The road to Independence
The road to Independence
generally followed the course taken by other British
colonies in the Caribbean up to the early 1960's, but since
then it has been distorted by a peculiar circumstance, the
unfounded claim of Guatemala to the territory of Belize—a
claim that has bred national disunity and seriously warped
the political, social and economic development of Belize.

With independence a serious task faces the Belizean
people—not only to transform a society marked by
centuries of colonial exploitation and dependency, but to
build a national unity shattered by decades of political
strain under the weight of the Guatemalan claim.

A long history of resistance to oppression characterizes the
road leading to September 21. This booklet sketches some
of the main events in that history, from the time of the earliest
inhabitants to that of the self-made diplomats of the
internationalization. It highlights the actions, often small but
always meaningful, of Belizeans struggling for freedom and
dignity.

The colonialism suffered by Belize and other Caribbean
countries was all the more effective because it was so
subtle, instilling in the colonized people a sense of
inferiority and dependence, promoting disunity among the
people, and providing a justification of itself that many of the
colonized accepted as true.

In such circumstances it is difficult to sustain an organized
and conscious anti-colonial struggle. Our history shows
however, that somehow, despite all the difficulties, an
unbroken thread of resistance to domination has been
maintained.

The victory of independence belongs to each and every
Belizean throughout this history who, in no matter how
small a way, demonstrated by his action his conviction that
nothing is more abhorrent than slavery in any form, and that
nothing is more precious than freedom and independence.

The struggle continues.
They built magnificent pyramids and palaces
WHILE Europe struggled through the Dark Ages, the Maya developed a great civilization.

For some fifteen centuries they thrived in an area that stretched from southern Mexico to Honduras, and Belize was an important part of their domain, being at the centre of a trading system which extended all along the Caribbean coast.

We know them as the Maya, a people whose advanced civilization reached its peak between the 7th and 9th centuries. They were expert farmers, providing themselves with a wide variety of crops including corn, cassava, beans, yams and squash. While Europe struggled through the Dark Ages, the Maya developed a knowledge of astronomy which allowed them to devise a calendar as precise as today’s: they employed an advanced system of mathematics based on the zero concept, long before this was known in Europe. They built magnificent pyramids and palaces, examples of which can be seen in Belize today at sites like Altun Ha, Xunantunich, Lubaantun, Nim Li Punit and Lamanai.

Maya society suffered a sudden and unexplained breakdown at the end of the 9th century, but many of the people remained on the land, living the life of subsistence farmers in small, scattered communities.

Maya political organization consisted of a group of independent “principalities” entering into alliances with each other. In the century before the European invasion, most of northern Belize was part of the “principality” of Chetumal (a city that was then in Belize, in the vicinity of what is now Corozal Town), which belonged to a federation of principalities called the League of Mayapan. In the mid-15th century, a series of civil wars caused the League to fall apart.
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TURKEYS in the shape of spears and corn in the shape of arrows
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But when the Spanish tried to conquer the Maya in the 16th century, they encountered fierce resistance. In 1531, a Spanish expedition set out from Yucatan to Chetumal. In answer to a demand to submit to Spain, its chief ruler, Nachankan, replied that he did not desire peace and that the tribute he would pay would be turkeys in the shape of spears and corn in the shape of arrows. When the Spanish marched into Chetumal, they found the place deserted and renamed it Villa Real. This was the first attempted Spanish settlement on Belizean territory. But the decision of the Maya to withdraw to the bush was only a war tactic. Nachankan and his Maya warriors harassed the Spanish troops whenever they came out to look for food. The guerrilla tactics used by the Maya so weakened the Spanish forces that they became prisoners in the city surrounded by Maya forces. After 18 months, the surviving Spanish fled, heading out to sea. Thirteen years later, another Spanish force conquered the area north of Belize, but no serious attempt was made to hold Chetumal Town in Belize. It became a place of refuge for Maya fleeing from Spanish rule.

