

In defence of Pan Trinbago

Voice of the people

reactionary Press has come out in support of one of their favourite sons whose removal from office we called for. We issued a media release stating the facts of the matter as we perceive them. This was not carried but instead we were attacked in a biting editorial which distorted the facts and presented the case of the other person.

The writer has sought to vilify Pan Trinbago after we made a call to the Minister of Tourism and State Enterprise for the removal of Aubrey Admas, the Tourism Cultural Adviser, on the grounds of gross disrespect to the organisation.

Minister Gordon held discussions with us prior to Mr Adams's appointment. He stressed on the point that the steelband would play a major part in the tourism thrust.

Despite this, at the first meeting Mr Adams called in his new capacity he invited taxi drivers, vendors, mas' men and others, but not Pan Trinbago. We had to dispatch a letter to Mr Gordon before we were invited to the next meeting.

We raised objections to the Tourism Authority's approach to several matters



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yet these were never reflected in the Minutes. We made decisions at meetings and Mr Adams went out in cavalier fashion and did his own thing.

There is a standing agreement over the years between Pan Trinbago and the Tourist Board that bands perform for the cruise ships at the Dock site for a fee of \$2,000 for a two-hour performance.

This is a standard fee and is used for all out-door performances including the public concerts put on by the Central Bank at the Eric Williams Plaza. We have never stated that our fee is \$1,000 an hour as the editorial has done.

Huge Cost Factor

Two cruise ships were due on the same day and Mr Adams hired a band through its sponsor to play at the departure of the first boat. He approached the band, informing them that the second boat was due in a short while and that the band should stay on and play for its arrival.

Our representative, who is a dock worker, intervened and informed the Captain that they were taking away employment from another band and that they should charge for the extra time.

It was finally agreed that the band should play an extra hour for the sum of \$1,000.

The editorial attempts to portray panmen as blood suckers for insisting that the \$2,000 fee should remain. There is a huge cost factor for every steelband performance, including blending of the pans and transport.

A two-hour performance means five hours of work including manual labour as pans have to be loaded at the panyard, off-loaded at the venue and the process reversed before the players go home.

Workers have to take time-off from work without pay, yet Mr Adams wants us to perform for free while he obtains sponsors for his Ambakaila people to appear for the same purpose.

The editorial claims that we insist on hiring only unsponsored bands of our choice. This is again untrue as we make sure that only the best bands are chosen.

Mr Adams is approaching sponsors behind our backs to have panmen play for free so all this is part of his propaganda.

Mr Gordon requested that we supply a steelband at no cost earlier this year when a group of tour operators was invited on a special cruise. Renegades did the honours and so impressed were the operators that they promised to greatly increase the flow of cruise ships to our ports.

Golden Egg

Lo and behold, circumstances militated that three cruise ships arrived unexpectedly and Mr Adams sought our assistance to have bands appear at no cost. When we refused he responded that we could shape up or ship out. He approached Jit Samaroo offering payment and a tour but Jit referred him back to Pan Trinbago.

The writer of the editorial castigates us for trying to kill the goose that laid the golden egg but at the same time is serving Mr Adams's interest in portraying a Rum and Coca-Cola tourist concept through his outdated Ambakaila shows. This is another attempt to dehumanise our entertainers and citizens by labelling us with a "native" culture.

Pan Trinbago will not allow its members to be disrespected in any form and we stand ready to defend our interest against all those who would seek to exploit us.

SELWYN TARRADATH, Education Officer, Pan Trinbago.

THE EDITOR: Disrespect for our art-form and our place in society is one of the burning issues affecting panmen since the inception of the movement some 50 years ago. The fact that the Steelband has, in a very short time, become universally recognised as a serious new musical form does not yet earn for us the commensurate respect we deserve at home.

There is still the stigma lingering of that time not so long ago when the steelbandsman was the pariah of this society in an even more blatant way than the Rasta was recently.

Steelband involvement has permeated every strata of society, yet many of those who pay lip service to the art-form still see the practitioners of the art as mere yard boys, unskilled labourers and ragamuffins.

Confrontation

In spite of the international cultural emergence of the steelband, there are still people who see the steelbandsman as a rabble rouser who is always demanding something in a bullying manner.

We are labelled and branded as hooligans, irresponsible and immature, every time we raise our voices in defence of some position or over any issue where we feel that we are wrongly treated.

One reporter ended an attack on Pan Trinbago over a glaring impasse between the Government and the organisation by stating that our problem is that we need to exact respect and recognition over and over again. He does not stress how close he came to the truth in his effort at being sarcastic.

Confrontation, it seems, is still the only method by which we can achieve any gains in this society.

The powers that be refuse to recognise our strength unless we flex our muscles. We sit and negotiate with them in good faith and they turn around and renege on all their promises. We only get action when we take steps which lead to their embarrassment. All major concessions granted to the steelband movement have been won in this fashion.

We are currently involved with two issues of disrespect with two different Government Ministries and already the