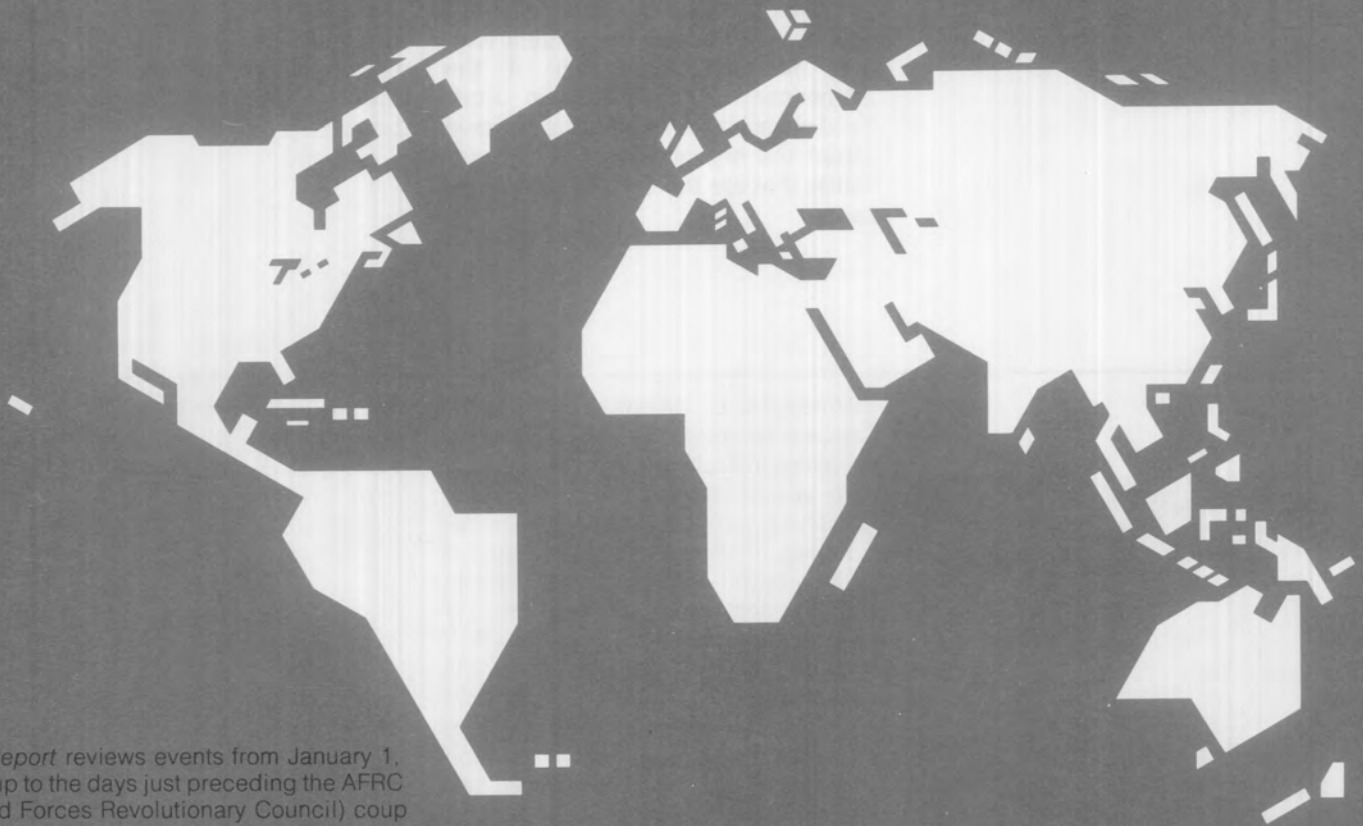


Ghana's Troubled Transition to
Civilian Government

by Barbara Harrell-Bond



This *Report* reviews events from January 1, 1979 up to the days just preceding the AFRC (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council) coup in June, an event which reflected the extraordinary conditions of poverty and frustration Ghanaian citizens have long endured.

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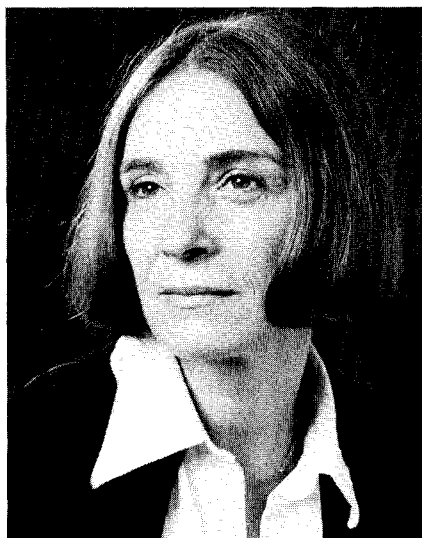
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In 1978 Ghanaians made political history in West Africa by proving that through sustained opposition and extreme sacrifice, civilians are able to bring down a military Head of State and then force a military government to make an about-face on party politics and civilian rule.

