

# Panorama awards for next Independence

ML1040

**O**N LAST Tuesday night's four-hour discussion on Radio Tempo, we considered where pan reach. We agreed that any plan for change had to begin with Panorama and that an early initiative was needed to change the framework of incentives. I spelt out proposals made at Scherzando in January 1995. My hope is that the Independence Day awards will include a whole new category meant to recognise the even more vital role pan now has to play in national unification and reconstruction. We might decide to call them the Panorama Awards and to distribute them in the form not so much of medals as of grants to panyards in cash and kind in return for performance.

The focus would broaden from the music, the steelband, the carnival and even the cultural life, in that restricted sense of the term. It would embrace performance in education, research, industrial expansion, employment creation and export promotion as well as community mobilisation and development.

The steelbands are centres of excellence and discipline. They are magnets of mobilisation to which the youth gravitate. With the pan as lead instrument, they have been the most important single pole of indigenous innovation to have emerged with an enduring significance.

Right from the start (1950) we should have been employing the yards as the beach-head of the pioneer industry programme by building-in facilities to train and retrain the work force through a systematic support to the system of formal schooling. That needed to be done in a way which would have developed the community of small business into a community of large business as well.

In the 1940s and 1950s, along the East-West Corridor from Diego to Arima, there were thousands of seamstresses, tailors, shoemakers, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, carpenters, masons, painters, electricians and motor mechanics. We have killed off this class of independent people. The system now sends the generations on a wild goose chase after useless certificates and "passes".

What we have created are captive voters and party supporters dependent on special works and URP crash programmes. All the money we now spend on the SBDC, YTEPP, AIM, YESS, SHARE, the Cottage Programme, etc. and much of the money we spend on the junior sec, senior sec and prestige schools ought to have been channelled through the panyard, including the panyard as metaphor for all community agencies with the same sort of potential.

Think of the subsidies our consumers and taxpayers have mostly wasted on the import replacing assembly industries now vanishing before the winds of market liberalisation. How did the latter exploit us without mercy and yet they have not even learnt to compete. Imagine such incentives given to pan. Every yard should have developed pan making and tuning capacities; research activity in metal and sound engineering as well as in the locomotion associated with moving hardware, players and community supporters.

Every yard should have developed its own export processing zone to produce textiles and leather goods: caps, tops, jeans, unders, slippers, belts and all the souvenir items. The people would have kept the profits from the self-exploitation. How would it have been possible not to develop restaurants and laundries and all the service trades what with places for women and families alongside their husbands and fathers? Would domestic violence have posed such a problem? How could we have avoided the construction of day-

care and homework centres and all the amenities that people in the port need when they are together as working families, learning skills, holding down jobs, making their way in the world?

How would it have been possible for the pan yards not to have installed language labs so that band communities could master all the foreign languages relevant to touring the world in search of work and markets? Would they not have begun with English and moved easily to Spanish and French? Is this not a country in which from 1800 to 1900 the language of the street was the French patois?

The whole shape of the learning would have been different had we resolved to bend it to suit the needs of the people. Instead we have been trying to make the people fit into someone else's idea of work, school and business. It is the brightest, the most sensitive, and the most discerning who are systematically dropping out, thank God, leaving the field to the cynical and the greedy, ready to extort, exploit and get rich quick.

If none of the possibilities has so far materialised, is it not because there is an authorised version of what the development programme should be, one imported through the colossal stupidity we are teaching in the schools and the universities?

The aim now must be to launch a massive counter attack on the powerlessness and the drift which are the

hallmark of this colonial tradition, for such a long time the dominant theme in West Indian affairs. The only conceivable starting point is the steelband. Pan has a relation with limbo, the first cultural industry we created in the Middle Passage to make space where before there had been none just as, out of the discard of the dustbin, our magic has fashioned for us a new instrument the symbolism alone of which is an explosive response to our historic dis-possession.

**P**an's navel string also bury with calypso where the authorised version is systematically subverted and sabotaged by the people through the use of the double entendre. Pan links organically with mas as well. With rings on its fingers and bells on its toes, it makes the music wherever it goes. Upon our dancing selves we carry our art arming us thereby with the options of identity which we need for coping with the cosmopolitan culture of the global village. The drive to pay our way in the contemporary expression of this order could begin by distilling this experience of 500 years for all those people who are only now discovering the rigours of daily cultural interface, of douglarisation, if you prefer.

