

Former Prime Minister, The Most Hon. Edward Seaga has used my statement about the PNP being a democratic socialist party and the PNP's need to figure out how we give expression to that ideology within the context of our current economic and political reality, to launch his version of history. There are many persons who do not share Mr. Seaga's memory of the history of Jamaica in the 1970s.

I was born in 1972 and was therefore much too young to fully understand and appreciate all the developments affecting the country during that period first hand. While I am a student of political history and have a perspective on the 1970s, it is not my intention to respond on a point by point basis to Mr. Seaga.

Mr. Seaga has failed to mention the international context of the 1970s; a period of great ideological upheaval in the world as many nations who had gained independence in the previous 10 – 20 years were finding their place in the world and in which large nations sought to exercise hegemonic power, resulting in many proxy struggles in countries like ours.

Jamaica was at the forefront of the search for 'space' for smaller and weaker countries who had no role in determining the structures of international affairs, in its championing of a "New International Economic Order." Some countries which had for a very long time been accustomed to directing countries like ours were intent on keeping people like us in our place – in the words of the late Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, Eric Williams, "the hewers of wood and the carriers of water."

Much of the respect which Jamaica enjoys internationally today is as a result of its role, under the leadership of Michael Manley during the 1970s. In fact, many of the agreements which the Government entered into with countries such as Cuba and Venezuela, which were criticized at the time, have been adopted, endorsed and continued by JLP Administrations and have brought significant benefits to the Jamaican people.

While there were high levels of GDP growth in the 1960's, the vast majority of the Jamaican people felt excluded from that growth and turned to the PNP in 1972 to give expression to their hopes and aspirations. We will not pretend that mistakes were not made. The undisputed fact however is that many Jamaicans (especially those from the lower social and economic strata and those of darker pigmentation) who prior to the 1970s were denied social and economic advancement, had doors and opportunities opened for them because of the 1970s. Historians will in time pronounce fully on that period.

A trend in many democratic countries is to have parties with a 'left' leaning. These parties are grouped under the broad umbrella of Social Democracy. There are many social democratic parties the world over, for example the Labour Party in the UK, the Australian Labour Party, the Barbados Labour Party, the Social Democratic Party of Germany, the Social Democratic Party of Japan, the Socialist Party in Spain, the African National Congress in South Africa and the People's National Party in Jamaica among others. The term Social Democratic is used by some, while others use the term Democratic Socialist and some even use the term Labour (but note that the Jamaica Labour Party is not numbered among the International Social Democratic Parties).

The second objective of the People's National Party as listed in our current Constitution is ***"To work for and promote the political, economic, social and cultural progress of the country as a whole in accordance with the fundamental aims of the Party to build a Jamaica based on the principles of Democratic Socialism"***

All political parties need to reinterpret their raison d'être from time to time. While a party is grounded in a philosophy/ideology, the appropriate expressions of that philosophy/ideology must evolve as the circumstances and the environment changes. That is the context within which I made my comments.

As a political movement, the People's National Party has always demonstrated its willingness to engage in introspection, review and analyses to determine that its policies and programs are appropriate for the time. In the 1980's, after extensive internal debate and an analysis of the period of the 1970's, the document called "The Compass" was developed. In the early 2000's, the 21st Century Document was done and more recently the Progressive Agenda.

Coming out of the 1970s, the Party accepted that the State could no longer control the "commanding heights" of the economy and that private sector led growth with appropriate State intervention was the method to be used to facilitate economic growth. That cannot be reversed.

We also recognise that economic growth is critical to delivering the much needed social services.

One of the recommendations coming out of the 2016 Appraisal Committee's work is that the Party needs to reaffirm what it stands for. This is critical as party members must be able to clearly articulate this vision and convince the population to invest their hopes and aspirations in the PNP and to trust us with the awesome responsibility of handling state power.

That process has already commenced within the Party and will continue in the weeks and months to come. We will engage all our stakeholders including the public.

While our methods may change over time, our mission and vision as articulated in these ideals, remains the same.

It is the ideals of social equity, equality of opportunity and the building of an egalitarian society that are fundamental, and not the label under which these ideals are given expression.