

## OUR OPINION

# Creating a new kind of panmen

THERE are only three top class steel pan tuners left in Trinidad. We should all be very concerned about this. The trouble is, however, that we take steelband for granted and Mr. Goddard's periodic attempts to make people aware that the steelband is going through a crisis have not met with any success.

This is not to say, of course, that fewer people are "beating pan." Indeed, the same Mr. Goddard is fond of saying that we can export every steelbandsman we have in Trinidad and Tobago at the moment, and have them replaced in a few months' time. He is right — and were it not for the fact that we have lived with it for so long, we would be continually surprised at the manner in which young Trinidadians so readily take to "pan."

Few of them, however, want to do anything else but beat. Pan tuning is a hard and unglamorous business involving many months of sweat, away from the applause of the crowd. Youth, today, has little time for this, preferring to make their mark in the pan world by their dexterity with their sticks and their ability to memorize the tunes they are called upon to play.

## A note of music

The result is that there are very few cases of youngsters who have gone on from playing pan to studying music. Those that there are were taught their music in their early years and then later opted for the pan rather than the more traditional instruments that their parents would doubtlessly have preferred. But there are not even very many of these, and there are a number of steelbands in this country without a single member who is able to read or write a note of music.

As a result the steelband is facing a grim future. Not enough musicians and three first-class tuners who are forever being tempted to join the pattern by their colleagues and go abroad to the usual better wages and better conditions. Only a few weeks ago, one of the three remaining tuners was asked to go to Montego Bay, Jamaica, for two years. His job — to teach Jamaicans how to tune and play the steelpan.

## Same type of person

Ironically, we need more of the same type of person here. Government's decision to send the West Indian Tobacco Company's Gay Desperadoes on a \$20,000 scholarship to the United States may turn out therefore to be an important starting point. They will be away for eight weeks and when they return it means that we will have 35 steelbandsmen with some knowledge of music.

We do not expect to have Bachs and Beethovens in eight weeks' time — or in this generation. But we welcome the attention which is now being paid to our steelbandsmen and it is money well-spent.