

They can't take pan away from us

PAN IS NOT in danger, according to Port of Spain Mayor Stevenson Sarjeant. Sarjeant made this statement during the commentary session of a debate on the survival of pan in Trinidad and Tobago and of the possibility that foreigners may take the steelband away from this country through their own development of it.

The debate was part of a seminar organised by the Institute of Social and Economic Research of the University of the West Indies' Calypso Research Project which took place at the Port of Spain City Hall auditorium on Monday night. Minister of Sports, Culture and Youth Affairs, Senator Dr Basil Ince and Sarjeant opened the seminar. Ince said the seminar was one of the highlights in the project to establish a national calypso archive.

Monday night's topic was *Calypso and its Relationship to the Steelband* and the topic was led by Louis Regis, author of several books on calypso and drama director at the Pleasantville Senior Comprehensive School.

The main paper of the seminar dealt with how the calypsonian chronicled the whole history of the steelband and the steelband movement through his compositions.

Solicitor Lennox Pierre, a noted patron of the steelband movement, added to this account, saying that it was because the calypsonian regarded the steelbandsman as a fellow traveller in the movement from social contempt to acceptance, that he continually assumed the right to advise, guide, celebrate and criticise the steelbandsman and his steelband.

On this issue, Lord Kitchener was singled out for his continued cel-



Sarjeant



Regis



Pierre

bration of the steelband through his calypsoes. Merchant's *Pan in Danger* was described as the complete calypso for "its lyrics, its technique and its appeal to the cultural nationalism for a people." Stalin was also cited for his ability to see beyond "the glitter of performance and rhetoric" and to see what sponsorship had done to the steelband as a whole.

Ray Holman, composer and arranger, challenged what he called this "nice arrangement" between calypsonian and steelbandsman, by saying that he and his counterpart, Boogie Sharpe, had tried on "numerous occasions" to get front-line calypsonians to sing their compositions (created especially for pan) and had failed.

He referred to the case of Sparrow and Earl Rodney, stating that although the former acknowledged Earl Rodney as the composer of *Steelband Music*, "that was as far as it went."

Both Shortpants and Zhivago counterpointed this by suggesting that perhaps Holman and others like him should try "calypsonians other than those in the front-line." Said Zhivago: "I am not a star and it would be an honour for me to sing a song composed by Bertie Marshall."

The debate moved spontaneously to question this marriage between steelband and

calypso. Lennox Pierre argued that while steelband developed as an instrument to play calypsoes, it did not have to remain within the confines of calypsoes, or, as he termed it, "Steelband does not have to reach its consummation within the confines of calypso or Carnival."

Said Pierre, "What steelband has created is a new family of music, a new orchestra which does not have to find its ultimate development inside of Carnival. In fact, he added, Carnival could retard the development of steelband."

Others argued, however, that the classical tendencies — "the minor and melodic arrangements" — were anti-progressive. It was argued that if pan were standardised and panmen learned to read music and play European music, that pan would lose its indigenous roots. It was also argued that the panmen were already becoming less and less involved in the Carnival celebrations as a whole (as distinct from panorama.)

Sarjeant expanded on the discussion to comment on what he described as the general ambivalence of the Trinidadian to the diffusion of our culture.

He referred to the Trinidadian ambivalence of wanting pan to receive international recognition but yet wanting to keep it to ourselves. "When

the outside world recognises it, we become afraid that they would take it away from us, that we would lose it."

The discussion was resolved with a quote from Stalin: "Steelband is a baby and when it grows up it will decide what clothes it wants to wear."



Boogie Sharpe



Lennox Pierre