The first European settlers in Belize were English pirates who used the coast for shelter and later cut and exported logwood which fetched good prices as a dye-fasteener in Europe. This settlement began around the middle of the 17th century and by 1700 had become the centre of the British logwood trade.

The British settlers rarely encountered the Maya during their first century of occupation, since the settlers remained near the coast where the logwood was abundant. But in the late 18th and early 19th centuries the British settlers, in response to the changing demands of the metropolitan market, moved further into the interior in search of mahogany. Then, encroaching upon Maya settlements and encountering resistance, British troops drove the Maya deeper into the western forests. When they reemerged later in the nineteenth century they were decisively beaten by the British, who then incorporated them into the social structure of the colony as a dominated and dispossessed people.
By 1745 slaves accounted for 71% of the settlement's population
THE first British settlers cut their own logwood. Then, as their businesses became more established, they sought additional supplies of labour. The same situation had previously faced settlers on the Caribbean islands in connection with the production of sugar, and they turned to Africa, which, raped by the slave trade, provided slave labour for the vast sugar estates of the Caribbean.

By 1724, the settlers in Belize had acquired African slave labour from Jamaica and Bermuda. By 1745 slaves accounted for 71% of the settlement's population (excluding the Maya), and by 1800, 86%.

The social structure of the settlement was greatly affected by the shift in economic activity from logwood to mahogany. Mahogany exploitation required more slaves for labour, more capital, and more land. In 1787 the settlers began to pass a series of laws relating to land which soon resulted in a dozen settlers owning four-fifths of all the land within the limits of the settlement. This monopoly of land ownership was a fundamental aspect of the almost complete monopoly of the settlement's political economy by the dozen families who constituted the elite.

Although some slaves were allowed to cultivate some “provision grounds” for subsistence purposes, they were generally not allowed to engage in agriculture, since the mahogany lords feared the loss of their labour force. Laws were passed prohibiting slaves from marketing their produce. Despite these obstacles, however, the African slaves, whose cultural tradition included the cultivation of the soil and not the preparation of timber for export, managed to “make plantations” on an extensive basis, mostly for home consumption.

Because of the economic activity in which they were engaged, the conditions of the slaves in Belize differed somewhat from that of their brothers on the Caribbean plantations; but, like them, they rejected and rebelled against their oppressors, some of them struggling for a freedom which they might never have experienced but for which they were willing to risk all.
"A considerable body of runaway slaves are formed in the interior"
THE last slave revolt was led by two black slaves, 
Will and Sharper, in 1820

Throughout the period of slavery the British settlers lived 
in fear of revolts and escapes, a fear that was often justified. 
The slave revolts of 1765 and 1766 were dwarfed by that of 1773, 
which lasted five months and was suppressed only with the help 
of a British naval force from Jamaica. On at least one occasion of 
a Spanish attack on the settlement, against St. Georges Caye in 
1779, "several negroes in arms," including one African ex-slave 
who had recently run away, appeared among the Spanish forces. 
The last slave revolt in Belize was led by two black slaves called 
Will and Sharper in 1820. It occurred between the Belize and 
Sibun Rivers and lasted for almost a month.

Apart from these armed actions by the slaves, there was a 
continuous movement of runaways to Yucatan, Peten and Honduras. 
There were also communities of escaped slaves within 
Belize – in 1816 a reference was made to one "near Sheboon 
River, very difficult to discover, and guarded by poisonous 
snakes"; in 1817 there is a report that "a considerable body of 
runaway slaves are formed in the interior"; and in 1820 the British 
reported "two Slave Towns, which it appears have long been 
formed in the Blue Mountains to the northward of Sibun."
<table>
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<th>Owner's Name</th>
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**AFTER** slavery, they found new and more effective ways of controlling the labour force.
Thus did the great landowners in Belize manage to maintain their domination over a large section of the population after emancipation, establishing a system of land and labour which lasted into the middle of the twentieth century.

