

Marley, Miller and Bishop

Sometimes our sense of superiority might be totally misplaced. My second-best example is a story from my youth. Some of my friends worked in Sam's Garage learning 'trade'. Sam was their mentor and master and they lived by the Gospel of Sam. When he called a spade a spade none of them dared to say it was a shovel or even a gardening implement. I was not surprised to find a similar situation in the best-selling series set in Botswana 'The Number One Ladies Detective Agency'.

Anyhow, Mr. Maharaj who traded in cocoa and coffee had a serious problem with his car and went by Sam for succor. The boys were there gathered around Sam to snatch any crumbs of knowledge that Sam offered. Mr. Maharaj ventured an opinion for his problem. 'Is the catta-plane,' he suggested. Immediately everybody hooted, rolled around on the floor, and make Mr. Maharaj the laughing stock of Siparia. 'Is not 'cattah-plane' is 'cattah pin!' they shouted. From then on whenever Mr. Maharaj passed in his car everybody shouted at him, 'Cattahplane, look the cattahplane.'

It took me an extremely long time before I checked on the word and found out it was 'cotter-pin'. A cotter-pin is a split pin or a pin with two tines that are bent at the time of installation so that it is similar to a rivet or a staple except it is looser. Since I was one of Mr. Maharaj's tormentors in both volume and frequency I felt like a total jackass, and because Mr. Maharaj had already died there was no way to expiate that particular piece of arrant stupidity. I knew my friends too well to believe they had any idea about what they were talking about and I took their ignorance for scripture.

I was taking in the Senate debate last Tuesday when Communications Minister, Gerry Hadeed, attributed the phrase 'Forward ever, backward never' to the late Bob Marley. Immediately after he spoke, the PNM speaker, Diane Baldeo-Chadeesingh sought to be consistent with what she professed would be her role in the Senate. When she was appointed in December last year she said that she planned to keep the Government in check and she did a fact check on Hadeed. She made a hue, cry, song and dance about who first used the term 'Forward ever, backward never' and attributed it to Maurice Bishop, former Grenada Prime Minister. She took a great deal of delight in humiliating Hadeed and smiled triumphantly when she figured that she had staged her own bloodless coup. Thereby hangs the best example I have of misplaced superiority.

I went online feeling that something was not altogether correct and that I had heard the phrase before Bishop took it as his rallying cry. I figured he might have made it famous but it was not originally his.

So I checked first on Marley and found that the song, 'Forward ever, backward never' was composed and sung by Jacob Miller, cousin of Maxie Priest, a reggae artiste who first sang it before 1977 and then it became popular, possibly at the One Love Concert with Marley, Peter Tosh and Dennis Brown - all reggae legends. Miller died in a car accident in 1980. Bishop, who had close Jamaican connections, seized power from Gairy on March 15, 1979. I am convinced that 'Forward Ever, Backward Never' started with Miller. The moral of this story is that sometimes in trying to appear too erudite, you end being merely rude. This is the cattahplane all over again.