

Copeland: I never sold a single G-Pan

Recipient of T&T's highest award reflects on PP approach to pan, innovation

MICHELLE LOUBON

Three years after receiving the Order of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Attorney General Anand Ramlogan had accused (July 11, 2011) G-Pan inventor Copeland of selling steel pans for personal gain.

Ramlogan even said Government proposed taking legal action against Copeland and three associates for profiting from sales of the G-Pan while such intellectual rights are vested in the Government. Former government minister, Junia Regrello, along with Copeland, were named as a director in the Panadigm Innovation Ltd Company (PIL) which was incorporated to facilitate the commercialisation of the G-Pan.

Interviewed on Friday, Copeland said he felt the real issue arose over ownership of the PHI (Philamornic Harmonic Instrument, formerly the minipan).

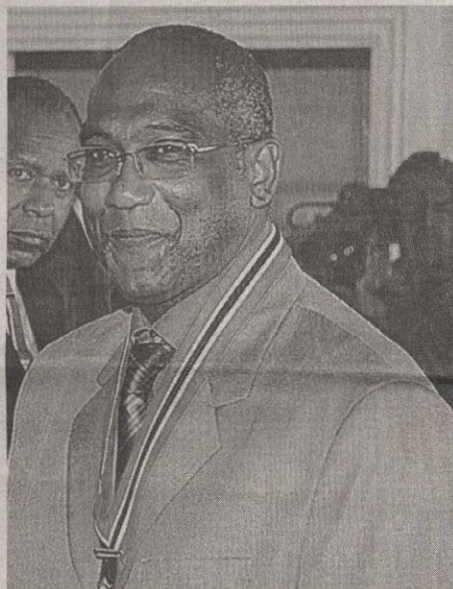
Commenting on the accusation, he said: "I never sold a single G-Pan. When the AG said I was hijacking pans, I said, 'What is happening here?' I was accused of doing that. I handed over the G-Pan. That was the agreement. The ownership of PHI was never the focus of any discussion with respect to government. The way the IT world works you can't commission its ownership."

He maintained government did not commission anything else but the G-Pan.

Copeland added: "It was not the best of times. I went through a lot of cycles. And I had thought the project was ready and we had started to talk about commercialising the G-Pan. You give grants to people who have ideas and you work with them to get those ideas and they accepted it was made. I made the same presentation to Mary King (former planning minister) and it was accepted in terms of that model to give grants."

Funding guidelines

Copeland said when he and government



Brian Copeland

discussed the funding, the idea that resulted was a re-engineered pan which turned out to be the G-Pan. He said his university team received a \$30 million grant. Government had said they would cover the work on the G-Pan as well as the work that was in progress at the St Augustine Campus lab at UWI. They decided to lump the two sets of funding—the robopan, the electrapan and their mini pan which became PHI. The G-Pan was the only pan started in the project. About \$18 million was spent on the G-Pan.

He said the funding for the project stopped in November 2011.

Copeland said that in June of 2010, he conducted some enquiries and found the sales of G-Pans belonged to Government.

"But we had a working relationship. In November they responded and I said it looked as though they don't want me on the project. I have not made a G-Pan or sought to market

it. I have covered all the trademarks and the sad thing was we were preparing to go back for more funding. There were agreements to cover extra activities like filing for patents."

Discussion over ownership rights

He said the G-Pan innovation was not a "road shop."

He said: "It is a serious innovative business. If they wanted ownership I would not have taken their money to do it. If they had said they wanted ownership of the PHI, I would not have gone that way. We would not have taken their money. We went for funding for the lab. It was to get funding for the work we were doing and owning the intellectual property rights."

The four inventors of the PHI were Copeland, Earl Phillip, Marcelle Byron and Keith Maynard.

Copeland said the People's Partnership administration should have held discussions with the UWI innovators concerning the project before initiating legal action.

He said: "I have a suspicion we are going to be poached soon. There should have been discussions. Nobody has ever come to our lab to see what we are doing. We should have had discussions. If they are really interested in the whole project and what it was about they should have held discussions. They should have looked at how it has progressed, where it is and where we are going. The value of the work is being whittled away because of the legal matter. I strongly suspect there is going to be poaching soon."

He said they introduced the idea of intellectual property rights. "What was required was simple and professional discourse."

He felt the government was the agent they could rely upon to have confidence in that level of creativity.

He said: "I don't think it is the right approach if we want to develop a proper inno-

vative climate. We (the UWI team and other stakeholders) were the ones who pushed a way forward for the country to develop. The project was an excellent project for creating a strong and innovative culture for T&T."

He added: "If somebody comes up with an idea, my personal feeling is government should fund those ideas. You vet it and be lenient with them. Let them own it. Then they feel as if they are going somewhere with it. I made that offer to them several times. Ownership of the PHI was not in the discussion. It never came up. They were not interested in it."

5,000 drum factory at Macoya

Copeland said they created a plant at Macoya that was capable of manufacturing excellent drums.

He said: "We have a capacity of 5,000 drums per year at Macoya. The good thing was we were able to reshape the technology this Carnival. We made drums and the money went back to UWI. I have a company but it has not been active. Nobody ever came to see the facility at Macoya. Nobody ever came to see the project. We have a full plant capable of making excellent drums."

He felt governments should be operating for the good of the country.

"What we have is one of the best run project. There was no underhand thing. They have checked the account. I took no excesses. I paid myself bottom dollar. In the end there were at least two major changes to the pan industry. We have shown them what was possible. The G-Pan and the PHI."

Still patting himself on the back, Copeland said: "They took a snippet of the PHI playing the intro. It was used in the Nicki Minaj video. We were doing something right. We were the only ones who kept the research and innovation for 20 years."

Copeland said he also felt it was a test case over intellectual property rights and the relationship between government and UWI.