The "abolition" of slavery and the establishment of the apprenticeship system did not give the slaves freedom and barely changed their status. Final emancipation in 1838 merely changed the forms of struggle between former masters and slaves—the issue was still how the mahogany lords could control the labour force; after slavery, they found new and more effective ways of so doing.

The first priority was to ensure that the freedmen could not have ready access to land, to prevent them from becoming independent farmers. Until the abolition of slavery, crown grants of land had been given out freely to whites; but, six weeks after abolition, the British issued a circular relating to the new laws that must be passed "calculated to meet the new exigencies of the society." One of the laws was "for preventing the unauthorised occupation of land." Land was henceforth to be sold at £1 per acre, a price high enough to be beyond the reach of the average freedman. This measure was necessary, argued the British, because free gifts of land would "discourage labour for wages." The freedmen therefore had to seek employment with their former masters in the large timber concerns.

The wealthy cutters of Belize further reduced the options of their ex-slaves with a system of labour laws designed to keep the workers under very firm control. At the heart of this system of control was the practice of paying wages by "advances," the effect of which was to bind the worker to his employers by keeping him in debt.

The advance system operated within the context of a strict contract system which bound the labourer to the employer for periods of six to twelve months. The laws imposed a penalty of imprisonment with hard labour for 3 months on a servant failing to perform a contract and allowed the apprehension of a servant without warrant by the employer or his agent and the forcible removal of such worker to his place of work. The advance system was combined with the "truck system" which forced labourers to take a portion of their meagre wages in goods from their employers' store. The effect of all these forms of labour control was that the freedmen became virtually enslaved for life.

Thus did the great landowners in Belize manage to maintain their domination over a large section of the population after emancipation, establishing a system of land and labour control which lasted into the middle of the twentieth century.
By 1802 about 150 Garifuna had settled in the Stann Creek area of Southern Belize.
THE land laws of the settlement were also applied to dispossess the Garifuna of land they had occupied for many years.

THE population of Belize did not remain confined to the Maya, British and African people, however; it was augmented in the 19th and 20th centuries by other immigrants from other lands. The Garifuna (previously known as black Caribs) of Belize are of predominantly African origin, descendants of Africans who escaped from slavery in the Windward Islands and mixed with the Carib Indians of St. Vincent. There they fought against Spanish, French and English attempts to colonize them, one of their great leaders being Joseph Chatoyer. The British finally defeated them in 1796 and the following year transported some 5,000 of them to the island of Roatan off the coast of Honduras. Many of them moved into coastal areas of Central America – and by 1802 there were about 150 Garifuna settlers in the Stann Creek area of Southern Belize. They engaged principally in fishing and the cultivation of ground foods, and by 1811 were visiting the town of Belize to sell their produce. In 1832 large numbers of Garifuna fled to Belize from Honduras after a civil war, and their landing here, led by Alejo Bení, is commemorated as a national holiday in Belize today.

The woodcutters saw the Garifuna as another source of labour, and by 1833 many of the men were working in the mahogany camps. A resolution of the settlers of that year referred to the problem of “runaway Caribs” and resolved to appoint a constable in Stann Creek for their apprehension. The land laws of the settlement were also applied to dispossess the Garifuna of land they had occupied for many years. In 1855 the “Laws in Force Act” gave legal title to any person who was in quiet and undisturbed possession of land since 1840 – but this law did not apply to the Garifuna on their lands. Thus were the Garifuna integrated into the society as yet another repressed and disenfranchised group.
OVER three hundred soldiers entered the village, burnt it to the ground and destroyed all the crops.
In 1840, the settlement's population was calculated at around 3,000; the 1861 census enumerated over 25,000.

In mid-century momentous events taking place in Yucatan were destined to have a decisive and lasting effect on Belize's population. In 1848 the Maya of Yucatan revolted against the white settlers of Spanish origin, and in the resulting chaos and bloodshed thousands of Maya and Mestizos fled into Belize. In 1840, the settlement's population was calculated at around 3,000; the 1861 census enumerated over 25,000.

