

Needed — Social Survey

By Of Steel Bands

ALBERT GOMES

YET another serious social problem seems on the way to being solved. We have come a long way since the days when many members of the community felt that corporal punishment was the only solution for crime and law-breaking. It is not so long ago that many persons were urging stern measures against the steel bands.

Indeed, the opinion was widely held around the Carnival season that the time had come for firm handling of the situation. Even persons who had some sympathy with the "boys" were wavering. They had veered somewhat to the point of view of those who have always held that soft measures would be of no avail. In the face of a really serious situation, the members of the Steel Band Committee acted with wisdom and imagination.

They refused to give in at a time when there was a tendency to dismiss the steel band problem as a hopeless one. If even the truce were broken tomorrow, the committee's achievement would be no less deserving of our gratitude and praise. It required both faith and courage to organise the meetings of rival bands. Without deep understanding of the "boys," success would not have been possible. The achievement should serve as a lesson to all those who fail in similar undertakings merely because they fail to meet the people whom they are seeking to assist on common ground.

The moment there is any suggestion of patronage, the victims of the good intentions shrink into themselves and refuse to react. It was really a pleasure to watch the faces around the camp-fire on that last night of the "get-together" at the Youth Centre at Cocorite.

And what an astonishing feat Mr. Carlisle Kerr made of his role as master of ceremonies. For fully two hours he had to improvise a rapid succession of all forms of entertainment. When supplies were low, he found a dancing partner for the Mayor; and the crowd cheered and shouted as the Mayor and his partner circled the flames. The "get-together" was a success for the simple reason that those who organised it knew what they were about. Too often in this country similar efforts fail even when there is a substantial government vote to assist them.

Without some knowledge of the people, it is not even possible to approach them. The Youth Council provided precisely what the "boys" wanted. There was no danger of creating the impression that the purpose was to reform them. They were made to feel that they were among friends, people who shared their pleasures and understood their desires. The scene in the Magistrate's Court was an interesting aftermath to the previous night's proceedings.

HERE, Mr. Beaumont Celestain showed a sensitive understanding of the problem with which he was confronted. He admonished the "boys" and impressed upon them the gravity of their responsibility now that so many persons had co-operated in an attempt to bring peace among them. Now that all this has been done, however, the committee's work has only just begun. What we need is a social survey of the steel bands scientifically conducted with a view to publication of a report.

There is far too much speculation on the question and a survey of the steel bands therefore the

only proper way of meeting the ever-present threat of ignorance and prejudice. With the assistance of Mr. Mose, the Probation Officer, who has played such an important part in the recent negotiations leading to a truce, this should not be difficult.

The most difficult part of the job has already been done, seeing that any survey would be impossible without the confidence and goodwill of the "boys" themselves. It may be well that the committee should explore the possibility of support from the University College of the West Indies. Perhaps a study of the steel band develop-

relations could risk. If they are to be kept permanently in good relations with each other, some method must be found to provide scope and realisation for their creative impulses. Their weaknesses are those of all artists and performers. Public acclaim is dear to them. Indeed, much of their anti-social behaviour stems from the same sensitive horror of obscurity common to all artists.

Those who saw and heard band-leader Pile and Casablanca at the Grand Stand on Carnival Sunday certainly must have appreciated the time, the effort and the study necessary to the



THE CASABLANCA STEEL BAND, on parade in a city street during the last Carnival. Commentator Gomes wants a social survey made of steel bands.

ment in the West Indies would be regarded as a suitable undertaking for the social science department of the University College.

In Antigua, for example, the steel band movement has made rapid strides in recent years. They appear to be well organised and effectively disciplined. There are steel bands in Barbados and in several of the other islands. Is this a peculiarly West Indian form of music expression?

What are the social and economic factors underlying the movement? Is this form of artistic endeavour confined to persons of a particular class and economic position? Is the orchestration different in the various territories?

ONE great advantage to be gained by such a survey would be the factual data without which any discussion on the subject must perforce be vague and speculative. One suspects that there are deeply rooted emotional problems involved which require much more than a formal truce to resolve. The curious juxtaposition of the urge for self-expression through music and the harsh lineaments of poverty suggest that a permanent solution of this problem of the steel bands is still far off.

What are the prospects of the bands becoming organised? Here it might be possible for the committee to assist considerably in the achievement of what has always seemed an important objective in the struggle.

The ideal would be an organisation of the "boys" themselves with as little interference from outside as their "own delicate performance" which they pre-

sented. An organisation of their own would protect them from possible exploitation by persons eager to present them in public for mere profit. This is something that they bitterly resent, seeing that they need money as much as anyone.

The community should give all support to the committee in the efforts that they are making to solve one of the most exciting problems of the community.

Colonial Statistics

LONDON, (By Air)—It has been said that figures can prove anything. It has now been found that figures can make things too.

That is the conclusion to be drawn from the special meeting of the Royal Statistical Society which was held to discuss Colonial statistics in London on Wednesday, March 22.

The importance of statistics in Colonial affairs has been increasingly recognised since a statistician was appointed to the Colonial Office towards the end of the war. His appointment was followed by the appointment of an expert on demography. The two have now been merged into what has become a sub-Department of the Colonial Office.

The conference has dealt with organisation problems, demography, agricultural statistics, mineral statistics, external trade returns, industrial output, employment and labour statistics, balance of payments and national income calculations, capital formation estimates and the systems of publishing Colonial statistics.—C.N.A.

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