On July 5, 1978, General Fred W.K. Akuffo took over from the discredited General Kutu Acheampong as head of a reconstituted Supreme Military Council.¹ Although Ghanaians did not greet this change of leadership with any general enthusiasm, General Akuffo appeared to many observers to be responsive to enlightened opinion from both within and outside Ghana. The country's economic problems remained extremely serious, but the new SMC implemented stabilization measures—including a tightening of fiscal and monetary policies, the depreciation of the cedi by 58.2 percent, and price control deregulation—and during the first five months of 1979 they continued their efforts to bring some order into Ghana's chaotic economic situation. Potential outside donors welcomed this evidence of a more rational policy and their renewed confidence in Ghana was reflected in financial support from the International Monetary Fund and other sources (although Britain, which loaned £20 million to Ghana, denied that its decision was based on the changeover of government, insisting that its motives were only "humanitarian").

In January 1979 General Akuffo inaugurated a program for a return to civilian rule. A Constituent Assembly was formed, charged to debate the draft constitution for a transitional government which had been prepared in 1978 and to present a final version for SMC approval by April. Political parties began to form under the rules laid down in 1978 and elections were promised in June, with handover to civilian rule finally to come in July 1979.

Akuffo, who had attended the Royal Military Academy in Sandhurst from 1958 to 1960 and had been Chief of Defense just before assuming leadership of the Supreme Military Council, was regarded in international circles as capable of dealing with the problems of transition from military to civilian rule. His program even included taking steps to deal with the serious problems of corruption. The Popular Front Party (PFP), which had taken over the policy and leadership of Busia's Progress Party, was believed likely to win the elections. Since the PFP promised to continue the PP government's policies of encouraging foreign investment and Western-looking foreign policy, many outside observers believed that it was only a matter of time before Ghana was on a more stable economic and political path.

But in June 1979 Akuffo and Acheampong, together with six of their colleagues, died at the hands of a firing squad and the name J.J. Rawlings began to raise a specter of

fear in the hearts of the many West African leaders who were using their public offices to plunder the wealth of their nations.

On the one hand it seems incredible that observers of the Ghanaian situation throughout the first five months of 1979 should not have anticipated the June 4 coup d'état. On the other hand, this is perhaps less surprising when one reflects, as the *Legon Observer* put it, that "... diplomats are not 'informed.' Their contacts with people in the country are exceedingly limited in range, and their cocooned existence sustained by imported food and drink, protects them from any firsthand experience of the kind of hardships which the rest of us are suffering" (June 13, 1979). Perhaps nowhere in contemporary Africa has this accusation been more deserved than in the Ghana of 1978-79. Even after the June 4 coup, observers both inside and outside the country continued to display a near blindness to the significance for the average Ghanaian of the "revolution" which was led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings and his Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC).

It was variously described in the Western press as "essentially a mutiny led by a few junior air force officers and some members of the 5th army battalion," a coup for a coup's sake," and as an action with "no popular support," "ill-timed," "unfortunate, and unwarranted." That the sufferings of the majority of the population had passed all

levels of tolerance several months earlier seems to have been missed by most diplomatic representatives in Ghana. As one Ghanaian put it, "Westerners are quite content to look no further so long as whoever is in power adopts monetary policies which encourage and safeguard their investments and, especially in the case of Ghana, give hope that their profits will *eventually* be repatriated." The unfortunate accuracy of such remarks is illustrated by a document prepared in Accra during the desperate first half of 1979, in which United States-Ghanaian economic relations are discussed:

Ghana despite its recent economic difficulties, continues to be the third largest market for U.S. goods in sub-Saharan Africa. U.S. sales to Ghana will probably remain over \$100 million in 1979 and may, in fact, exceed past figures because of better management of Ghana's foreign exchange resources and the renewed possibility of external commercial financing.²

Although this document was written to provide "general guidance" to potential investors, it should surely have contained some reference to the political implications of an economy in which essential commodities were almost totally absent and malnutrition among both children and adults was widespread,³ even in Accra, the capital. On one occasion in the midst of an acute water shortage, the American Ambassador had had to call the police to control the crowds who had forced their way into his compound to *drink* the water from the swimming pool. It was an explosive situation and there is very little reason to doubt what Rawlings reiterated throughout the weeks of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council's rule — that had the AFRC not taken control when it did and had it not administered the type of "discipline" which it did, there would have been a total breakdown of order and many more lives would have been lost.

This *Report* will review events from January 1, 1979 up to the days just before the AFRC *coup* in June. It may be that the lessons of the Ghana experience will have some relevance in understanding and predicting events in other West African countries. This, certainly, is the belief of many ordinary Africans, which may explain official attempts throughout West Africa to discredit the Rawlings-led "revolution."

Transition to Civilian Rule: The Constituent Assembly

In January 1979 General Akuffo directed the newly inaugurated Constituent Assembly to prepare a constitution that would be strong enough for effective government, but without the authority to trample on individual liberties. Members of the Assembly were solemnly reminded by Akuffo that even if the new constitution contained prescriptions for good government, Ghana's political stability would still be threatened by economic chaos.

