

## **Eulogy to the Rt. Hon. George Price**

**George Price was born on January 15, 1919 at 1114 Pickstock St. in Belize, British Honduras. He was the third of the eleven children and the first son of William Cadle Price and his wife Irene Cecilia Escalante Price. During the second week of his life, he was baptized at the Holy Redeemer Cathedral by Bishop Frederick Hopkins, S.J. and thus began a lifelong commitment to the Catholic faith.**

**Young George attended Holy Redeemer School during the years 1924 to 1931 and at the age of twelve was enrolled as a boarding student at St. John's College at Loyola Park on the seashore of what is now the south side of Belize City. He was there on the fateful afternoon of 10<sup>th</sup> September, 1931, when the catastrophic hurricane struck. He almost lost his life when the building collapsed and, after several harrowing experiences, eventually made his way home safely. It can well be said that his life had been spared for a "higher purpose".**

**After the hurricane, the College was relocated to the compound of Holy Redeemer School and George completed his high school education there in 1935. A formative influence in his life at that stage was Fr. Hugh Harkins S.J. who helped him to advance his musical skills in playing the piano and pipe organ and who introduced him to human pain and suffering by taking him to anoint the dying in the Tuberculosis Huts. (This in the pre antibiotic era must have required great courage and conviction).**

**Between the years 1936 and 1942, Mr. Price was a seminarian in the United States of America and in Guatemala. Due to World War Two, he was unable to continue his planned course of studies in Rome and so returned home. Here he entered the employment of Mr. Robert Sydney Turton, a mahogany and chicle exporter, who was also a member of the Legislative Council. Through him Mr. Price was introduced to the world of business and, as Mr. Turton's secretary, travelled extensively with him in the United States. It was also at Mr. Turton's encouragement that Mr. Price entered the world of politics, contesting the Belize Town Board elections in 1944 and losing.**

Mr. Price's subsequent political career was (to put it mildly) more successful. He won the six Belize City Council elections which he subsequently contested and ten of eleven national elections. He served as Mayor of Belize from 1958 to 1962, Member of the Legislative Council from 1958 to 1961 and of the Legislative Assembly from 1961 to 1984. He was First Minister from 1961 to 1964 and, with the attaining of Internal Self Government in 1964, became Premier. He was Belize's first Prime Minister from 1981 to 1984 and served in that capacity again from 1989 to 1993. He also served as Senior Minister from 1998 until 2003, in which year he retired from active politics.

On December 31<sup>st</sup>. 1949, the Governor of British Honduras using his reserve powers and against the wishes of the people, devalued the dollar. This led to widespread protest and the formation of the Peoples Committee (a group of ten or so men meeting at the family home in Pickstock St). Thus began The Peaceful Constructive Revolution the ultimate goal of which was the Independence of Belize and a better life for all Belizeans. The committee later evolved into the Peoples United Party which was formally founded on 29<sup>th</sup> September, 1950 with Mr. Price as the party secretary. In 1956 he became party leader, a post he held until 1996. Mr. Price remained an active member of the party until his retirement.

The third quarter of the last century saw slow but gradual improvement in the country's political and economic development with Mr. Price at the helm. Universal adult suffrage was introduced in 1954 and internal self government in 1964. Improvements in infrastructure, transportation, communication, education, and health services were realized. Hurricane Hattie in 1961 resulted in a huge economic setback but hastened the building of the new capital city Belmopan which was formally declared open on August 1, 1970. The name of Belize was formally adopted in 1973. Throughout this time, Mr. Price traversed the length and breadth of the country for the most part in his legendary blue and white land rover and remained in contact with the Belize City residents via his famous Wednesday "Clinics". He would listen to their concerns, note same on various little pieces of paper and then effect whatever action he could to meet them. Throughout this time, his emphasis was always on preparing Belizeans to realize their own destiny as an independent sovereign state with a common identity.

Guatemala's unfounded claim to Belize remained an obstacle to the attainment of Belize's independence. Faced with the United Kingdom's refusal to provide a long term defense guarantee, it was decided to internationalize the Belize position by means of an extended diplomatic effort headed by Mr. Price. Diplomatic support was gained from CARICOM, the Commonwealth of Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement and finally the other Latin American countries and, at the 35<sup>th</sup> plenary session of the United Nations in 1980, 139 member states supported the resolution calling for the independence of Belize. Belize became an independent country on 21<sup>st</sup> September, 1981, the main ceremony taking place here on the steps of the National Assembly. In the following weeks, Belize was admitted as a member state of the United Nations and of the Commonwealth of Nations.

As Prime Minister of Belize, Mr. Price continued to further the goal of developing Belize as a young dynamic sovereign democratic state in the Caribbean. He remained in contact with his people at home and continued to relate to world leaders abroad leading to the description of his being able to walk with kings but keeping the common touch.

During his life, Mr. Price was the recipient of numerous awards and honours. He was made a member of the Privy Council of the United Kingdom (hence the designation Rt. Honorable). He received, among others, national awards from Honduras, Venezuela (the Simon Bolivar Award) Mexico (the Azteca eagle award) Cuba (the José Martí award) the Order of National Hero of Belize and the Order of the Caribbean Community.

Mr. Price passed his retirement years at the family home in Pickstock St., playing the piano, reading books of both religious and secular nature, and entertaining the visitors who continued to arrive at his gate. He attended daily Mass until prevented from doing so by failing health a year ago. He remained optimistic on most subjects discussed but in particular of the future of Belize in the light of the problems we now face.

Mr. Price was a complex man. His best known qualities were his unswerving commitment to the Catholic faith and to the attainment of independence for Belize and, after that was achieved, to its continued development. He was a man

of extraordinary vision, a born leader who remained resolute in the face of adversity and hardship. His humility and integrity were legendary and it was well known that he had absolutely no regard for material wealth. The most striking thing about him was, however, his genuine concern for the well being of his fellow man as being the highest object of God's creation and his continued efforts to bring out the best in all the people he encountered. His personal interests including music and reading and, in his earlier years, the sport of horseracing even at one time owning a horse. He was "George" to his siblings and "Uncle George" to the rest of us. Our family held him in high regard and to some extent in awe. We could not always agree with his views but generally had to admit that he would often see things which we did not.

It is customary to end a eulogy with a quotation of the deceased; and, in view of the many quotations of Mr. Price heard during the last week, this is indeed an impossible task. Two are, however, here offered. The first was his response to a question from a family member last year on the 29<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Belize's independence as to how he felt looking back over the entire struggle for independence. He said "I have no regrets. I did what I had to do and with the help of God and the support of the people we achieved our just objective" A better one might be his response to the question posed by a foreign journalist as to how he would like to be remembered. Mr. Price said that he would be in favor of his epitaph reading quote "A good Belizean who went through life on a pilgrimage and who left the world a better place than he found it". I think we would all agree that Mr. Price did just that (and it would appear that a headstone of some size may be required)

The extended family of the late Rt. Honorable George Price, Father of the Nation of Belize and Leader Emeritus of the Peoples United Party thanks the people of Belize, of the region, and of the world for their continued prayers and support. May God continue to bless Belize.