

OUR OPINION

Congratulations, Phase II

THERE was a time when newspapers used to feel obliged to call on the population to have a "clean" Carnival, meaning a Carnival without the stain of violence. That is hardly required these days, and the fact that it is not must say something about the way the society has matured in matters of this kind. In fact, to date there has not been a single major incident in any of the crowded Carnival fetes, which is an improvement on last year when there were a couple of fatalities.

It seems that people are happy to keep their disputes in the realm of words and there have been plenty of those, beginning with the results of Saturday's Panorama competition which was won by Phase II Pan Groove who became only the second Woodbrook band in 25 years to win a "Panorama."

When Phase II were beaten into second place by Catelli Trinidad All Stars last year, people argued that the Woodbrook band should have won, but now that the band has won people are arguing that the prize should have gone either to Pandemonium or All Stars.

That proves either that people can be very perverse or that the judging of steelband competitions is a difficult task, particularly when the audience considers itself as expert as Saturday's Savannah audience did.

Whatever the individual views, however, we would like to offer our sincerest congratulations to Phase II, an unsponsored outfit that has reached the top through their own efforts and the ability of arranger Len "Boogsie" Sharpe.

Sharpe became the first man in steelband history to win the Panorama competition with his own composition rather than one

composed by a calypsonian. A few steelbands went into the competition with original compositions this year and we expect that one of the results of Phase II's victory is that more steelband arrangers would be encouraged to compose their own melodies.

The traditionalists will find fault with this development but they should consider that in the end the pool of local music will be widened and that future generations will have a greater variety from which to draw.

Phase II is also the first unsponsored band to win a Panorama, which puts the lie to the long-held theory that no unsponsored steelband could ever win a Panorama. Behind this theory has been the view that companies are all-powerful in Trinidad and Tobago and that the Carnival Development Committee, afraid of incurring the wrath of the business community, would never have the courage to "crown" an unsponsored band.

What is incredible is that such patent nonsense could have continued to prevail in people's minds for so long. We hope that Phase II's victory will help to end the suspicion of legitimate business activity that exists in Trinidad and Tobago and that, instead, people will understand that were it not for the continued support of businessmen, Carnival, as we know it, would collapse.

The truth is that local businessmen are Trinidadians like everybody else who grew up with a love and enthusiasm for the festival. Today, as we all have a good time on the streets, let us feel goodwill towards both the public and private institutions, and all those who have been responsible for Carnival remaining within the reach of even the least privileged among us.