One of the controversial issues facing the Constituent Assembly was whether Ghana should have an executive president with a cabinet drawn from an elected body or a ceremonial president with a prime minister exercising power. Ghana had already experienced both systems: an executive presidency under Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (President July 1960-February 1966) and a ceremonial president under Dr. Kofi Busia (Prime Minister October 1969 to January 1972). After debating the pros and cons of these systems, in February the Constituent Assembly voted by 73 to 43 in favor of an executive presidential system along the lines of the American model. (Thus Ghana, like Nigeria, has turned away from the Westminster model.) However, the ratio showed the extent to which there was serious division over this issue and revealed the strength of the old political divisions. The 43 voting against the executive presidential system were all former Busia supporters from the Progress Party.

During the weeks following the opening of the Constituent

Assembly the public was informed through the press of the passing of various amendments, the contents of which reflected some of the reasons for the serious and growing discontent within the society. There were, for example, provisions aimed at curbing the widespread corruption among public officials and politicians. Political parties were prohibited from having as a founding member, leader, or member of its executive any person who had been disqualified from being a member of parliament or from holding any public office through having been found guilty of some corrupt practice by a commission of inquiry. Political parties were required to publish their sources of income and accounts annually in the local press. All public officers had to declare their assets and liabilities and *those of their wives* within three months of the promulgation of the new constitution, at the end of every two years, and when their terms of office terminated. All businesses owned by people assuming public offices must be handed over to the Public Trustee before taking office and parliament was given the power to widen the categories of "public officers" required to declare their assets at any time.

The Assembly also decided that the president's salary and other benefits should be subject to taxation. Moreover, the president would not be retired on full salary; parliament would be charged with the responsibility of setting the appropriate retirement salary. There were also discussions about reforming the tax laws so that people in the private sector and the self-employed would be taxed equally along with the civil servants who now carried the main burden of income tax. It was further recommended that the tax system should be broadened so that the "instant millionaires" would find evasion difficult.

There was discussion about the need to reduce expenditure on the armed forces and recommendations were made for the establishment of

a military training scheme. However, an amendment that would have made it obligatory for the armed forces to engage in agricultural and construction work was rejected.

Another amendment of extreme importance to the public was that which barred parliament from ever establishing a one-party state without submitting the question to the electorate. The constitution-makers were at pains to insure that the "dictatorial" practices of the Nkrumah era never again surfaced.

Press freedom was another controversial issue. It was decided that it would no longer be necessary for anyone wishing to establish a newspaper or any other form of mass communication to acquire a license from the Ministry of Information and that the constitution would provide explicit protections for press freedom. A press commission was to be established and an amendment was passed giving journalists the right, under the constitution, to withhold their sources of information, save where a court held that disclosure was in the interests of national defense or the conduct of foreign policy.

But *the most controversial amendment*, as it later turned out, was that which indemnified the Supreme Military Council, the National Liberation Council, and the National Redemption Council—the three past military governments—for acts committed in connection with the *coups* of 1966 and 1972. This indemnification was to apply only to those acts committed on the two days on which the *coups* were effected, although the press was quick to point out that these provisions did not preclude Ghanaians from taking legal action against any member of these *military governments* for misdeeds committed while in office, if cases could be established (*Daily Graphic*, May 28). Nonetheless, there were immediate protests against the fact that the amendment appeared to *reward* the coupmakers by providing pensions, tax exemptions, and other benefits.

In January there was already some openly expressed cynicism about the arrangements for the return to civilian rule. The Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, G. Koranteng-Addow, one of the architects of the Unigov idea,⁴ was sacked for his criticisms of the SMC's plans. Professor K. Folson, Pro Vice-Chancellor of the University of Legon, and a member of the Assembly, said that the process of writing a new constitution was a waste of government resources since there was nothing wrong with the previous one. He expressed the fear—which was widely echoed, particularly in the PFP's political campaign—that the proposed constitution would give enormous powers to the president and was bound to create, once again, a "one-man showmanship" in the country.

In March there was a public outcry when two Members of the Assembly were found guilty of "indiscretion" in the use of public funds for their hotel accommodation. The two managed to save themselves from dismissal from the Assembly by paying these hotel costs and writing letters of apology which were printed in the local papers.

Industrial Relations

Tension was also mounting on the industrial front. In November 1978 Akuffo had imposed a state of emergency after a wave of industrial unrest, including a strike by thousands of civil servants in support of their demands for more pay—which resulted in some 2,100 being sacked for defying the government's ultimatum to return to work. Although Akuffo lifted the state of emergency in January 1979 and appointed a committee to inquire into the civil servants' grievances, industrial unrest continued during this period of transition. There was a 15-day strike in January by railway workers who demanded more pay. One contractor was beaten by his workers because he had failed to pay them for three months and in

February all contractors threatened massive layoffs and work stoppages on all government projects. They pointed out that they were having difficulties in paying their workers, purchasing materials, and paying their own creditors because the government had not paid them since November 1978. In early February workers from the Ghana Cargo Handling Company went on strike and 150 were sacked for contravening the collective bargaining agreement. In May the *Tro Tro* (the local name for the privately owned vehicles used for public transportation) drivers struck in protest against the lack of spare parts and poor-quality tires, the drivers accusing middlemen of selling tires at C1,400 instead of at the control price of C130 (C1.75 = \$1.00).

