



**THE BIRTH of
NATIONALIST
MOVEMENT in Belize**

Objectives

What is Nationalism?

na·tion·al·ism

/ˈnæʃ(ə)nəlɪzəm/

noun

noun: **nationalism**

patriotic feeling, principles, or efforts.

synonyms: patriotism, patriotic sentiment, **flag-waving**, **xenophobia**, **chauvinism**, **jingoism**

"their extreme nationalism was frightening"

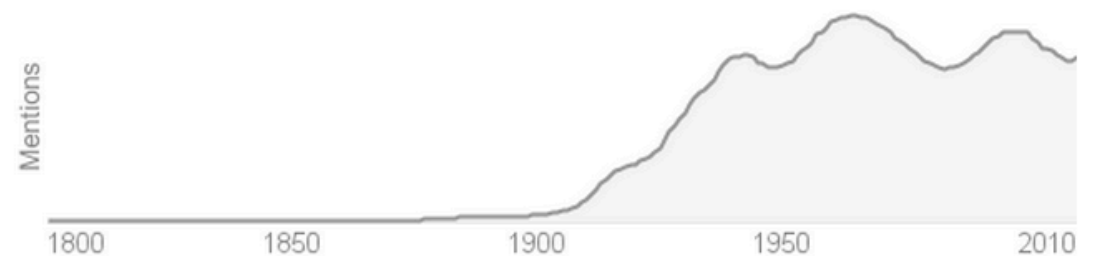
- an extreme form of this, especially marked by a feeling of superiority over other countries.

plural noun: **nationalisms**

- advocacy of political independence for a particular country.

