MC 1640 1990

people

Tears of the panman

By VALENTINO SINGH

EVERYBODY feeling happy, Carnival day in the city
But we never know de pressure that pan and the panman undergo
I does see dem merry making, everybody sipping something
Take some time off and think and see how de steelband condition stink
From de days of Fisheye and Winston Spree, I remember pan beating so sweetly
But tell me whey pan reach, whey de hell pan reach
Ken "Professor" Philmore beating so well,
Outside all ah hear is Andy Narell
So tell me whey pan reach, whey de hell pan reach
So when you playing Carnival day, I say
Take some time off and pray
Do not forget to check the bigman
Beg him to say a prayer for the pan
Cause doh mind how we pray and preach
Ah still cyar see whey pan and the pan man reach

CRO CRO 1989

WITH A MEASLY grant of $44,000 from Government to pay its office staff for the entire year; a "hold" on prize money and appearance fees which was promised to the organisation prior to the 1989 Panorama competitions; and a dilapidated office "which is broken into every Monday morning," Pan Trinbago appears to be faced with its toughest battle since coming into existence.

After just four months in office, new President Owen Serrette admits that he never believed that the task of leading Pan Trinbago could be so difficult.

"When I took over, I thought that the office would be easy to streamline, but we have a fundamental problem and that is that too much of our help is voluntary.

"We have people who are teachers and Public Servants and this is one of our biggest headaches. The job of administrating pan is a full-time one and I would like to see those of us who are working with Government being seconded to Pan Trinbago for two years. This will really help us."

Serrette revealed that since taking over the job, his life has changed considerably.

Appearance fees

"The pressures are coming from all sides. On the one hand you want the best for panmen...you want to ensure that what they are supposed to get comes their way, but on the other hand, one has to be responsible ...to understand the problems which the Government currently faces with respect to finances."

The comment was in response to Government's failure to pay what was promised to the organisation prior to Carnival 1989.

"Some panmen are saying that the leadership is not strong. But I think it is important that we be responsible.

"Government still owes us some $260,000 in appearance fees and prize money, but they are just not in a position to pay and there is very little we can do but to look for alternative means to develop ourselves."

"When I took over I thought it would have been easy to streamline the office, but we have a fundamental problem and that is that too much of our help is voluntary"

Serrette, who works in the Ministry of Finance, agrees that the organisation has been too dependent on Government over the years.

"This is one of the areas I hope to get around during my two years here — and despite all pressures I will serve out my two years — but Pan Trinbago has to cut out this dependence on Government and start working towards self-sufficiency.

"We are in the process of setting up a massive raffle which we want to launch later this year. We hope to raise $1 million. If it works, it could be a starter."

The first area which Serrette hopes to tackle if the raffle is successful, is the organisation's office. "It's madness to have anyone working in this place. Just around Carnival I took my vacation to come in here and do some Pan Trinbago work...but you cannot work in here for very long.

"There is no air conditioning and every hour one has to get some fresh air or one might suffocate. Even the physical state of the place is not conducive to work. The building is made from board and was once abandoned, but we got together and took it over.

"But it has outlived its usefulness. Just look at the windows, we have to get an old piece of wood and patch it up. Imagine a tourist coming here and wanting to see the headquarters of pan ...what will he think? "

But the problems of the prospective tourist visiting Pan Trinbago's headquarters is not the major concern of the Pan boss at the moment.

Instead, Serrette is more interested in finding out why pan is not given more prominence in the present drive by the Tourism Development Authority (TDA) with respect to the amount of cruise ships visiting the country.

"It's unbelievable that Pan Trinbago is not on the TDA board. Imagine that! In fact it's a shame that people who come here from overseas are being given this type of Ambakaila entertainment...Yellow Bird and Rum and Coca Cola.

"The TDA calls us to meetings yes, but only after they make their decisions. Then they simply inform us and there is little we can say or do to change their opinions.

"We would like to see a visit to the panyard being introduced to the programme instead of the visitors being taken to Roxy. In this way we would be tapping the resources of our indigenous talent."

Serrette agrees though that the mechanisms are not really in place to encourage this type of activity in any big way.

"But there are lots of panmen out there who are unemployed and who are quite good with their hands. If the tourists are encouraged into the panyards for one hour every week, think of what can happen.

"It could very well provide incentives for people to show their talents in art and craft...the panmen could print jerseys and sell...the spin-offs could well be a great thing for the industry and the country."

Solo Harmonites

The soft-spoken Solo Harmonites panman says that at times, since taking over, he has had to assert his authority.

"There are times when I am referred to as Bokassa, but I am prepared to stand up and take steps which my conscience tells me are the right ones.

"I am not going to do like the former President and say that I am prepared to die for pan because I am not dying for anyone, but I believe in being reasonable and will operate along those lines always.

"I am not fully satisfied with what has happened since taking over because I anticipated a lot more...like the introduction of weekly pan concerts so the steelbandsman could start earning some income from pan, but the financial problems continue to be a problem.



OWEN SERRETTE
one big headache

"The fact that panmen did not receive all that was due to them for 1989 has encouraged a lack of motivation among the pan community. They are saying that they worked during the Carnival season for what was promised to them, but unfortunately they cannot collect their salaries."

Serrette claims he is in sympathy with the panmen. "I know how it feels, because several men used their own money in the interest of their band, thinking that they would get it back and now...."

He says that to motivate panmen in the circumstances is a big task. "I suppose things will change when we learn what is happening financially."

Serrette ended by calling on Government to be mindful of the fact that panmen still have outstanding bills from Panorama "and it would be nice if they can get their respective grants to clear this off."