance. The organization, with its limited access to funds, cannot afford to pay the salaries of full-time officers to carry on the day to day business of the steelband movement.

Two executive officers of Pan Trinbago were on full secondment to the organization during 1982 and 1983 and the organization was able to extend its workload and make great strides during this period. We have sent in our proposals to the Ministry on the secondment issue but instead of improvements things have changed for the worse.

The situation became

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crucial this carnival when the executive officers who are usually seconded to Pan Trinbago from their substantive posts at this time, with full pay, were suddenly informed by the Ministry of Culture that there would be no secondment of public service workers anymore, but that we would be entitled to no-pay leave of up to three years duration.

Our salaries for that period have been stopped. We contacted a senior official of the Ministry who told us that they had made no firm commitment for the payment of our salaries.

No-pay leave is not the solution to our problem as Pan Trinbago is unable to meet the salary costs of fulltime working officers. There are also some serious repercussions to the taking of no-pay leave which affects the increments, pensions and gratuity of the officer in his substantive post.

Secondment means that the officer, although performing his duties away from his substantive post, does not suffer from any change in his salary arrangements.

The C.D.C. is fully staffed by public servants during the entire

year to undertake a project which occupies two months of each year, so why all the fuss about secondment of Pan Trinbago officers to carry on the daily duties of the organization all year round.

The Prime Minister's Best Village Competition is a good idea that has failed to progress beyond its political implications, yet government continues to pour public funds into a programme that has lost its cultural direction and whose only value is as a political base for the ruling party.

The officers of Pan Trinbago are all dedicated steelbandmen who invariably are the leading administrative officers and mainstays of their individual bands, besides which many of us have the additional responsibilities of rehearsing and performing with our bands.

Family life is a questionable area in the circle of committed panmen, as once you fall in love with pan, all else takes second place. Yet we have our commitments and must perform our duties in our everyday jobs. The little time we have spare is dedicated to the running of Pan Trinbago and no national organization can realise its full potential with spare-time officers running it.

Imagine the Greater London Council and the London Arts Council contribute more money to the development of the steelband in London than our governmental agencies do here

We cannot develop unless the government of this country once and for all establishes a clear-cut policy on pan so that we can have guidelines in which to work.