Most of the refugees formed settled communities in Northern Belize. With the mahogany trade in decline and vast areas of the north virtually denuded of mahogany, the big landholders were willing to rent land to the immigrant farmers, who were soon producing considerable quantities of rice, corn and vegetables. By 1857 they were already supplying enough sugar for the local market and a surplus for export.

This latter fact brought a quick response from the big landowners, who decided to take over the business of sugar production, forcing some of their tenants into wage labour and quickly dominating sugar exports. Within a decade of the first export of sugar from Belize by the Mestizo rancheros, the production and export of sugar was controlled by the five companies that had steam machinery on their extensive estates. Many of the Maya and Mestizos became a rural proletariat dependent entirely upon the wages, in cash and food, provided by plantation work. Others were able to become a part-time peasantry, their low cash wages being underwritten by subsistence agriculture on rented land.

The interest of the landowners in sugar cultivation in the north, however, did not diminish their continuing and greater interest in mahogany exploitation, and when some of the Maya refugees from Yucatan drifted further south until they settled in the Western District of Belize near to mahogany works, they became an object of concern to the British. The Maya who settled in the Yalbac Hills founded several villages, the main one being San Pedro. A detachment of British troops marched on the village in 1866 but was routed by a combined force of the San Pedro Maya and their former rivals the Icaicha Maya, whose chief was Marcos Canul. The following year troop reinforcements arrived in Belize, and a force of over three hundred soldiers entered the village and burnt it to the ground and destroyed all the crops as well as several other Maya villages in the area. Canul kept up the struggle against the British during the next five years, and was finally defeated at a battle in Orange Walk in 1872. The Maya were by then securely incorporated into the colonial social structure as a dispossessed and dominated group.
ATTEMPTS in the 19th century to develop commercial agriculture brought other peoples to our shores from China, India and the West Indies.
ALTHOUGH the attempts by the settler elite to develop commercial agriculture in 19th century Belize were shortlived, they did result in the immigration of other peoples to Belize, particularly from China, India and the West Indies.

All these peoples who became Belizeans, however – the Maya, the African, the Garifuna, the Indian and others – lived within a colonial society that was completely dominated politically and economically by a small white settler elite and later by metropolitan companies and the metropolitan government. The economic control of the settlement changed around the middle of the 19th century, when some of the "monied cutters" became indebted to London commercial houses and became bankrupt, while others survived only by going into partnership with metropolitan firms.

By 1862 when the settlement was officially declared a colony, the dominance of metropolitan countries was firmly established, and the resources of Belize came under the direct control of the metropolitan capitalists. The distribution of land in Belize was such that the vast majority of the population was completely dispossessed; at the same time the land was grossly underutilized, and while the people were unable to grow their own food they remained dependent upon imports, creating a strong merchant class that, together with the forestry interests, dominated Belizean society well into the middle of the 20th century.
Peace! Peace!! Peace!!!

(First Good News for the Children.)

We received a letter by the mail this week from

"Santa Claus"

informing us that he will visit Belize and that his Headquarters will be

Meyer, Usher and Company.

We had great difficulty in getting "Santa Claus" to come here this year, owing to the Great European War. He was going to the Front but we entreated him to come and give all the good children a present before he goes to the Front, and he said he would.

All orders for toys and other Christmas goods must be sent to us early to enable you to get the pick of the toys. We have quite a selection of dolls, drums, pianos, children's rocking chairs, nursery chairs, rocking horses, wheelbarrows, wagons, velocipédés, go-carts, side walk sulkies, etc., etc.

Our Prices are Very Low

First come first served.

The people of Belize lived in conditions of poverty, ignorance and hopelessness.
"BETTER to be a dead hero than a living coward"
IN these circumstances a charismatic leader of the unemployed emerged in the person of Antonio Soberanis, who held meetings in the centre of Belize City and travelled to the districts protesting the plight of the workers and calling them to action. In his maiden speech on March 16, 1934 in Belize City, he declared his willingness to die for the cause of the unemployed, stating that he would prefer to be a "dead hero than a living coward."

