



Skiffle Bunch during the preliminary round of the Pan Ramajay ten-a-side competition in September this year.

Steelband power base 50,000 people strong

Following is the conclusion of the contribution by Pan Trinbago's Education Officer, Selwyn Tarradath, speaking as a panelist on the topic "Race, Class and Politics in the Steelband Movement," at the seminar "Stratification Patterns in Carnival, Calypso and the Steelband."

The panel discussion was part of the symposium presented by the Institute of Social and Economic Research and the Faculty of Social Sciences, UWI, on Social Stratification in Contemporary Trinidad.

The discussion, held at the conference room of the Central Bank building in Port-of-Spain on December 6, also heard contributions from Professor Gordon Rohlehr, Dr David Trotman, Mrs Ann Lee, and Mrs Molly Ahye.

The first published part of Tarradath's discourse appeared in Friday's edition of the *Trinidad Guardian* while the second appeared yesterday.

ERIC WILLIAMS and the Peoples National Movement swept to power on a wave of nationalism in 1956 supported by the masses. He unashamedly rode the backs of the steelband movement. His big pay back was to force the corporate sector to sponsor steelbands, a move which brought interaction between two disparate sections of the society.

The steelband Movement is a power base, after all it is representative of almost 50,000 people from all walks of society, and more important it is firmly rooted in the various communities which provide an even greater sphere of influence.

Many politicians have used the movement as a springboard to power. Some steelbandmen have become politicians because of their support from the Government.

The Government of the day will always attempt to use the leverage of the steelband movement for political mileage. The movement on the other hand must be politically competent to deal with them.

We have thrown up several personalities who have proven themselves a match for the politician. The two that come most quickly to mind are George Goddard and Arnim Smith. Men who combined street sense and guile to outwit the wily politician at his own game.

Those who have a deeper knowledge of politics would understand the role the steelband movement plays in the delicate balance of power. Even Basdeo Panday would have to realise this, and be prepared to deal with the movement should he seek the position of ultimate power.

The steelband was started by people of African descent. Today all Trinidadians and Toba-

gonians are represented in the movement in an almost proportionate manner.

Indo-Trinidadians have made a sterling contribution to the art form. Jit Samaroo has not only brought the steelband to the remote region of Lopinot, but continues to represent the country with his family group which is the most professional steelband ensemble we can produce.

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Beside Jit we have seen other competent Arrangers such as Steve Achaiba; Bobby and Selwyn Mohammed and Henry 'Bendix' Cumberbatch. Amin and Ainsworth Mohammed besides being top Bank managers are expert steelband administrators. Tunapuna All Stars and Rhythm and Blues of El Dorado have an almost total East Indian membership, and no band in Trinidad is without an East Indian presence.

The Chinese tend to stay with their businesses, but a few have ventured into the field of Sports and Culture. The Steelband Movement has been enriched by such personalities as Ellis and George Ngwai, Aldwyn Chow Lin On, Peter Aleong and Hugh Loy. Not to mention the blind Chinese Second Pan player from Wonderland and more recently Gale Stars.

John Chow is the only Chinese Pan Tuner whom I can think of but there are many Pan players of Chinese descent scattered around the bands.

Anise Hadeed is the most popular Syrian panman, but Jamil Whiby has been arranging from Southern bands for years. There are others playing Pan, but at a lower level of intensity.

All Walks Of Life

The French Creoles have established their presence since the early 50s and continue to support Pan whether as Corporate sponsors, Pan players or supporters in the North Stand.

Many middle class people who were actively involved in the steelband movement during the 50s now occupy high powered positions of employment. Names that readily come to mind are Nicky Inniss of Fernandes; Ronnie Chan of Scotia Bank; Peter Hezekiah of the Government Public Service Division and Hakim Ahmad the Manager of the Port-of-Spain branch of the Co-operative Bank.

Today, the steelband is representative of all walks of life. The composition of Pan Trinbago's Executive is indicative of this. The President is a very senior Public Servant, the Vice-President is a Principal, the Treasurer a qualified Chartered Accountant.

We have two Teachers; an Electrician; an Insurance Executive; a Customs Officer; a News Photographer; two Policemen; two Lab Technicians and an Insurance Agent, most of whom are still active panmen.