

Pan Trinbago can't do its work

The following is a statement from Arnim Smith, President of Pan Trinbago, on the Eddie Hart issue and the question of secondment of national officers.

PAN Trinbago would like to raise as a matter for public comment the question of a "National policy on culture."

Do we see culture merely as the embellishment for the grand national occasion, or do we regard culture as the expression of our identity as Trinidad and Tobago, a distinct and separate nation among nations, with a distinct character and clear aspirations?

Let me illustrate this contradiction by making an analysis of an issue that has been the cause of tremendous disappointment and concern to Pan Trinbago.

Eddie Hart has been fired by the Ministry of Works, Maintenance and Drainage for allegedly abandoning the job during the Carnival period. Eddie Hart is well known to the entire steelband community as a tireless worker and staunch defender of the steelband movement in general, and Catelli Trinidad All Stars in particular.

Eddie is the President of the Northern Region of Pan Trinbago and the Public Relations Officer of Catelli Trinidad All Stars. Eddie is also the founder and inspiration behind the biggest football league in the Caribbean, the Eddie Hart Football League, and the coach of one of the top first-division teams, Tacarigua United.

For the past four years, executive officers who worked with the government have been seconded to Pan Trinbago for the first three months of the year to facilitate the organization's pivotal role in Panorama and Carnival celebrations.

This year, Pan Trinbago as usual applied for secondment following the usual procedure, where cabinet approval is given after the fact but officers proceed on leave once the various department heads have been informed.

In February, the government replied to our application for secondment with what we understand is their official policy position after years of *ad hoc* arrangements.

This position was that government would cover one third of the salaries for four designated posts (which incidentally are below the level of the officers' present posts). And that officers who had applied

for secondment could proceed on "no-pay" leave for a period of up to two years.

Notwithstanding the fact that Pan Trinbago was in no position to pay the salaries of its seconded officers based on the new arrangement, the executive of Pan Trinbago decided after consultation with the Ministry of Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs to proceed on no-pay leave. To do otherwise would have severely jeopardized the contribution of the steelband movement in Carnival and Panorama.

The above course of action has resulted in the fact that the salaries of nine executive officers have been stopped from the month of March, the first time this has happened for four years. And as if this were not enough of a burden for Pan Trinbago, Eddie Hart was summarily fired after 24 years service in the Ministry of Works, Maintenance and Drainage.

Pan Trinbago is contesting what we see as a contradictory and unfair assessment of the role of the steelband movement.

If the view was that there was not enough work to actively occupy the seconded officers, or that the nature of their work was not critical to the success of Panorama and Carnival, then perhaps we would have been inclined to accept our present position.

But since there is a multitude of direct evidence that the opposite is closer to the real truth, we ask the following questions.

Can an organization which, on the basis of self-reliance, has to maintain a north and south office and a paid staff of five persons afford to pay, in addition, the salaries of six executive officers? Can Eddie Hart's selfless contribution to the National Panorama and Carnival celebrations be at the same time the cause of his dismissal after 20 years of service?

Is this not the same Pan Trinbago that has developed Champs in Concert to the level of being one of the major if not the major Carnival production?

Did not Pan Trinbago fund the inaugural 1981 Schools Steelband Music Festival from the proceeds from this very Champs in Concert?

My friends, Pan Trinbago was forced to ask the nine officers to return to work from April 1, since the organization cannot afford to support them and their families.

And the question therefore arises, what about the steelband

headquarters and the pan factory? Pan Trinbago on its own initiative has already amassed \$550,000 towards its two important capital projects. In fact the mandate of our last convention directed the executive to concentrate on building an independent base for the steelband movements' national projects, thereby having gradually to rely less and less on government's financial support of the organization. The point is, who will see to these projects which have both reached critical junctures?

What about the tuners convention which is scheduled for later this year to deal with the critical question of the pan factory and its implications for tuners nationally?

What about the pan-on-the-road project as our contribution to this year's Independence celebrations?

What about pan in schools? At present, Pan Trinbago is committed to drawing up a comprehensive programme for the consideration of the Ministry of Education.

What about our end-of-the-year production? What about the servicing of our 100-odd membership of steelbands? What about our bi-annual convention scheduled for December this year?

Can Pan Trinbago address itself to all the above and still have to raise funds to pay the salaries of six executive officers? Or if we cannot afford this, can all of this be accomplished on a after-work basis? Have we not passed that stage? Who will attend the numerous meetings with various agencies which are scheduleld within working hours? Those are the questions that have been worrying the minds of all panmen in this period.

And somehow we believe that we can only answer the above questions in the affirmative. To do otherwise would be to turn our backs on a lot of hard work and a lot of potential for national development.

Pan Trinbago has written to the Ministry of Sport, Culture and Youth Affairs requesting the re-opening of dialogue on the matter of secondment, as well as the specific question of the dismissal of Eddie Hart. We believe that we have to sit down with the Ministry and arrive at an acceptable compromise. We must attempt to bridge the gap from both sides and arrive at a workable solution, for the future of the steelband and culture hangs in the balance.