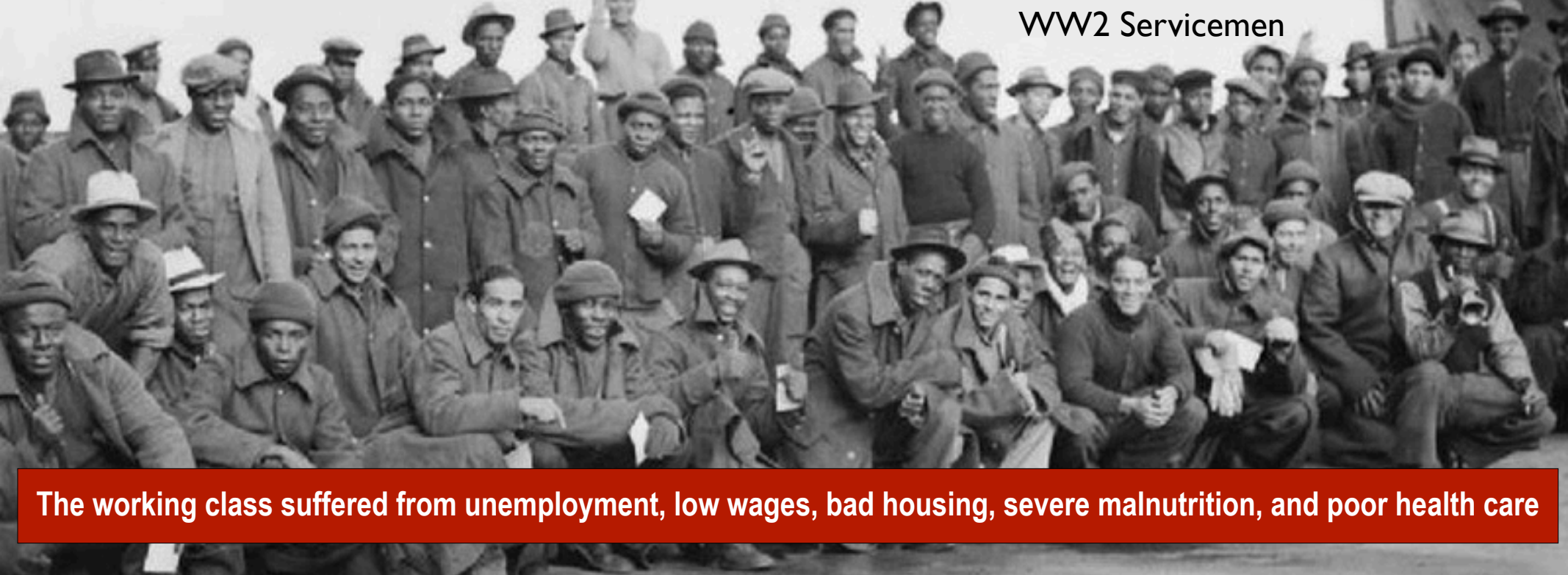
Translate nationalism to

Use over time for: nationalism



Birth of the Nationalist Movement

1. ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS (Before and After World War 2)
2. CAMPAIGN AGAINST COLONIALISM (Power of the Governor – ‘Reserve Powers’)
3. ALLIANCE WITH WORKERS (PUP + GWU)
4. CONSTITUTIONAL STRUGGLE
5. POLITICAL STRUGGLE (People’s Committee and the Formation of the People’s United Party (PUP))



The working class suffered from unemployment, low wages, bad housing, severe malnutrition, and poor health care

The struggle of the workers led by Antonio Soberanis played an important part in the birth of the nationalist movement in Belize. People began to question what colonialism had done for Belize. They began to wonder why a country with so many resources, with such wealthy landowners and merchants, had so many poor people. The poor economic and social conditions in the 1950's also helped them begin to think about self-government and independence.

Economic and Social Conditions

During the 1930's and 1940's the economy was still based on forestry, but this industry was declining continuously. During World War II (1939-1945) the industry had revived for a while. Unemployment had also been eased because thousands of workers emigrated to Britain for forestry jobs, to Panama to work in building the Canal and to the southern United States to work in agricultural estates. But after the war they came home to unemployment and poverty.

A local legislator stated in 1949 that "the privations suffered during the Depression were but bagatelles compared to the sufferings the people are undergoing now." He warned that people might be forced by their misery and hunger to resort to crime and rioting.

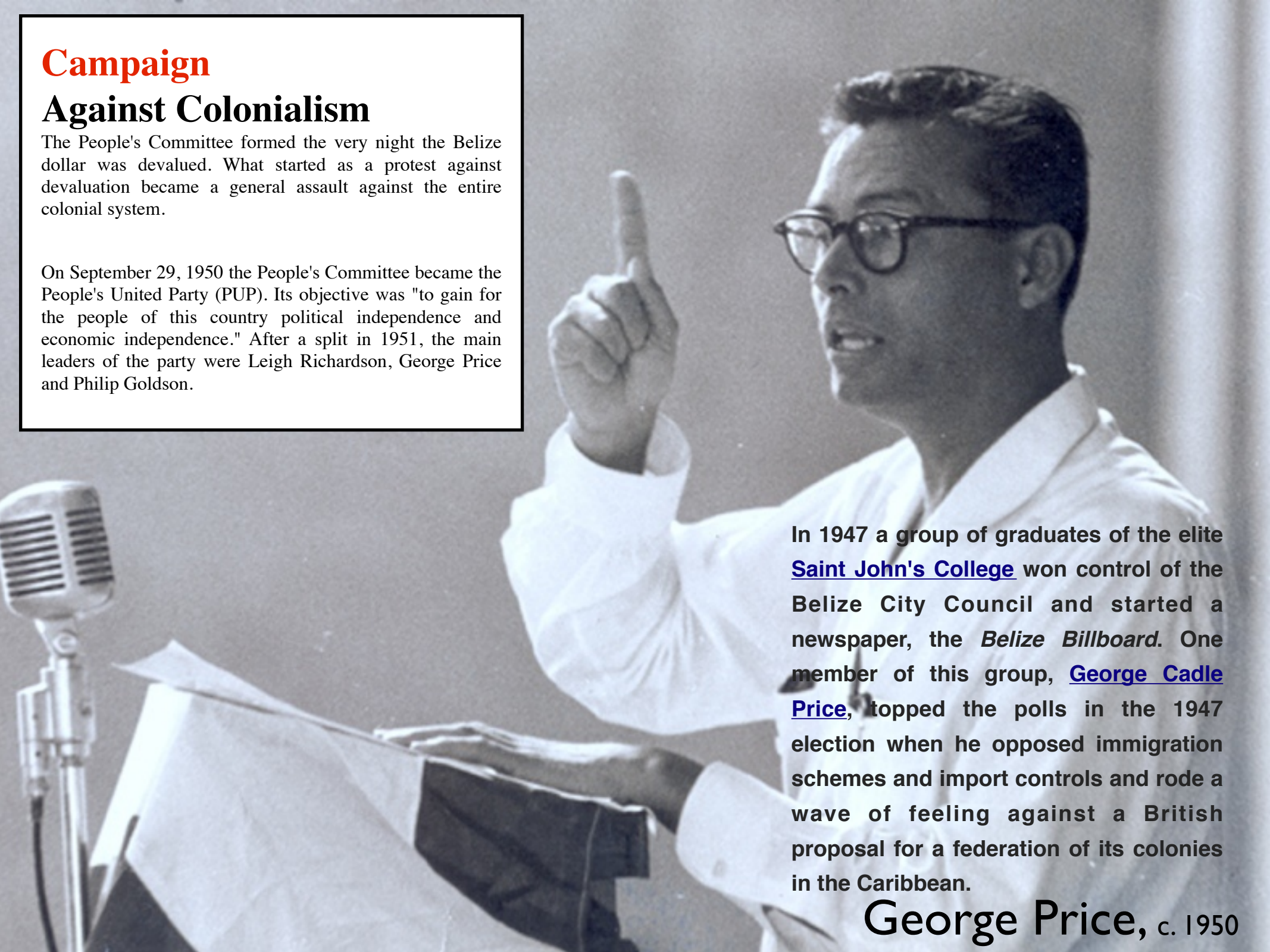
The **devaluation** of the Belize dollar, on December 31, 1949, resulted in the immediate worsening of the workers' situation.

