

Song hailing Seaga proved popular

BY HOWARD CAMPBELL
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GLADSTON Taylor's best days as a singer seemed long gone in 1978 when he and the Fabulous Five band recorded a song that would become his signature.

That mento number, *Papa Eddie* (Our Leader), was released two years later as the Opposition Jamaica Labour Party's (JLP's) official campaign song for the October 30 general election.

For Taylor, popularly known as Singer Man, Seaga's message of 'deliverance' from the socialist policies of then Prime Minister Michael Manley seemed appropriate.

He told the *Jamaica Observer* that even in the tense political climate, he was not afraid of being tagged as a political hack.

"I wasn't scared. I saw it as sending a strong message to John Public that he (Seaga) was the right man for the job," said the 68-year-old Taylor.

Unlike the 1972 and 1976 elections, when musicians openly supported Manley and his People's National Party (PNP), the party had no official theme song for the 1980 campaign.

In fact, the challenging economic conditions inspired hard-hitting songs like Bunny Wailer's *Crucial*, which gave the singer his first number one hit in Jamaica as a solo act.

Other songs that resonated during the period dealt mainly with the political violence that resulted in over 800 deaths prior to election day. *Peace Treaty* by Jacob Miller and George Nooks' *Tribal War* were two of the many anti-violence songs that called on gangs in the Kingston ghettos to throw down their arms.

Ironically, most of Jamaica's musicians threw their weight behind Manley in the 1972 election. Singer/producer Clancy Eccles assembled a massive musical bandwagon that accompanied the PNP on its islandwide campaign, helping them to a landslide victory over the JLP in February that year.

Four years later, Manley's radical grass roots programmes were still hailed by the 'small man'. Among them was Neville 'Struggle' Martin, a singer from St James whose song *My Leader Born Ya* (*The Message*), produced by Eccles, helped give the PNP another massive win.

In 1980, the tide had changed and the JLP sensed a return to power under the conservative Seaga, a former music producer.

During the early 1960s, when Seaga was leaving the music business for a career in politics, St Ann-born Taylor was trying to break into it as a member of the Alpines, a group that recorded for producer Arthur 'Duke' Reid.

Their best-known song for Reid was *Children Of Today*. Taylor said they also recorded for other top producers such as Prince Buster and Leslie Kong, but had little success.

In the summer of 1978, as Jamaica's economy wilted, he recorded *Papa Eddie*, which was produced by Junior Gray and distributed by Dynamic Sounds, the company owned by bandleader Byron Lee, a close friend of Seaga's.

Taylor recalls that 500 copies of the song were released in time for the 1980 election. "It tek off. The people did love it," he said.

Taylor has been employed as a security guard at the JLP's Belmont Road headquarters for over 20 years. His last song, *Bell Rock*, was part of their campaign for the December 29, 2011 general election.