At that time a single British company, the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC) owned almost one half of private land in Belize - over a million acres - and was the main employer as well as the greatest influence in the local colonial administration. It was a natural target for an enraged and frustrated populace.

On 1 October 1934, a group of unemployed of about 500 men and women succeeded in closing down the BEC sawmill as well as several other large businesses. The rioters soon clashed with the police and several persons were imprisoned, including Soberanis.

Because of the overwhelming force of the colonial administration, the repressive labour laws and the successful attempts by the colonial authorities to divide his followers, Soberanis failed to bring about the changes that he sought; but he did plant the seed that would germinate and grow by the end of the next decade.

The conditions of the working class during the 1940's were even more crippling than those of the depression years. The declining mahogany and chicle industries and the paucity of agricultural development created widespread unemployment and the payment of starvation wages. Bad as things were throughout the decade, they suddenly got much worse in 1949, when a serious drought ruined crops. A British reporter of the period noted that "of the 35,000 employables, nearly a quarter are without work or working on part-time work, earning less than 12 shillings per week ... Belize City is about the most shockingly depressed spot in the whole British West Indies, perhaps in the Commonwealth. Hunger, poverty, the filthy conditions under which the people exist are incredible." Conditions were ripe for the effective organization of a nationalist movement, and all that was needed was a clearly defined issue around which the potential leaders could rally the people.
FOR three decades he appeared in every corner of Belize, sampling every pot, coaxing people to support independence. He, more than anyone else, has seen the reality of Belize and knows that independence is just the beginning.
ON 31 December 1949 the British government devalued the Belize dollar after it had recently assured the people that it would not do so. It was recognized that this would bring additional hardships at a time of large scale unemployment and poverty. That very night a group of young Belizean leaders formed the People's Committee to protest the actions of the colonial government. After months of protest marches and meetings, the People's Committee evolved into the People's United Party (PUP) on 29 September 1950. By then the goals of the people had become crystallized and they demanded far more than just an improvement in their standard of living: the Party's constitution proclaimed the goal of political and economic INDEPENDENCE.

In the decade that followed a fierce though generally peaceful struggle unfolded against British colonialism in Belize. The PUP leaders — of which Leigh Richardson, George Price and Phillip Goldson were the most prominent and influential — quickly formed links with, and for a while became leaders of, the General Workers Union. A general strike called in 1952, again with the BEC as the main target, demonstrated the strength of the movement, and in 1954 a major victory was won with the achievement of universal adult suffrage. In 1957 George Price emerged as the authentic leader of the nationalist movement, and after attempts by the British to discredit him failed to curtail popular support for the cause he espoused, an uneasy peace developed between the Belizean leaders and the colonial administration. By 1961, the British conceded that Belize could become constitutionally independent whenever it so desired. In 1963, a new constitution accorded a large measure of internal self-government to the people of Belize for the first time in their history.
<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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<td>$5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>$1.5</td>
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<tr>
<td>1979</td>
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In the two decades since, Belizians have had a significant say in the running of their country, and some major changes have occurred. The two most significant are the change from a forestry to an agricultural economy and an important land reform program that made available to small farmers hundreds of thousands of acres previously owned by the large estates. In the 1960s, the fishing industry was reorganized so that the newly formed fishing cooperatives became the sole exporters of fish products, bringing dramatic and lasting benefits to local fishermen and placing, for the first time, the fruits of their labour in the control of Belizian workers. There has been some diversification of the economy, including small steps in light industrialization, and a general improvement of the standard of living of the people. Basic amenities have been improved and expanded, and social services have been upgraded.

But for many years now there has been an artificial barrier to the political and economic development of the country, and an affront to the dignity of Belizians—the fact that Belize, even in the last quarter of the 20th century, remained a colony, a dependency of Britain.