Campaign

Against Colonialism

The People's Committee formed the very night the Belize dollar was devalued. What started as a protest against devaluation became a general assault against the entire colonial system.

On September 29, 1950 the People's Committee became the People's United Party (PUP). Its objective was "to gain for the people of this country political independence and economic independence." After a split in 1951, the main leaders of the party were Leigh Richardson, George Price and Philip Goldson.



In 1947 a group of graduates of the elite [Saint John's College](#) won control of the Belize City Council and started a newspaper, the *Belize Billboard*. One member of this group, [George Cadle Price](#), topped the polls in the 1947 election when he opposed immigration schemes and import controls and rode a wave of feeling against a British proposal for a federation of its colonies in the Caribbean.

George Price, c. 1950

1st POLITICAL TASK

One of the first political tasks set by these leaders was to create a national unity out of the **divisions** created by colonialism. They travelled throughout the country calling on the people to unite and fight for their rights and for a say in running their country. They educated the people about the problems of colonialism. They explained how poverty and misery were caused by the system of exploitation, and the special role the B.E.C. played in this process.

These young leaders were not only concerned with raising the living standards of the people, but they were also determined

to make a complete break with the colonial past.

In a memorial to the King from the People's Committee in February 1950, they declared that the social evils under which Belizeans were suffering:

What were some of the divisions created by colonialism? What are some divisions we have today?

NATIONAL UNITY

"are caused by colonial exploitation that takes abroad the wealth of the country and leaves it impoverished and destitute. There is in us a growing and determined aspiration to eventual self-government."

Alliance with Workers

From the time of the People's Committee, a strong alliance was formed with the working class movement. The working class was represented by the General Workers Union (GWU). By 1951, the leaders of the PUP and the GWU were almost the same.

In October 1952 they called a national strike to protest against the economic conditions which had steadily worsened since devaluation. Even occasional rises in wages made little difference because prices kept increasing. **The B.E.C. was a major target of the strike, but government workers went on strike too, as well as workers of the United Fruit Company and several other companies.** The strike was called off after ten days when the government and the other companies - except the B.E.C. - agreed to negotiate with the union for better wages and working conditions.

The B.E.C. held out for 49 days and stopped the strike by using scab labour protected by police. In spite of this, the leaders felt that the strike was a success. It had shown that working class solidarity gave the workers power and won them benefits. This established the PUP in the public mind as a party for working people. **The membership in the GWU increased quickly to over 8,000.**

DRINK PLANTER'S PUNCH! A Native Product
At All Clubs, Bars, & Liquor Stores

346 SUNDAY OCTOBER 1st, 1950

 **The Belize Billboard**
Largest B. H. Circulation
(Established 1946)

People's Committee Dissolved
People's United Party Formed

TRANSFERRED to the Thistle Hall because of reports to the Battlefield, the People's Committee meeting Friday night marked the end of the People's Committee and the formation of a properly constituted political party called The People's United Party.

