

When scrap turns precious metal!

If some irate Jamaicans decide tomorrow that they want to mount a street protest to demand justice, decry injustice or just disrupt traffic for the hell of it, where dem going to find the critical 'road-blocking' raw materials? I wonder.

Look here nuh peeps, unwanted fridge carcasses and bicycle skeletons are a thing of the past. Old car chassis, ancient oil drums, rusty kerosene and paint pan, and discarded barbed wire, are fast becoming extinct objects. Yeah man; a once harmless creature called the scrap-metal trade has evolved into an ugly thing, monstrous and gigantic, and now everything metallic is suddenly a prized target. When last you see a piece of old metal lying carelessly about the place? Old iron, aluminium, copper, steel, zinc, lead, brass and bronze are now very valuable, and every piece of discarded old iron is being treated as precious metal. In fact, if you wear braces or have metal filling in your dental work you better keep your mouth shut before pickpocket raid yuh oral cavities. But how did this thing get so out of control? Great works of art, valuable sculptures and statuettes are being hijacked. Historical artefacts like cannons from the colonial period are being stolen, pipelines and telephone cables are being ripped from their places, and heartless thieves trying to cash in on what is now an obviously lucrative trade in scrap metal are removing train lines. Even dead people can no longer rest in peace, because graves are being desecrated as the vultures go in search of the metallic parts on coffins and caskets, and any pieces of jewellery buried with the deceased! Creative reuse Our facility for inventive recycling and creative reuse of what could be dismissed as garbage is part of what makes Caribbean people so unique. I love to remind people that a Trinidadian found a discarded oil drum (scrap metal), and cut off the top, beat grooves to create different sounds, and created the steel pan -- the only musical instrument invented in the 20th century. Of course, a Jamaican found a similar drum, but he cut it lengthwise and jerked chicken. So it's thanks to the innovative use of scrap metal that we have steel pan music and jerk chicken, which are two distinct features of Caribbean life. And the trade in scrap metal has been around for ages. From as far back as I can remember there was always somebody travelling around the city collecting discarded scrap metal for reuse and/or recycling. I had a next-door neighbour named Mr Roy, in my Trench Town days, who used to collect old metal, which he used to melt and remould as pots. Greed The problem these days is that need (or greed) is greater, decency is rarer, and scruples are scarce. And every field of endeavour or means of livelihood that looks like it doesn't necessarily require knowledge, training or regulations becomes attractive to the desperate and dishonest seekers of a fast buck. So suddenly every idler and his finger-faring cousin, if they're not into cash for gold business they are now scrap-metal collector/trader. And dem people deh hungry. So dem nuh have time fi seek out unwanted, thrown-out metal that we call scrap. Dem just confiscate anything looking metallic and scrap it! Now with the way Trinidad tends to follow Jamaica with certain things, imagine what woulda happen to all dem steel bands if the scrap-metal madness bruck out over there? box-mi-back@hotmail.com with Blakka Ellis