

BELIZE FACTS AND FIGURES

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SECTION: PART II: THE PEOPLE OF BELIZE AND THEIR HISTORY/LEIGH RICHARDSON

Leigh Richardson

Born: 1924, Died: 2008

Leigh Isaiah Allison Richardson was one of Belize's early nationalists who responded to British cruelty in modern Belize.

Part of Leigh's formative years were spent at St. John's College starting in 1937. He formed a friendship with Philip Goldson around 1946 and both went to work as writers for Narciso Valdez's *Belize Billboard* newspaper. In 1949, the Colonial Government arranged for Richardson to study journalism for one year in London.

When Richardson returned from London, Belize was a different place, and he quickly became the Corresponding Secretary for the General Workers Union (GWU) and was a leader of the People's Committee. Around this time, the sentiment in Belize was becoming distinctly anti-British and Richardson and Goldson took up positions at the forefront of the war for the minds of the Belizean people, a conflict conducted in the print media and at public gatherings.

Richardson continued writing alongside Goldson for the *Billboard*. Richardson's column was titled: *As I See It*. In fact, it was one of Richardson's essays printed in the *Billboard* that brought down the British hammer on the young nationalists for the first time. This piece, published on June 17th 1951, combined snippets of speeches by John Smith, George Price and Philip Goldson and approached the topic of democracy from a theological background. It suggested that there were two roads to democracy: evolution or revolution.

Richardson's initial article was followed by "Kingship and the People" and "Seven Days of Freedom" written by Philip Goldson for the *Billboard*.

These three articles formed the basis for three charges for which Leigh Richardson and Philip Goldson were found guilty of "Seditious Intention" on November 5th, 1951. When they were brought out of the courthouse, the crowd cheered and spontaneously began to sing "Land of the Gods." They were sentenced to 18 months hard labor on November 8th.

Whilst in prison, both men secretly continued to write for the *Billboard*, sometimes using toilet paper as one of their media. They smuggled out the writing and it is believed that the columns they wrote from prison included "View" and "Rights of Mankind" which started to appear in the paper around December 6th 1951.

Richardson and Goldson taught illiterate men in prison how to read and write. They completed their sentence in August of 1952 and upon release, Richardson became the second leader of the PUP because John Smith had resigned in November of 1951.

Richardson was then overthrown as party leader of the PUP in 1956 by George Price. Richardson went on to form the Honduras Independence Party and the National Independence

Party with Philip Goldson and others. Richardson left Belize under some form of exile beyond his control some time before 1973. He resided in exile in Jamaica, Trinidad and finally the USA and pursued a teaching career. Richardson was awarded Belize's Order of Distinction in 2008, but he was unwell and not able to be present for the ceremony. He died in New York in 2008.