The areas in which we might find the greatest tradeability and competitive advantage are not agriculture, manufacturing or tourism but cultural and intellectual services. The panyard can be called upon as centre of excellence, magnet of mobilisation, pole of innovation and circuit of education, business and community interdependence. By making systematic micro-twinning possible (Caroni-Laventille?), it would give impetus to agriculture through school and community feeding.

What it would do above all else is generate a new learning culture, distinct from the elite A-Level driven systems imported from the Atlantic.

Is this not the story of African slaves, Asian indentured workers and European domestic servants who have all survived in America to pose the

question of human rights, freedom, democracy, independence, and equal participation? The painters, the novelists, the musicians, the poets and the playwrights have to sing this song of human triumph through audio, video, print and multi-media. What we should be selling abroad are songs, books, children's books, plays, videotapes, audiotapes and CDs all drawing on the diverse heritage and language ancestry of our mixed populations to distil the ethnic myths into fine art, music, literature, etc.

Pan must lead it both in production at home and in promotion abroad. The big Panorama award should be a world tour which would in effect be a hard-nosed selling expedition. The agricultural and manufacturing exporters, the hoteliers, and BWIA should piggy back as a matter of course.

**W**e should be franchising our ice cream, roti, doubles, souse, black pudding, bake and shark etc., after the fashion of the food multinationals. Success has nothing to do with materials or country size but with confidence, entrepreneurship, product differentiation, name recognition and excellent service.

Of course, we'd also be selling pan not as mass produced hardware but as custom built software. It would be a restricted number of designer-pan tuned by Elie, Bertie etc, endorsed by Boogsie, Liam, Jit, the Professor, Pelham, etc.

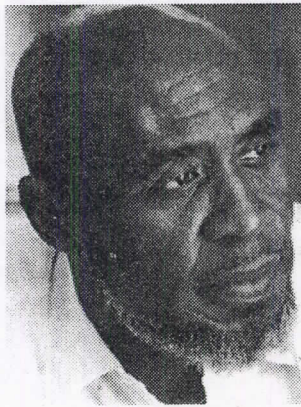
What we would be selling in fact is the "mongrel" West Indian civilization. Nothing is more saleable precisely because we're not Africans, Indians, Chinese, Syrians, Madeirans or Europeans. We are West Indians remade by America out of elements retained or retrieved from the mother continents.

The annual Independence awards should give incentive to sift and to celebrate our pride in this heritage. The performance at the Panorama Carnival competition would be handsomely compensated as would be the street participation on Monday and Tuesday. The link with all the year round activity would be made through the Band of the Year award. Points and prizes would be given for Ramajay and Music Festival. Also for other varieties of innovation: pan-tassa, pan-violin, pan-tabla, pan-jazz, pan-piano. This would encourage pan to douglarise and to develop duets, quartets, quintets, suitable for clubs, weddings, sundry ceremonials.

Projects in sound engineering and electronics would also be rewarded; developments in locomotion, in pan manufacture. Grants would encourage establishment of labs, recruitment from among supporters of architects to design sites, builders to construct facilities, planners, administrators, technocrats, promoters, managers, entrepreneurs, etc. A whole new regime of apprenticeship would be introduced so that the (privatised) secondary school would wish to twin with the panyard immediately in the matter of language teaching, fabric decoration, metal smithy, wire bending, costume making, etc.

All this would require the local and municipal authorities to make a huge adaptation. The Civil and Teaching Services would have to be expanded on a huge scale and localised in the municipal councils altering transport (City Gate) options as well as attitudes to working in the home locality. This is the other part of the solution to zoning, the shift-system, etc.

The present cutback of the public sector is predicated on low productivity and wasteful bureaucracy. What is proposed here is a creative challenge and a whole new concept. The State must expand in the service of national reconstruction provided more taxation and spending lead to increased productivity, output, employment and exports. The present government should be eager to take the country down some such path. It would rescue us from a disaster of nearly 50 years, a curse on the land.



LLOYD BEST