Medical doctors also struck and later began a "work-to-rule" slowdown to draw attention to the appalling hospital conditions which included an almost total absence of drugs, bandages, and other essential medical supplies. In May nurses, too, came out in protest against their C6 per day salary at a time when it cost at least C30 to purchase food for one meal for a family of four. Even the Musicians' Union marched on the SMC protesting corruption within the recording industry.

Akuffo's Travels

In the meantime Akuffo was putting considerable effort into foreign relations. During a 48-hour visit to Benin he conferred with President Mathieu Kerekou and they released a joint communiqué which expressed support for ECOWAS, criticized South African white rule, and restated their support for the Patriotic Front and for SWAPO. Akuffo also took the opportunity to make a special appeal for African members to adhere to the OAU charter, especially the OAU resolutions on mercenaries—a clear reference to the attempted coup in Benin in which mercenaries were said to have landed at Cotonou airport from a neighboring African state.

Akuffo visited Ivory Coast in March to enlist that government's assistance in curbing the smuggling across their shared border, especially the smuggling of cocoa. Prospects for joint energy exploration were discussed, as were plans for creating a direct telephone link between the two countries. Akuffo also visited Liberia to establish a permanent Ghana-Liberia commission, implementing an earlier agreement between the two countries. Again, a joint communiqué was issued, expressing their commitment to increased cooperation and the promotion of mutual economic activity. In May Akuffo also spent two days in Togo in an attempt to reduce the tension existing between the two countries. The problem of smuggling cocoa, timber, diamonds, and various manufactured items was discussed and, as a result of the visit, four Ghanaians who had been accused of subversive activity against Togo were released. It is also conjectured that it was at this meeting that agreements were reached which, only a few weeks later, led the Ghanaian police to cooperate in the kidnapping of two Togolese, resident in Accra, who were to be tried for treason in Lomé.

The visit which was probably to have the greatest significance for Ghana's economy after the June 4 coup was Akuffo's trip to Nigeria, where he discussed with General Obasanjo arrangements to set up a permanent joint commission to oversee oil exploration in the two countries. Obasanjo and Akuffo had been classmates at Sandhurst and it appears that they re-established their friendship during this visit as they considered plans for the return of their respective countries to civilian rule. Later, it was the AFRC's refusal to heed Obasanjo's plea to spare Akuffo's life that led Nigeria to cut off Ghana's supply of oil.

Economic Measures and the Cost of Living

Akuffo's stabilization measures were, on the whole, sensible and suggest that those who had

confidence in his leadership were not entirely misguided. It is significant to note, however, that the accompanying public revelation concerning the causes of Ghana's economic ills did more to fuel the public's rage toward those seen to be responsible than to reassure Ghanaians about the reality of positive changes promised for the future.

It was apparent to all Ghanaians that the country was suffering from a foreign exchange crisis. This crisis had developed, the public was informed, because of the "lack of any system of priorities over the past several years for the use of foreign exchange." It was learned that in 1978 the value of import licenses issued was *double* the amount of foreign exchange available. Moreover, it was rather lamely explained that the system of monitoring the repatriation of foreign exchange earned from exports had been "weak and ineffective." And who had been responsible for such mismanagement? Everyone knew that it was the members of the military governments and other officials who headed boards and corporations and banks.

Over the weeks information became more specific. One investigating committee revealed that C10 million had been lost to Ghana through the illegal granting of credits by the Timber Marketing Board for exports of timber products and that officials from four government agencies had been involved in transactions which utilized fictitious bank documents. In one case, a forged permit allowed one firm to export C21,000 worth of timber products and the foreign exchange equivalent was not repatriated. As one former SMC member and Head of the Border Guards noted in his testimony before this committee, "the sales of timber are fraught with loopholes due to the absence of a ledger book." Another committee investigating the Western Region Development Corporation found that C352,658 provided by the government to reactivate

abandoned factories could not be accounted for. Such revelations added to the festering rage of the public.

It was well-known in Ghana that a sizable proportion of the country's chief source of foreign exchange, cocoa, was regularly smuggled with the connivance of the Border Guards into Ivory Coast or Togo where it was sold for higher prices than were paid in Ghana. Smugglers had the added incentive of being paid in CFA francs with which they could purchase items that were scarce in Ghana for resale at high profits. A more problematical question, however, was the whereabouts of the foreign exchange earned from cocoa sales through the Cocoa Marketing Board. The Archer Committee was charged with investigating the board, which was later described by one member as a microcosm of the national economy, rife with corruption and every kind of abuse. The committee's reports further angered the public because they revealed officials' attempts to evade responsibility. One chief of the Cocoa Marketing Board denied all knowledge of the board's sales operation account for the first 18 months of his office. The Managing Director of CMB told the committee that it was the Bank of Ghana that should be made to account for the earnings from cocoa. One director failed to show up to give testimony when he was called. Files dealing with a cocoa-buying company that was partly owned by a South Korean firm mysteriously "disappeared." It was disclosed that employees were responsible for adulterating cocoa and that the CMB had provided large amounts of money to finance the Unigov campaign.