The constitution of the new party as summarized by Philip Galleon who presented it to an overflow audience is:

Members may be either registered voters, persons at least 18 years old with three years residence in British Honduras or Hondurans abroad.

To join, a person must apply on the official form to his district executive committee. When an applicant is admitted, he must sign a pledge of loyalty to the Party, witnessed by two members.

Entrance fee is 50 cents, yearly subscription \$1.00.

The party will be governed at various levels by district executive committees controlled by a central executive council which will be under the supreme authority of a convention of delegates appointed by members throughout the country.

Municipal candidates will be selected by district conventions, national candidates will be chosen by the convention of delegates from among persons proposed by the various district conventions.

Friday night, the Hon. Johnny Smith became the first member of the Party when he publicly took the Pledge at Thistle Hall. He was followed by Messrs. George Price, Leigh Richardson, Cammy Gabb, Henry A. Middleton, Philip Galleon, and a few other members and supporters of the People's Committee.

The audience was told that Application forms may be obtained from The People's United Party Office, Church Street.

MAJESTIC

Sunday Matinee 5.30 Pursued
Sunday 8.30 Always In My Heart
Monday 8.30 The Wicked Lady
Tuesday Matinee 5.30 The Cowboy & The Sheriff
Tuesday 8.30 Easter Parade & Boston Blackie Booked On
Wednesday 8.30 Last Hall of Suspicion
Serial! Jungle Queen
Thursday 8.30 Pursued

PALACE

Sunday Matinee 5.30 That Wonderful Urge
Sun. & Mon. 8.30 They Passed This Way
Tuesday 8.30 National Velvet & The Hidden Hand
Wednesday Matinee 5.30 Badmen Of Missouri
Wednesday 8.30 The Glass Alibi
Thursday 8.30 That Wonderful Urge & Tuya En Cuerpo y Alma

We Have A 29 Cent Dollar - Richardson

THE fact that in this year of Our Lord this city cannot produce much more revenue than \$100,000 is a disgrace. It means the people own nothing, they have nothing worth taking. They themselves are battling.

"This is so, because in terms of the 1939 dollar, your dollar today is worth 29.34 cents. Belize, nothing more than 29.34 cents. And you're lucky. If you live in a place like Gallon Jug, or El Cayo or Monkey River, it must be worth between 22 and 25 cents and not a scrap more." Leigh Richardson began his description of the general economic and political conditions of

Continued on page 2

Parties Good, Necessary - Price

"A powerful political party would be not only a good thing but a very necessary thing. Tonight the People's Committee will present to you the constitution of a new party and will invite all citizens of this country who love their country, to join the People's United Party and to work for the betterment of conditions. If you receive this constitution with interest and enthusiasm, if you enroll in the thousands, if the majority of the people constitute the People's United Party, then we are on the right road to political and economic advancement and we shall not only win municipal and

Continued on page 12



The Constitutional Struggle

Although the PUP emphasized change in the economic conditions, their main effort was to challenge the colonial political system. They demanded political power for the people, and this required constitutional change. **First the people had to be given the right to vote.**

In the fight for universal adult suffrage, the right for all adults to vote, the nationalist leaders tried to change people's attitudes. Many people, especially those from the middle class, argued that the colony was too underdeveloped, its people too backward and illiterate, to have the right to vote. Instead they suggested three options: a literacy test; a system of indirect voting by the districts outside of Belize City; **and reserve powers for the governor.**

In a report on constitutional change published in 1951, the middle class praised what they called the tradition of "British Institutions, British laws, and those high principles of fair play, freedom and justice which are characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon." They argued that the colonial system had created a fair administration, under which every resident could "retain for his own use the fruit of his labours." Most workers, however, did not agree.

DEVELOPMENT

"But those who argue that social, economic and educational development must take place first, before political independence, are putting the cart before the horse. On the contrary, political independence is the first essential step forward, in order that a government may be established, representative of the people and not subservient to the exploiting monopolist interest. Only then does the possibility exist to utilize the resources of the country for independent social and economic development, instead of for tribute to absentee shareholders."

