



OL' MAS 1979 - POLITICS AND PAN

(Express Photo)

The Politics Of Pan

SHORTLY before 5.30 p.m. on Carnival Tuesday, the WITCO Gay Desperadoes Steelband set up their pans in Panoramastyle formation on the stage at the Queen's Park Savannah and treated the capacity audience to a spirited rendition of Kitchener's "Symphony in G". It was an electrifying performance, and not simply because of the music.

Questioned on television shortly thereafter as to the reason for his band's dramatic defiance of Pan Trinbago's ban on participation in CDC-sponsored events, captain Rudolph Charles lamely argued that as a "community" band, Despers had a responsibility to its revellers. Either it would provide the music to keep them dancing, or else run the risk of creating a volatile mixture of excess energy and pent-up frustrations.

Ironically, Charles added that his followers were quite prepared to defend themselves against

anyone who took objection to their stand. Since Pan Trinbago had instructed its member bands to refrain from beating only when they crossed the stage at the Savannah, we are left to wonder at Charles' implied calculation that a ten-minute gap in the music would have had a greater potential for violence than the open provocation of a disgruntled steelband community.

A few minutes after the Charles interview, those of us who were looking at television at the time were given some reason to suspect that it wasn't only Peter Minshall who was choreographing his presentation at the Savannah that day.

For TTT then chose to interview Minister of Culture Cuthbert Joseph, who professed to see in the Despers' action a sign that we were

establishing a healthy democratic republicanism which no one, not even the government, could dictate to the people. And especially with regard to Carnival, which the Minister assured us was "the people's thing".

Of course, it was none other than "Cutty" himself who had been at the centre of the controversy which culminated in the Pan Trinbago boycott of the 1979 Panorama finals. Cutty didn't quite get around to telling us that "the voice of the people is the voice of God", but he did say, apropos the performance by Despers, that "the people had spoken".

Alas, the people speak with forked tongue. For no sooner had Despers left the stage than Starlift, the 1978 Panorama champions, put in their appearance. And not only did their

panmen pocket their sticks, but the entire band of masqueraders set up a chorus of "No pan, No pan".

It is not known for certain whether Despers were unique in their defiance of the Pan Trinbago ban. Nor is it known what Pan Trinbago's reaction will be. On the Saturday before Carnival, the Express quoted the secretary of the association, Peter Carasquero, to the effect that the steelbandmen had unanimously agreed "that any band defying the boycott on all CDC competitions will be debarred" — presumably from the association and, therefore, from any competition organized by the association.

But the more interesting question is — Where does Pan Trinbago go from here?

What will happen, say, if the government sticks to its guns

next year? Another boycott of Panorama? Or perhaps we should ask — Where does the steelband movement go from here? Because we ought not to forget that the steelbandmen have had other organizational vehicles in the past; in this regard the Despers break-away is ominous, as is the widespread view that the government was reluctant to come to terms with Pan Trinbago because of the political alignments of leading executive members.

It is said that the president of the association, George Goddard, is anti-PNM — though what the evidence for this is, we are not quite sure. (This is the same George Goddard who was president of the Trinidad & Tobago Steelbandmen's Association when that body was supplanted by Pan Trinbago, widely alleged at the

time to be a creation of the PNM.) What is a known fact is that the secretary of the association was a DAC candidate in the 1976 general elections.

Since a former president of Pan Trinbago was a successful PNM candidate in those same elections, and since in some quarters Despers is held to be a PNM band, benefitting from the relationship by being granted generous scholarships, among other things, it is not at all surprising that an air of political intrigue has come to surround the whole issue.

So will the outcome of the current impasse be a new organization to represent steelbandmen, one more compatible with the present ruling party? And if so, where will the steelband movement go from there?

● From Page 2

1958-59 to Tapia in 1968, which enabled us to grow and to prosper and to offer Trinidad and Tobago a fresh option in public affairs, and which now, when much else is collapsing in ignominy, continues not only to keep the Movement alive but to fortify it by allowing us to effect a needed separation between the political life of Tapia and the educational work that must be seen to stand above any mere propaganda.

We know from experience that we can count on your support and we look forward to your reply and to your pledge of participation.