Ironically, the challenge to Belizians' aspirations to independence came not from the colonial power, but from the government of a neighbouring state, which maintains an unfounded claim to the territory of Belize and which, for many years, threatened to pursue this claim by force if necessary.

For twenty years—since 1961—the government of Belize participated in Anglo-Guatemalan negotiations concerning the Guatemalan claim—not because it recognized any rights whatsoever of Guatemala in or over Belize or its future, but because, faced with Guatemala's military threat, it sought to help the British and Guatemalans to settle their differences without prejudice to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belize.
AFTER 14 years of fruitless negotiations...6 years of intensive diplomatic activity.
SPECIAL efforts were made to gain the solidarity of the peoples and governments of Latin America and especially of Central America.

For many years, the Belizean government largely left matters up to the British, who were constitutionally responsible for the foreign affairs and defence of Belize. But when, in 1975, after 14 years of fruitless negotiations, the Guatemalan government demanded the cession of a large area of Belizean territory as the price for dropping its unfounded claim, the Belize government decided that it must wage a second war for independence, this time on the international front, to gain support for its claim to full independence with its territory intact and secure. There followed six years of intensive diplomatic activity on the part of the Belize government in an exercise that became known as “the internationalization.” Immediate and firm support was received from the countries of the Caribbean Community and the Commonwealth of Nations. In 1975 the first United Nations resolution on Belize was passed by the General Assembly by a vote of 110 in favour, with 9 against and 16 abstentions. This large initial support was made possible because of the undertaking by the Non-Aligned Movement, at its Foreign Minister’s Conference in Peru that year, to commit its total support to Belize.

Although the United Nations support was substantial, it showed up a serious weakness – none of the mainland Spanish-speaking Latin American countries had voted for Belize. It became the number one priority to win the support of these countries, and special efforts were made to gain the solidarity of the peoples and governments of Latin America and especially of Central America, whose countries were particularly bound by economic and other historical ties with Guatemala.
OMAR Torrijos... an ardent campaigner for Belize in Latin America
They built magnificent pyramids and palaces
IN a few short years, there developed a regional consensus in favour of Belize's stand against the mini-imperialists.

THE chink in Guatemala's armour of Latin American support first appeared in another continent – at the Summit Meeting of the Non-Aligned Countries held in Colombo, Sri Lanka, in August 1976. Belize had been invited as a special guest and was given special status in the Movement. Also present there to lobby support for the struggle to regain sovereignty over the Panama Canal for his people was General Omar Torrijos. Although Panama had been previously committed, in a signed declaration of Central American countries, to support Guatemala's claim, General Torrijos became convinced of the justice of the Belizean struggle for independence, and at the next UN General Assembly session, Panama voted in favour of the Belize resolution. The Guatemalan government, conscious of the effect this had in undermining its Latin American support, broke off relations with Panama. This did not deter Torrijos, who was prepared to back up his principled commitment to the ultimate consequences. He became an ardent campaigner for Belize in Latin America, and was instrumental in securing the support of many other countries. He became a constant source of sound advice and inspiration; he will live forever in the hearts of Belizeans who can never forget his significant contribution to our struggle for independence.

After Panama, many other Latin American countries voted for Belize in subsequent UN resolutions, but another break in the Central American wall did not occur until the victory of the Popular Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, which not only brought an important new vote for Belize at the UN, but also a committed ally.

Another event that considerably improved the international position of Belize was the assumption by José López Portillo of the Presidency of Mexico. Although Mexico had supported Belize before, President Portillos principled and very firm stand has greatly strengthened Belize's hand.
Independencia a Belice, el 21 de septiembre

El anuncio oficial se hizo en Londres y Belmopán.

