

# Trinidad Guardian

NATIONAL NEWSPAPER OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Established September 2, 1917

22-24 St. Vincent Street, Port-of-Spain

## Pan goes to university

In a way, it is a kind of derogation for Trinidad and Tobago when an American university can appreciate our sweet steelband music to the extent of setting up a degree course in it.

All praise to Northern Illinois University and Professor Alan O'Connor and Trinidadian Cliff Alexis who are actually running the course. They have done exceedingly well to devise and offer a BA degree course in steelband music which not only gives the pan new recognition and status but which is also sure to produce a stream of good pannists.

Depending on an inexhaustible supply of raw talent, Trinidad and Tobago, of course, will always remain the home and fountainhead of steelband music; this confidence may explain why, unfortunately, we continue to take the phenomenon we have created for granted.

In light of the initiative taken by Northern Illinois University, it seems quite sad that we have not yet set up a school of music for our pannists. Why was our own Anthony Prospect not given the support for such a project? If the steelband movement is to take an international leap, if qualified pannists are to establish our music in various parts of the world, will they come from TT or Northern Illinois?

Or will we now be sending our steelbandmen to Northern Illinois on scholarships to acquire degrees in pan music? How do the Ministry of Culture and the University of the West Indies

react?

We beat our chests and proudly boast that the only new musical instrument of the 20 century was invented and developed here, and proclaim the merits of our steelbands. But we have no established courses of training or any centralised venue for performing.

Steel orchestras are Cinderellas of local entertainment, not guaranteed employment in the many fetes and functions taking place. Even at Carnival, pans have given way to brass bands and disc jockeys with amplifiers. Seldom do leading steelbands tour the world to show their unique talent and proficiency.

### Taking The Baton

At the University of the West Indies they are learning French and Spanish and Linguistics, but nobody is giving courses in pan. True, many of our schools have steel orchestras using borrowed instruments, but there is no encouragement towards professionalism.

In spite of all this, we must commend Northern Illinois University. They have done well. We hope their steelband music course will attract many youngsters and steelbands will grow in popularity in the United States. Maybe we can help them with additional resource personnel.

This country, however, has no excuse for letting others take the lead in developing pan. We cannot make apologies for letting foreigners pioneer research into pan music and taking the baton in studying pan at university level. TT must get out of its lethargy and do what needs to be done. Sweet pan is our thing and we should be holding it up to the rest of the world.