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Bread and Steelbands

THE NATIONAL Consultation on the Steelband on January 29 to 31 offers the opportunity for many who are involved in the propagation of this national art form to air their views and to put forward constructive proposals on the way it should go.

What should be aimed at is to arrive at a consensus on an action programme designed to take the Steelband to new heights, while at the same time providing its practitioners the opportunity of earning a livelihood.

The agenda of the Consultation is sufficiently comprehensive to enable discussion of all possible aspects of the movement and it should be the aim of participants to see that practical results emerge from their exchanges.

A key topic of the three-day meeting will be employment opportunities. The present position is that even when the steelbandsman gets a chance to work at his art it is only possible for him to do so part-time. He does not have, for instance, the chance to play regularly for pay so he could draw an adequate, steady income.

It may be a reflection of the lack of appreciation of our own creation that we have not yet found a way of organising a market for the abundant talents of our young people. We are nowhere near doing so though it cannot be that we are lacking in ideas to the pool of which participants in the consultation should be preparing to contribute.

The bread — and butter — aspect necessarily will loom large in the discussions whether it is in the matter of organising concerts by professional steelbandsmen, the setting up of a pan manufacturing industry or the merits and demerits of the small combo as against the full pan side.

The question arises also in such matters as overseas tours and contracts, legal protection for steelbandsmen, and others. The need is urgent as much for steps to protect the steelbandsman from exploitation as for our own exploitation of the steelband for the benefit of the country in which it was born.

The participants in the Consultation should hardly need to be reminded that the possibilities are infinite, but it is up to them to devise ways and means of grasping and developing them, taking care not to stifle initiative in the process. The Government will have its part to play, but any progress towards the desired goal will depend on each one playing his full part.

M.L. 1040