Leigh Richardson 1952



Leigh Richardson and Philip Goldson are received as heroes after their release from prison in August, 1952.

The PUP attacked the recommendations made in the report. The argument that the country must be developed before colonialism could be abolished ignored the important fact that colonialism was the cause of underdevelopment. In order for the country to develop, its people had to be free. There were some people in Belize who felt threatened by any changes from the colonial system. These were the "loyalists". They comprised mostly those who benefitted from the colonial system - traders, civil servants, and some professionals. They were the "middle class" who felt their opposition to the nationalist movement was their patriotic duty.

The PUP, with the strong support of the people, won universal adult suffrage in 1954. In elections held that year it won eight of the nine elected seats and 67 per cent of the vote. In the following years, Belizeans went on to win increased participation through new constitutions. In 1964, ten years after adult suffrage, Belizeans gained self-government.

British Honduras general election, 1954

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

General elections were held in **British Honduras** on 28 April 1954, the first held under **universal suffrage**.^[1] The new constitution replaced the Legislative Council with a Legislative Assembly, which had nine elected members, three officials and three appointed members.^[1] The result was a decisive victory for the pro-independence **People's United Party**, which won eight of the nine seats in a coalition with the **General Workers' Union**.

The pro-colonial **National Party** won the remaining seat, with NP candidate **Charles Westby** prevailing in the **Toledo** constituency.^[2]

Election results [edit]

e · d **Summary of the 28 April 1954 British Honduras Legislative Assembly election results**

Parties	Votes	%	Seats
People's United Party	9,461	65.04	8
National Party	3,342	22.98	1
Independents	1,743	11.98	-
Total	14,546	100.00	9

References [edit]

- ↑ ^{*a b*} Nohlen, D (2005) *Elections in the Americas: A data handbook, Volume I*, p100 ISBN 978-0-19-928357-6
- ↑ General Elections 1954 , Belize Elections and Boundaries Commission. (accessed 19 November 2014)

British Honduras general election, 1954



28 April 1954

→ 1957

All 9 seats in the **British Honduras Legislative Assembly**

First party

Second party

PUP

NP

Leader	Leigh Richardson (acting)	W. H. Courtenay
Party	PUP	NP
Alliance	PUP-GWU	
Leader since	1953	1951
Leader's seat	candidate in Belize West	(not a candidate)
Seats won	8	1
Popular vote	9,461	3,342
Percentage	65.04%	22.98%
Majority party leader before election		Elected Majority party leader
N/A		Leigh Richardson PUP

50 Years of Universal Adult Suffrage

CHANNEL 7 NEWS/ BELIZE posted (April 28, 2004)

Universal adult suffrage: it's a hard won right but one that we take for granted in a country where democracy is firmly in place.

It might be hard for most of us to appreciate but 50 years ago today was the first time that all Belizeans were able to go to the polls and vote. The 50th or jubilee anniversary of Belize's universal adult suffrage was celebrated today. There was a party at the city center and 7NEWS was there.

The symbolic "run for democracy" ended this morning with much pomp and circumstance. A city center packed with school kids watched as these torches were passed to three of the men who started it all. 50 years ago George Flowers, Enrique Depaz, and George Price were there when Belize gained universal adult suffrage. For Price, the memory is vivid.

Rt. Hon. George Price, Former Prime Minister

"Well the people thanks to them for standing up and supporting us in our struggle for adult suffrage and we got it."

Keith Swift,

"Do you remember way back in the days when everyone couldn't vote?"

