

# Golden Jubilee--50 Years after Adult Suffrage

Civic Center, Belize City

April 28, 2004

By Myrtle Palacio

Muy Buena dias, Buiti Binafi, A pleasant good morning to all.

On behalf of the staff of Elections and Boundaries Department, I welcome you to our continuing effort at voter education and community outreach. Today's endeavour is very special as we are commemorating, remembering a major mile-post in Belize's political history.—that of election under adult suffrage.

Fifty years ago today, April 28, 1954 was the first election whereby the majority of the people, the rank and file were eligible to vote for their leaders to the Legislative Council. It was also the first time that the elected members formed the majority in the Legislative Council, which consisted of 15 members—3 nominated, 3 officials (employees of the Crown) and 9 elected.

Some 20,801 persons registered to vote and 14,546 or 70% cast their votes. Three independent candidates and two political parties, the National Party and a coalition of the PUP and the GWU contested the elections. There were nine electoral divisions, 4 in the Belize District and 1 in each of the 5 other districts. The PUP/GWU won 8 out of 9 seats to form the government and the National Party, one seat. Those who emerged as newly elected leaders were:

Charles Westby	Toledo	NP
Nathaniel Cacho	Stann Creek	PUP/GWU
Enrique De Paz	Cayo	“
George Cadle Price	Belize North	“
Phillip S. W. Goldson	Belize South	“
Herman Jex	Belize Rural	“
Leigh Richardson	Belize West	“
George Flowers	Orange Walk	“
Jose Leon Chin	Corozal	“

Four of these leaders have passed away: Mr. Cacho, Mr. Westby, Mr. Chin, and Hon. Phillip Goldson. Can we remember them in a moment of silence. The children and relatives of Hon. Goldson and Mr. Westby are present. Can they stand please?

Two of our leaders made the US their home several years ago, Mr. Herman Jex and Mr. Leigh Richardson. Mr. Jex is 80 years young and lives in Atlanta. He wrote a short bio which will be read by his daughter Zelma, who is seated at the head table. Mr. Richardson lives in New York and his

brother Edgar and other relatives are here with us today. Three of the 9 elected leaders of 1954 are seated at the head table: Rt. Hon. George Cadle Price, Mr. Enrique De Paz, and Mr. George Flowers. We thank them for gracing us with their presence. Congratulate and we welcome your participation in our Department's endeavour.

In 1979, the franchise for voting eligibility was extended from 21 to 18 year olds. Continuous registration commenced in 1998; and since then, electors are empowered to ensure that those who get on the list of voters are duly qualified to do so through the objection process. Similarly political parties represented the House of Representatives are also empowered to monitor the voter registration process through scrutinizing, as well, as to peruse the Registration Cards of electors. That is the power we have today. But do we know these laws enough to demonstrate these rights? Do we?

I would like to acknowledge the efforts of my Ag. Asst C.E.O. Mrs. Sharole Saldivar and the Staff of the Department who are primarily responsible for carrying this initiative through to fruition and with zero budget. What energy and enthusiasm.

Kindly sit back, relax, and listen to the messages from our leaders representing: The Church, The Youth, The leaders of 954 and the present leaders. Thank you.