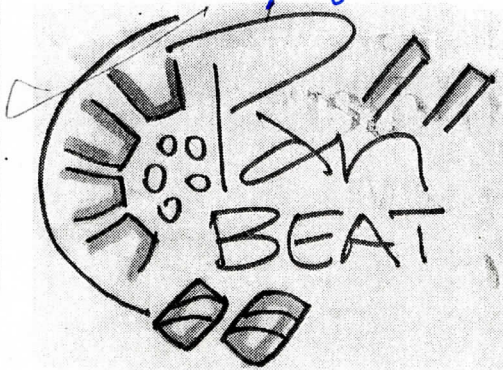


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Preying on steelband movement

Continuation of an article on the steelband movement by SELWYN TARRADATH, Education officer of Pan Trinbago. The first part was carried in yesterday's paper.

WE realise that the movement has outgrown its practitioners in many areas, and that we have a serious deficiency where management and administration are concerned that can only be properly addressed by attracting high powered personnel from among the intelligentsia particularly, and the public at large, generally.

Experience has taught us that many of these people have their own agenda, which is to become part of the body politic without ever reaching into the bowels of the movement. The people we wish to attract to become our consultants, managers and marketing experts must be willing to immerse themselves in every activity of the steelband (not necessarily by direct participation) in order to fully comprehend the psyche of the panman who he is representing.

We do not need the big boys who only attend the quarterly board meetings and then gallery themselves fully at Panorama time, even to the extent of pulling the first pan rack across the stage in a band T-shirt, only to disappear from sight after the band performs. There are many people out there who feel that they have all the answers to the problems that beset the steelband movement, and continue to disrespect our hard-earned knowledge and experience.

After Mr Best had made his initial contribution I was forced to make a response. I stated that I did not agree with some of his analyses and positions. I further stated that we had become accustomed to people intellectualising and pontificating to us without being in a position to do so. I also made a strong statement that one must put one's foot in the water before getting it wet.

My response was really an emotional one to hypotheses and projections made by Mr Best as statements of fact which I thought he was in no position to make. The immediate response by a call-in listener was one of utter consternation. How could this upstart panman dare challenge his guru Lloyd Best? The fact that Mr Best himself decided to play down the issue by saying that he did not see me as disagreeing with him held no water.

The listener eventually called back to say that if I believed that the steelband movement was 30 years behind, that the reason was self evident, meaning, as I see it, that people like me should shut up and allow people like Lloyd Best to form opinions and dictate policy on the steelband movement. I might have been a bit harsh on Mr Best but that is my style, and I am the first to admit that sometimes I become too sentimental and emotional about the steelband to objectively debate. I prefer to write.

However, Mr Best was not apparently taken aback by my challenge to his authority. Nevertheless, he adopted a more cautious approach throughout the debate and actually fed off of what Owen Serrette, (president of Pan Trinbago) and myself were saying before making his observations.

In his opening statement Best had totally condemned the present education system by unequivocally stating that it was utter rubbish, a waste of time and producing only failures.

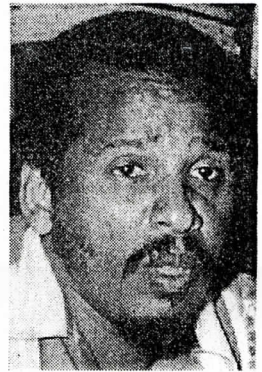
These are the same sentiments that Morgan Job espouses. My first reaction to this as a teacher of 30 years was why don't they keep their children at home and teach them? I found this position to be totally unfair to the 6,000 or so teachers who work within the system and generally do a wonderful job.

It is also unfair to my family. As I pointed out, I grew up in the tradition of teaching. Both my parents were primary school administrators and my grandfather, Charles Mc Donald Bailey, was a very popular headmaster who laboured long with much success and little reward to produce people like Mr Best. I had to defend their integrity and intelligence against such an unwarranted attack. Having grown up literally in school and having seen the changes in the system from colonial times to now, I must agree that there are areas with which I am not satisfied as a practitioner, parent and taxpayer.

The problem is not so much with the system as it is with its implementation. The teaching service is not in a mess. It is the Ministry of Education that is messed up. Perhaps there are those who dispute the vision of the late Eric Williams and would prefer that our system be selective, thus once more denying access to secondary education for the majority of the children of the proletariat.

How has Mr Best come to this drastic conclusion? Has he taught at the primary level, the junior secondary level or even the secondary level? Can someone who has operated entirely at the tertiary level speak for all teachers? Did he consult us, the practitioners or TTUTA or even Ministry of Education officials, or is it a unilateral declaration that we must accept because Lloyd Best and Morgan Job say so?

Has he analysed other educational systems and compared them with ours? If all the products of the system are failures then it follows that we are a nation of fools. Does Mr Best consider himself a product of the system? Did he consult members of the steelband movement when he offered the pan-yards as the only alternatives to the present education system? Does Mr Best really understand the steelband movement enough to arrogate such a responsibility to us? My answer is no!



SELWYN TARRADATH

Continued tomorrow