

KEITH SMITH comments on the steelband story in the 'T&T Review'

Pan's changing face

PAN as a movement may disappear but pan as an instrument could survive, according to the *Trinidad and Tobago Review*.

In its April editorial, the *Review* suggests that three factors are discernible in the events leading to the "All Stars fall-out."

The first is "the Panorama competition itself which has come to dominate and to shape the entire movement, the second is the decline in the loyalty of players to a band, or perhaps, in the identification between many bands and the communities in which they are located or, perhaps, the decay of the communities themselves."

The third, the *Review* postulates, "is the impact of commercial sponsorship on individual bands and on the steelband movement as a whole."

"When it first came, in the 'sixties," the *Review* reminds, "commercial sponsorship was seen, by almost all in the steelband world and without, as a great boon. The late 'fifties and early 'sixties was the era of steelband clashes and of gang war-

fare legendary for their violence and viciousness.

"The underlying cause of the problem, a largely urban one, was seen to be the prevailing high rate of unemployment and the resulting poverty and hopelessness.

"One response of the government of the day was the institution of "crash programmes of public works, which absorbed large numbers of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. No doubt that policy helped to release some pent-up frustrations no matter what other ends it might have achieved."

The *Review* observes that commercial sponsorship of steelbands also has been credited with the reduction of violence in the poorer quarters of Port of Spain but notes that there has been a downside.

"The not-so-hidden cost of sponsorship may have been a loss of the

habit of self-reliance on the part of many in the steelband movement, the development of a dependency syndrome in which much of the potential of the movement as an incubator of democratic values, social discipline and commercial enterprise has been lost.

"Yet the total sum expended by sponsors has not been vast nor has the majority of steelbands benefited. There have been a few sponsors who have given large subsidies. Others have given less generously, as their perhaps more limited means permitted. But many bands have benefited from sponsorship only marginally or have been left out in the cold altogether."

The result, according to the *Review*, has been stratification of steelbands based largely on the economic power or the generosity of the sponsors. The better-endowed bands

have been able to replace their pans more regularly, to hire the best arrangers and tuners, to decorate their pans and outfit their players more smartly and to compete for the best players on the basis of the payment of larger "fees," the prospect of greater glory and the enticement of overseas trips.

Panorama, the *Review* argues, "places a premium on all the advantages

which sponsorship confers. It has therefore become a showcase affair, dominated by a few, but precisely because of the glory achieved by those few, exerting a magnetic effect on all."

The result, it concludes, has been a radical alteration of the role of the steelband both in the Carnival celebrations and outside of the Carnival

season, and the paper suggests:

"The symbiotic relationship between calypsonian and steelband has shrunk in scope. The bands today only concentrate on calypsoes (and calypsonians) judged to be suitable Panorama material, each band devoting almost all its energies to the preparation of just one tune... there is the eclipse

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