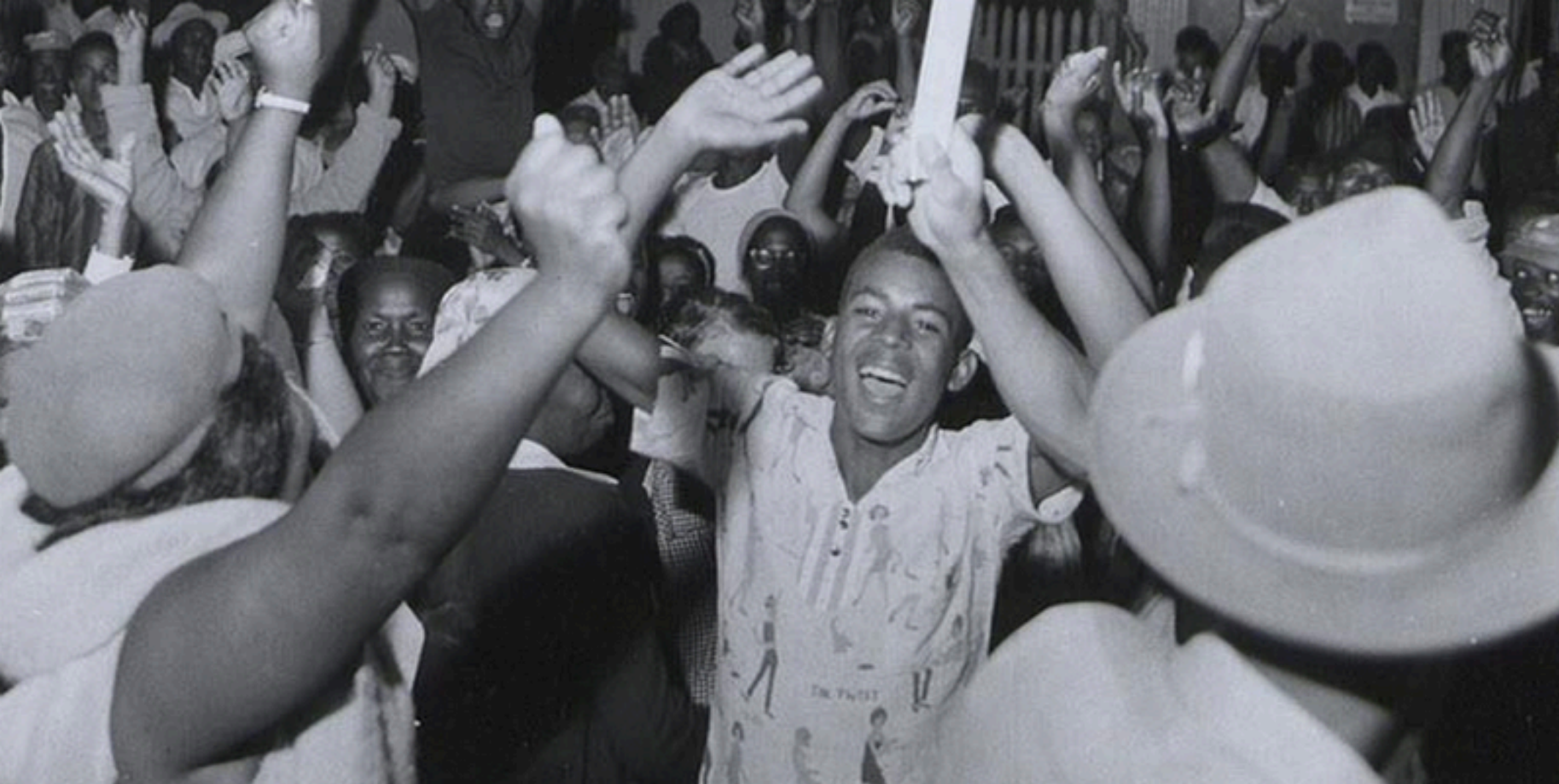
George Price,

"Oh yes I do remember. You had to have a job of \$300 a year and owning property of \$500 or more and very few had that in relation to the population. But it was small in those days, it was a big struggle."



George Price at Public Meeting early 1960s (above),
Counting ballots after an election (Belzie City)





The Political Struggle

It was a long struggle of political and civil action that enabled the people to make gains in the 1950's.

There was a lot of hard work involved in organizing the movement for decolonization. At times the struggle became violent. In 1950, a crowd stoned the homes of politicians regarded as pro- Britishers, and knocked out the police guard at the Governor's residence. The government declared a state of emergency that lasted 137 days. Violent incidents also occurred during a national strike in 1952. Generally, the threat of violence and the reality of thousands of people voicing their demands was enough to cause the authorities concern. They were forced to make concessions.

The colonial administrators created a new party financed by the B.E.C. They used force by declaring a state of emergency, passing laws, prosecuting and jailing leaders. They gave in to small reforms. They appealed to people's loyalty to the King and the British Empire. But none of these tactics worked.