In March, in the hope of easing the inflationary pressures, General Akuffo took an extreme step to reduce the amount of currency in circulation. All the borders were closed and new cedi notes were exchanged for old notes at a loss. Persons changing less than C5,000 were given seven new notes for ten

old cedis; those changing more than that amount received only five new notes for ten old cedis. Those who had their money in bank or savings accounts did not, however, suffer such losses; their money was changed on a one-to-one basis.

While the exercise punished smugglers, tax-dodgers, profiteers and black-market operators (some of whom were on the other side of the border), it also hurt quite unfairly farmers and others who had no access to banks or who habitually kept their savings at home.

From the official point of view, the currency changeover was a success, resulting in a reduction of 740 million cedis in circulation. But there were many objections to the manner in which it had been carried out. There was a general outcry that the plan had not been kept a total secret so that many people were able to make hasty bank deposits before the exchange operation began. The unfairness of allowing these deposits to be changed with no loss was also condemned and the government was urged to impose a tax on all bank and savings accounts. It was noted that there had been many "changeover contractors" who charged 10 percent for their services and who engaged in other illegal practices. Police and soldiers were accused of having changed money for "big men" and for exercising a considerable amount of brutality during the two-week exercise. On the last day of the changeover, journalists were mobbed by angry crowds in Bawku and Kumasi and accused of not having informed the public of the Border Guards' brutality and the "dubious actions of bank officials' and security personnel against the masses. When the Border Guards have been shooting, killing and molesting poor defenseless and innocent people here in your presence you have ignored the tragedy" (*West Africa*, April 16, 1979). There were many arrests in connection with the currency change and three people were reported to have died of exhaustion while waiting in queues.

One can get some idea of the mood of the Ghanaian public from a report entitled, "What the papers are saying in Ghana"⁵ in which an editorial from the *Daily Graphic*, "Time to Deliver" was summarized:

During the struggle for independence we were exhorted to seek first the political kingdom and all other things would be added unto us. Almost 22 years after that event, not only has nothing been added to the political kingdom, the very existence of that kingdom appears questionable to most citizens because of the economic bondage most people have been thrown into. It is all very well for people in authority to make speeches about self-reliance, tightening of belts and other such exhortations, nobody has yet told us how a household is supposed to exist without something as basic as soap... Nobody has yet come up with a coherent explanation about why in the year of Our Lord 1979, we should rely on corn cobs rather than toilet rolls... How come that the government still maintains a fully staffed department of Price Control Unit and yet nobody takes the slightest notice about how much we pay for goods? [On the "miraculous" reappearance of scarce essential commodities at the Makola markets at such prices as C2.40 for a tin of milk, C6 for sardines, C20 for Exeter corned beef, small and large-size tins of mackerel at C2.50 and C12 respectively, St. Louis cube sugar at C14 a packet, Pepsodent toothpaste at C12 per tube, Asepso soap for C8, and a large size packet of Omo detergent at C12.

The Graphic gravely submitted that it was time "we started to reap the fruits of discipline in public life that was promised seven months ago; and if once in a while somebody felt like eating one tin of corned beef, it should not cost him half his monthly pay."

Although there was a very slight (and brief) reduction in the cost of living, *Business Traveler* (*West Africa*, January 15, 1979) could report that it now cost a traveling

businessman "only" £68 per day in Ghana — life for the average person continued to grow more difficult. Nor were there any signs that things would improve. The loans from the IMF and other sources during this period were officially earmarked for importing spare parts, machinery, and raw materials for industry; but factories continued to stand idle or produce far below capacity. Essential commodities, many of which could be produced in Ghana, were unavailable and food was in increasingly short supply. Periodic petrol shortages put a further strain on the transport system and food distribution. For those who had access to black-market currency and could travel, Lomé was the source of commodities such as soap, cooking oil, powdered milk, tinned meat, sugar, toilet rolls, etc. Hence, the currency black market was extremely active, £1 costing as much as 20 cedis. In Lomé there were no shortages and smuggled items, produced and manufactured in Ghana, could be found on sale there.

The press kept the Ghanaian public informed of other irregularities. It was learned that most of the 5,000 tons of wheat that had arrived in November 1977 as food aid from the European Economic Community (EEC) was, 18 months later, rotting at Tema Harbor and that the wheat that had been allocated and delivered had been declared unfit for human consumption. How, when there was a shortage of wheat for bread in the market, had such a waste been allowed? The public learned that the donors had been instructed through repeated cables and telexes not to send the wheat to Tema, where there were no bags or other facilities for dealing with it, but to Takoradi. Despite these instructions the wheat had arrived in bulk at Tema where it had been left to the ravages of weather and rodents. And in April an even hungrier population was informed that 30,000 cartons of fish had spoiled owing to negligence of the Tema Food Complex Corporation and had, at the order of the Ministry of Health, been dumped.

