

A. BELIZE — Developments in 1975 in British Dispute with Guatemala

The British and Guatemalan Governments agreed at the end of November 1975 to hold a new round of talks in February 1976 aimed at resolving the two countries' 30-year-old dispute over the status of the British central American colony of Belize [see 22798 A ; 19669 A] ; this decision was immediately followed by a formal call for the resumption of such talks by the UN General Assembly in December 1975. A previous round of informal talks initiated in February 1975 [see 27044 D] had ended without agreement in July. The UN resolution on the Belize question came shortly after the first serious build-up of tension along the Belize-Guatemala border since early 1972 [see 26914 B].

It was announced in January that the British delegation at the new round of talks, due to start in New Orleans on Feb. 9, would be led by Mr Edward Rowlands, Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and would also include Mr Ivor Richard, Britain's permanent representative at the UN, while the Guatemalan delegation would be led by the Foreign Minister, Sr Adolfo Molino Orantes. The Belizean Premier, Mr George Price, would also participate in the talks.

"Internationalization" of the Independence Issue

During 1975 the People's United Party (PUP) Government in Belize, which had been returned to power in the October 1974 general election after calling for early independence [see 26914 B], adopted a policy of "internationalizing" the issues in dispute between Guatemala and the UK, which had received little world attention since the failure of a US mediation attempt in 1968 [see 22798 A]. This policy was intensified after the breakdown of UK-Guatemalan talks in early July when the British Government rejected Guatemalan proposals which envisaged the cession of the southern quarter of Belize (including an area thought to contain offshore oil deposits) in return for the renunciation by Guatemala of its claim to the remainder of the colony. The Belizean Government reacted to these Guatemalan proposals by stating that it doubted whether any useful purpose would be served by holding further talks.

Belize's efforts to attract wider attention to the continuing constitutional impasse—described by *The Financial Times* of Nov. 13 as leaving it "suffering all the problems of self-government with all the disadvantages of being a colony"—had been greatly assisted by its membership since May 1974 [see 26694 B] of the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM), the other members of which, both individually and collectively, gave strong support to the Belizean case for independence. In particular, the fact that Barbados, Jamaica, Grenada and Trinidad and Tobago belonged both to CARICOM and to the Organization of American States [see 27203 A for full membership of OAS in 1975] had ensured the Belizean viewpoint a full exposition in the latter forum for the first time.

(A constitutional amendment of 1974 transferring certain responsibilities in the external affairs field from the British Governor of Belize to the Premier had increased the latter's freedom to participate in the formulation of CARICOM's foreign policy.)

Important initiatives by leaders of independent CARICOM states to further Belize's interests within the region during 1975 included a strong appeal in favour of a "just settlement" of the problem by Dr Eric Williams, the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, when the 16th session of the (UN) Economic Commission for Latin America was held in that country in May, and the enlistment of Cuban support for Belize's right to self-determination by Mr Michael Manley, the Jamaican Prime Minister, when he visited Cuba in July.

In the wider international sphere, Commonwealth heads of government called in May 1975 for "a speedy solution to the problem . . . in accordance with the principle of self-determination" [see page 27208] after this item had been placed on the agenda of their meeting by Caribbean member-countries, while in August the fifth ministerial conference of non-aligned countries in Lima, having declined to admit Guatemala as an observer [see 27343 A], adopted a resolution expressing "full support for the people of Belize, whose aspirations for independence continue to be frustrated by territorial claims" and promising "to lend [the non-aligned movement's] support to all efforts directed to affirming the territorial integrity of Belize and the right of its people to independence". The Jamaican and Guyanese delegates were the principal speakers in favour of this resolution, the latter attacking Guatemala by name.

Having obtained the support of the non-aligned movement, the Belizean Government announced that it would seek UN backing for its case, and appointed Mr Assad Shoman, the Attorney General and Minister of Economic Planning, to head a

special public relations office in New York during the 30th session of the General Assembly, which opened on Sept. 16 [see 27428 B].

Consideration of the Belize question in the UN in the past was summed up by the *West Indies Chronicle* (of December 1975/January 1976) as amounting to little more than "a ritual affirmation of its claim by Guatemala and an equally ritualistic denial by the UK delegate". Addressing the 29th General Assembly session on Sept. 26, 1974, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister had stated that his country stood by the principle of self-determination, with the reservation that the disruption of Guatemala's national unity or her territorial integrity was incompatible with the UN Charter ("Belize" having been regarded as the 23rd *departamiento* of Guatemala under that country's constitution since 1945).

Mr Shoman's appointment was accompanied by an invitation from Mr Price to the opposition United Democratic Party (UDP, an amalgamation of the three parties which had formed an electoral coalition in 1974—see 26914 B) to join the ruling PUP in ensuring that a bipartisan case was put to the UN. This was subsequently accepted by the UDP leader, Mr Dean Lindo, after a formula had been agreed allowing the UDP to affirm its commitment to the colony's right to self-determination while reserving its position on the timing of independence (to which it had a more gradualist approach than the PUP).

At the opening of a debate on Belize in the UN Trusteeship Committee on Nov. 7, Mr Ivor Richard put forward a draft resolution co-sponsored by 61 other (mostly third-world) countries calling inter alia for the urgent resumption of negotiations between Guatemala and the UK.



(New York Times)

Mr Richard appealed for "maximum restraint" by Guatemala in the current border confrontation [see below], and described the origins of the dispute over sovereignty as "absurd", because the two sides were "arguing over the failure, more than 100 years ago, to build a cart road" [see 7761 D, where a background to the dispute is given], and also "tragic", because there was now "a new element which rightly demands recognition but which is being ignored, namely the Government and people of Belize" (who had enjoyed effective internal self-government since 1964—see 19669 A). The most forceful attack on Guatemala was made by Mr Forbes Burnham, the Prime Minister of Guyana, who accused the Guatemalans of threatening the peace and security of the hemisphere through their "act of aggression" against "a small defenceless state" at a time when "all efforts should be directed to the task of social and economic development" (Belize's agricultural economy having been severely affected by prolonged drought in 1975).

The Committee, which was told by Mr Price that Guatemala could expect the co-operation of an independent Belize, while a non-independent Belize would be "a thorn in its flesh for ever", adopted the draft resolution on Nov. 21 by 103 votes to 12, with 13 abstentions. A counter-resolution sponsored by Guatemala and 12 other Latin American states, which would merely have noted the existence of the dispute and asked for continued negotiations for a peaceful solution, was rejected by 62 votes to 22 with 41 abstentions, while a Mexican resolution also calling for new negotiations and requesting all parties involved to "refrain from unilateral action" was withdrawn.

The voting when the matter was put to the plenary session of the General Assembly on Dec. 8 as Resolution 3432 (XXX) was 110 in favour and 9 against (Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Honduras, Morocco, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay and Uruguay), with 16 abstentions (Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Israel, Japan, Malawi, Mauritania, Mexico, Peru, Philippines, Spain, the United States and Venezuela). Guatemala, which had previously "refused to recognize" the successful draft resolution, claiming that the UN "had no competence in the matter", did not participate in the vote.

Morocco's decision to join Guatemala's strongest Latin American supporters in opposing the resolution was attributed to its own current involvement in the Saharan territorial dispute [see 27575 A]. It was noted, however, that Venezuela and Mexico, which had previously supported Guatemala, abstained in the vote on Dec. 8.

President Pérez of Venezuela, itself party to a territorial dispute with Guyana [see 24286 A], had withdrawn his hitherto strong