AFP, AP, Latin y PL

BELICE, 26 de julio. — Los gobiernos de este país y de Gran Bretaña anunciaron simultáneamente hoy que Belice será independiente el próximo 21 de septiembre y que las fuerzas armadas británicas permanecerán "por un tiempo apropiado" en este territorio para garantizar la seguridad nacional.

THE writing on the
By November 1980, international support for Belize was virtually unanimous. A UN resolution called for independence for Belize without strings attached, and with security, by the end of 1981. This time the United States of America, which had previously abstained on all the Belize resolutions since 1975, voted in favour, and no country voted against.

The last bastion of Guatemalan support to fall was the Organization of American States, which had traditionally taken Guatemala's side in the controversy. With the emerging importance of Caribbean states in the Organization, and with the gradually increasing Latin American support at the UN, Belize's cause won acceptance. In November 1981, the OAS, by an overwhelming majority, endorsed the UN resolution calling for a secure independence in 1981.

The writing on the wall was now clear: nothing could stop the attainment by the people of Belize of their right to freedom.

Running parallel to the official efforts at government level, an important source of strength has come from many popular organizations, particularly in Central America. In Costa Rica, a committee of solidarity coordinated the work of Central American trade unions, students, artists and intellectuals who, often without being asked and sometimes under clandestine conditions, expressed their solidarity with Belize and pressured their governments to do likewise. The Festival of Solidarity for the Independence of Belize, held in San Ignacio, Belize in 1978, with the participation of artists and intellectuals from every Central American country, demonstrated the vitality of this support.

The solid mounting support for Belize did not, however, deter the government from continuing its efforts to find a peaceful negotiated settlement to the controversy, but meetings held in 1981 proved that the Guatemalan government, by insisting on terms that would amount to land cession, was still demanding too high a price for dropping its unfounded claim to Belize.

The decision has therefore been taken, with the consent of the British government and the blessing of the international community, to proceed to independence and to continue efforts thereafter to develop peaceful and friendly relations with the government.
and people of Guatemala. The British have committed themselves to continue to defend Belize, and British troops will remain in Belize for this purpose with the consent of the Belizean government.

And so Belize becomes independent on 21 September 1981. All peace-loving nations rejoice that this small country, threatened by a much larger neighbour with a military might far exceeding its own, has been brought, with the help of an international solidarity that gives meaning and strength to the principles of the UN charter, to an independence which the world pledges to defend and maintain.

For Belizeans, independence is an opportunity and a challenge. The socio-economic consequences of centuries of colonial dependency have to be faced; it will not be easy, but it must be possible, to reshape the society in freedom and justice.

There lies ahead the urgent task of reuniting the nation, divided by the long, winding road to independence, which has left its mark with the fear, distrust and disunity bred by the circumstances surrounding the claim pressed by the government of Guatemala. With independence achieved, our people must now put aside these divisions and work together to build Belize in freedom and unity. We are all in the same boat; its fate is now entirely in our hands—we will sink or swim together.

Belize's place in the world is assured. The long diplomatic struggle for recognition has had at least one important advantage—it has made for us many friends. Our policy is to have friendly relations with all our neighbours and with all countries of the world, recognizing that every people have a right to chart their own political and economic course without interference.

We recognize that the future and fortunes of Belize are inextricably bound up with that of the countries of the Third World and their stand against colonialism, racism, oppression and exploitation in any form, and in favour of world peace and cooperation in a new international economic order. Belize will pursue a policy of non-alignment and will apply for membership in the United Nations, the Commonwealth of Nations, and the Non-Aligned Movement. It will strengthen its tie with the Caribbean Community and strive to improve relations with Latin American countries, and between Caribbean and Latin American countries. It will seek to establish and maintain good relations with its neighbours, with the countries of the Americas, and with all peace-loving countries of the world.

Belizeans know that the struggle for a better life, for a dignified existence for all, does not end with Independence. Rather, Independence is the beginning of a long and difficult struggle that must be fought nationally and internationally, in union with the peoples of other developing nations, to create a new international economic and social order that will bring about the real liberation of our peoples.