In January, as part of the economic stabilization program, tough import restrictions were introduced and 7,000 small businessmen were excluded from importing goods in an attempt to "bring sanity into the country's import trade." Later on, however, and despite the extreme shortages of imported goods for sale, the public was amazed to learn that the Tema port was *congested* with unclaimed imported goods. Importers were asked to clear their goods immediately or risk confiscation by the government: they protested that the recent economic measures had caused the congestion, in particular the new rule requiring importers to declare their sources of foreign exchange as part of the clearing process. Since official sources of foreign exchange to make purchases abroad had been all but closed to most businessmen and traders, a number of illegal methods had been used to pay for imports: foreign exchange was purchased on the black market; locally produced goods were smuggled to neighboring countries where they could be sold for foreign exchange; "under-invoicing" exports and "over-invoicing" imports which passed through official bank channels were also common practices. The fact that all these sources of foreign exchange required the complicity of officials was not lost on the Ghanaian public.

Official pronouncements on price controls were of little help to the consumer in a seller's market. Periodic attempts to enforce price controls simply caused commodities to disappear completely. Those who could afford to pay joined the prevalent "kalabule" system.⁶ As one Ghanaian described the problems of traveling during this period,

It is quite simple: if you cannot pay [in this case] at least C15 for your C11 ticket from Kumasi then you must stand in the queue and watch the kalabule going on. A bus comes into the petrol station, fills up very slowly, and goes. The queue scarcely moves. Some people pay a bit more, or they know the man

selling the tickets, or his brother, and they get the tickets first and go. With money and connections, you can travel, at best, quickly and comfortably. At worst, you can simply jump the queue.

Otherwise you stand in the sun, shuffling occasionally and watching. They say "Ghanaians are too patient, too docile." People see what is going on at the kiosk and in the little space behind the kiosk and a white wall—a few men and women come to the back windows and call for their "friends" inside. At the front, the queue does not even reach the kiosk, a man sits on a table and collects money, tickets come from his voluminous pocket. There are middlemen at the front too, the ticket contractors.

... But then the woman who has joined in the grumbling against all the kalabule sees a friend who comes and tells her he got his ticket by paying fifteen cedis to someone, and she goes off to do the same.

... In discussing the relation between the oppression of waiting and a system of oppression, it is relevant to consider the kind of exploitation and profiteering that goes on in a queue for transport again as a microcosmic example of a phenomenon of national proportions. This is where the ticket collector, like the civil servant or politician, can exploit his position for personal gain at the expense of the public.

These days taxi-owners are demanding anything up to C200 a day from their drivers. A lot of the drivers complain, and mention the kalabule price of spare parts as well as what they have to give to the police [in bribes]. Others point out that the car-owners have to pay enormous amounts to import their cars from the ports. In any case, added costs get passed down until they reach the person in the street, who has no one to pass them to (West Africa, April 2, 1979).

The Problem of Acheampong and the Military

What was going to be done about General Acheampong? This was

becoming much more than a symbolic issue for the Ghanaian public. Over the past six years, as the economic situation in the country had deteriorated and the standard of living had been rapidly falling, the public had been subjected to the conspicuous and arrogant consumption practices of Acheampong and his colleagues. Everyone knew of Acheampong's famous "green pen," his trademark, with which he authorized all kinds of large and small financial deals for his friends. It was public knowledge that he gave huge contracts to "girlfriends" and others unsuited to carry them out productively. It was widely believed that the foreign exchange earnings from cocoa which had "gone missing" had been transferred to the foreign bank accounts of his and various other military officers. It was said that at one point he had created a crisis in Accra's banking circles by having so many banknotes printed that the capital's vaults ran out of storage space. One rumor in Accra alleged that when Acheampong had negotiated for a loan in Europe, he had been told that he should use his "own" money since he had more in his Swiss bank account than the amount he was wanting to borrow for Ghana. While the average person could scarcely find food for one meal a day, huge mansions were being built in the most expensive sections of Accra. (The piece of land lying between the airport and Legon University, where there are many such houses, is sarcastically referred to as the "army barracks.")

On July 5, 1978, the fateful day when he fell from power, Acheampong—who was described as suffering from shock—was driven to the luxurious lodge built by Nkrumah high above the Volta Dam at Akosombo. Later he was moved to a rest house at Amedzofe, a beautiful mountain village near Ho, in the Volta Region. He was described by Akuffo as "a free man." At the outset of his career as Head of State, General Akuffo had declared that "our primary function as a government is to heal the

wounds of this country." In January 1979 he granted an amnesty for all political refugees and ordered the release of all those who had been convicted of subversive activity by military tribunals during Acheampong's regime. (This was the third such "amnesty" announced since July 1978 when he had taken office. There is evidence, however, that in July 1979, there were still many persons in detention who had opposed Acheampong's Unigov campaign.)

Demands from the public and from within the junior ranks of the army for an investigation into Acheampong's affairs during his six years in office were steadfastly ignored. Complaints from young officers that the public's respect for the army had plummeted dangerously and that the army's tarnished image could only be rescued through such an investigation were topics of press debate within a month of Acheampong's overthrow. Indeed, there is evidence that *even at this time* there was a threat of a violent coup led by the lower ranks. Yet, in February 1979, when Akuffo was in Liberia, he could respond to questions about Acheampong's future with comments on the former leader's "need for a rest." Earlier the assets of five of Acheampong's former aides had been "unfrozen" and, as was noted, the Constituent Assembly had indemnified the coupmakers and made provisions for their retirement pensions.

