

OUR OPINION

Why we need this festival

THE show must go on. In this spirit the Steelbands Association have reconsidered their decision to cancel this year's Steelband Music Festival and have opted for making a go of it in November. And there is a lot to be said for this.

The year so far has been tremendously scarred by occurrences as momentous as they have been traumatic. The State of Emergency and curfew restrictions have instituted a level of disruption of normal life unprecedented in the memory of most Trinidadians and Tobagonians. In the circumstances, it would be understandable if the national self-assurance were to suffer some measure of decline, and that it could be felt we had lost that spirit to enable us to carry on normal business in spite of all that has happened.

There have been fears for Carnival 1971, but bandleaders have been showing a healthy optimism about the prospects. Now steelbandmen have said they want to go ahead with their festival. It all shows that our people who have been criticised as ready to fete under any circumstances have by the same token the positive capacity to function constructively and creatively in the face of adversity.

Permission to practice

And we have never wanted for adversity this year. Though we have seen over the last six months a reawakening of interest in the steelband movement, misfortune has befallen steelbandmen who have had their activities curtailed by the curfew etc. The Steelbands Association's Easter Sunday Jamboree had to be cancelled as well as the Festival.

Indeed the idea of no festival this year would have been by way of an anti-climax for steelbands. Government began the year by setting up a committee to assist steelbands in Small Business Year. The Prime Minister made his meet-the-steelbands tour by which he met 62 bands in 67 days! Cabinet agreed to grant \$120,000 for a Steelband Research Council. Desperadoes got a \$20,000 scholarship loan. And there was a dramatic alliance between Black Power and pan.

It is fitting that the November Festival should be a success both financially and otherwise for steelbandmen and we hope the police would look favourably on requests for permission to practise. Both steelbandmen and the country need the psychological boost that would come from a successful Festival which is one of the biggest popular events after Carnival.

Reports of turmoil

No doubt it would be invaluable in helping to defuse some of the tension still in the air. Everything should be done to facilitate the participation of the largest possible number of bands. Conceivably the possibilities for a good Carnival in 1971 could be improved because of the Festival and the atmosphere created by it.

To would-be Carnival visitors made apprehensive by exaggerated reports of turmoil in this country the Steelband Music Festival coming a few months before the national fete will be a more reliable index to the real state of the country. They will see that in spite of everything all has not fallen down.

When the final curtain falls on the November Steelband Music Festival the real winner will be the irrepressible spirit of Trinidadians and Tobagonians.