In March 1979 the Ghana Bar Association asked for an investigation of *all armed forces personnel and public servants* during the past six years of military rule. There were also demands that all loans made from the state coffers during Acheampong's time in office should be published. Akuffo's complacency in the face of such widespread discontent and his apparent refusal to do anything about these demands (which came from within the military as well as from the civilian population) led to the obvious conclusion that *the SMC could not afford to allow*

Acheampong to be subjected to any inquiry, because his testimony would incriminate Akuffo and most of the other senior officers as well.

Evidence of Acheampong's economic crimes mounted. One committee found that he, together with the former Commissioner for Finance, Dr. A.K. Appiah, had negotiated a one-billion-dollar loan from a mysterious source in France in a manner "prejudicial to the interests of the state." Another "loan" agreement with the Phoenix Finance International of Jersey Island was investigated and it was found that although Ghana had transferred 800,000 Swiss francs to this company as an insurance fee, no money had been received from Phoenix. The committee found that "improper pressure" had been put on Dr. Appiah by General Acheampong.

In May the pressures became irresistible and the SMC finally issued a decree stripping Acheampong of his military titles, his property, and his pension, and prohibiting him from entering any military bases on a penalty of five years imprisonment. He was banished to his home village. The decree charged him with committing various acts of economic and administrative misconduct against the state and the people of Ghana: he was accused of interfering personally in the economic and financial management of the nation, thus creating grave distortions in properly planned programs, issuing import licenses and contracts to friends, printing too many cedis, and taking dubious foreign loans to the detriment of the state.

It is hardly surprising that this action by Akuffo concerning Acheampong produced only further public anger. How could a man charged with such serious crimes against the state not be brought to trial? If he was guilty, then "village arrest" was hardly an adequate punishment. If he was not guilty, then he should be allowed to stand trial in order to clear his name. (Acheampong himself asked for an inquiry, denying all charges—a

stance he maintained in a press conference just before his execution.) While some Ghanaians comforted themselves that there would be nothing to prevent the new civilian government from later bringing Acheampong to trial, others pointed out that he could take advantage of the moment and flee the country. After all, it was assumed that he had sufficient funds stowed away in foreign accounts to support himself for life. Others went so far as to suggest that this might be exactly what the present Supreme Military Council had intended—that Acheampong leave the country immediately so as to obviate any incriminating revelations in the near future. Undoubtedly, the likelihood that Acheampong, with the probable complicity of his colleagues, would slip out of Ghana at the first opportunity was a factor in precipitating the attempted coup on May 15.

The Political Campaign

There were other reasons for the growing discontent. Elections were scheduled for June 18 and although the ban on party politics had been lifted on January 1, 1979, the process of organizing parties and conducting campaigns was fraught with difficulties. The first blow to political activity was a disqualification decree that banned 105 politicians from holding public office because various commissions of inquiry had found them guilty of defrauding the state or abusing their office. The list included some very highly placed individuals, including one of the SMC's own appointees to the Constituent Assembly. One commentator (*West Africa*, January 8, 1979) argued that this action by the SMC was most unfortunate, since Ghana needed the leadership represented by men included in this list. The feelings of the Ghanaian public, however, were more accurately reflected in a letter in response to this editorial:

It is pretty sad to note that some critics of Ghana who charge the people in high places with bribery and corruption and nepotism are the

same people who use democracy as a cloak to cover offenders in our society. Democracy should not be a ladder upon which certain natives should dupe the country to enrich themselves... I disagree with you that those banned are indispensable. Ghana can do away with these cads whose ignominious behaviour has plunged it into an abysmal status both politically and economically (West Africa, February 5, 1979).

That over the weeks following certain persons included in the list were "selectively" allowed to appeal the judgments and that a number of these were "cleared" did little to encourage public confidence in the impartiality of the legal process.

The SMC imposed other restrictions that were bound to hamper "conventional" campaigning. One decree prohibited parties from importing cars and other equipment for their campaigns. Later on, however, this decree was reversed and the importation of a limited number of vehicles (100) was permitted, to be paid for by the parties. Raising campaign funds was another matter in which the SCR interfered: individual contributions were limited to C1,000 and donations from aliens were forbidden. Nevertheless, as one journalist put it,

... politics and money remain indissolubly linked. In the present set-up you must be wealthy or have access to capital before you can effectively claim to represent the best interests of the nation. Two major formations in Ghana, the People's National Party [PNP] and the Popular Front Party [PFP], will have spent millions of cedis [and hundreds of thousands in other currencies] by the time the June elections come around. It was a nice idea to decree that no Ghanaian could contribute more than C1,000 to a party. But money moves in, out and about in Ghana in mysterious ways. And nowhere is the power of money in action more blatant than in a place like Ghana. So while the powerful Lebanese community

remains largely invisible, while General Acheampong remains the skeleton in the military closet, and more than ten commissions of enquiry tediously investigate the affairs of state agencies and individuals, turning up sorry scapegoats and small fry, the hallowed "return to constitutional rule" is very much under way. As the different parties deploy their loudspeaker vans and other weapons of the electoral arsenal, we must bear in mind that "democracy" is capital-intensive (West Africa, March 12, 1979).

It was alleged that the PFP received money from South Africa through contacts in the Ivory Coast and that it had paid C7 million for the building used for the party headquarters. According to other rumors, most of the PFP's funds came from the Lebanese business community and some directly from President Houphouët-Boigny, who had been an admirer of Busia (Houphouët-Boigny had sent foodstuffs from Ivory Coast to Ghana at the time of Busia's funeral.) Certainly, the parties showed evidence of having funds, although political activities were visibly affected by losses incurred at the currency changeover. In fact, it was suspected that the very timing of the changeover by the SMC was a deliberate attempt to curb the financial excesses of the campaign.

Before the end of January, 16 parties had been formed and more were to come. The Constituent Assembly anticipated that voting would be highly fragmented and they provided for this in an amendment to the Presidential Election Decree. The president was to be elected with 50 percent or more of the votes. If no candidate obtained at least half the vote, a second election was to be held within 21 days. If three or more candidates obtained the highest number of votes in the first election, and there were no withdrawals, parliament, through a secret ballot and with no prior debate, was to elect two such persons to be the candidates in the second election. If

the candidates received equal votes in the second election, parliament again by secret ballot and without debate, would decide which candidate should be president.

As far as the Ghanaian public was concerned, the front-running parties (the PFP and the PNP) were simply the old Progressive Party and the Convention People's Party with new names. The United National Convention (UNC) was the result of a split from the PFP. The Action Congress Party was led by Colonel Frank Bernasko and although he was described as having a "clean image," his chances were limited by the fact that he had been a Commissioner for Agriculture under Acheampong. Both the PFP and the PNP suffered from leadership problems and internal conflicts. The two leading candidates for the PFP, Victor Owusu and J.H. Mensah, had been disqualified by the SMC decree and their appeals were pending. Both men were ultimately cleared and Victor Owusu became the PFP's candidate for president, but Mensah was taken to court a second time and was not cleared, so that he was unable even to stand as a member of parliament. Mr. Imoru Egala hoped to be the PNP candidate, but he too had been disqualified and was not cleared. Very late in the campaign, the PNP put up Dr. Hilla Limann as its presidential candidate.

While outside observers like to see ideological differences in the parties—the PFP leaning to the right and the PNP to the left—in fact, as far as Ghanaians were concerned, neither party represented any clear ideological stance. As for the PFP program, one supporter summarized it this way: "Look at the stores, there are no goods in them. We will make the goods flow!" (West Africa, March 12, 1979). As for the PNP, which appealed to the memory of Kwame Nkrumah for support, there was a certain confusion concerning policy, as illustrated by an interview with Imoru Egala, recorded by the BBC Network Africa:

Q. What about other aspects of his [Nkrumah] policies? Do you still consider yourselves as a socialist party? Where do you stand on public ownership and things like that?

A. Well, before Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown, he had this... er... what do you call it, state ownership and private... mixed economy. I think I still stand by that. Er, we've come, our background, Ghana is socialist, there's no doubt about that. What we lack is capital to work with. And we've tried it by trying state-owned enterprises. Even up to the moment, with change of governments, we find the mess even the Army are in with state-owned enterprises. We now believe that we need good qualified people... train them and then they can run the business properly. We still believe, what the party believes is no any -isms or anything. Our people are hungry... they want food, they want clothing, they want shelter. If they can get those things then other -isms can come afterwards. We don't want to stress on these things now.

Q. You're not hostile then, in principle, to private capital and private investment?

A. No, no, no, not at all. I think... er... it's a good thing, it's a good thing once it's under control. You see, some of our people call Ghanaians capitalists... I don't see any capitalists in Ghana. They are all living on overdrafts. You see, that's the essence of the thing. There are no capitalists. We are all background socialists... all the parties (*West Africa*, April 30, 1979).

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At the final count before the elections there were 11 presidential candidates: 7 were from political parties that had survived SMC disqualifications and mergers; 4 were running as independents.

Outside observers interested in the direction of Ghanaian politics were concerned with the various party platforms in the campaign but in Ghana "Most people see the scramble for political power as a

Party Candidates and Their Running Mates

Mr. William Ofori Atta and Alhaji Mahama Iddrisu (United National Convention)

Dr. John Bilson and Mr. John Kportege Kportugbe (Third Force)

Dr. Hilla Limann and Dr. J.W.S. de Graft Johnson (People's National Party)

Mr. Kwasi Amoako Atta and Mr. Ernest Obed Andoh (People's Vanguard)

Col. Frank Bernasko and Mr. Attoh Okine (Action Congress Party)

Mr. Victor Owusu and Alhaji Yakubu Tali Tolon-Na (Popular Front Party)

Alhaji Ibrahim Mahama and Professor Mawuse Drake (Social Democratic Front)

Independents and Their Running Mates

Mr. R.P. Baffour and Nana Debrah Apreku I (the only woman candidate)

Mr. Imoru Ayarna and Mr. Kofi Kissi Debray

Mr. Kwame Nyante and Mr. Baiden Amissah

Mr. Mark Diamond Nii Addy and Mr. R.A. Quansah

Source: *West Africa*, May 7, 1979.

scramble for access to quick money" (*West Africa*, March 17, 1979). There was relatively little interest, the same commentator averred, in what the politicians had to say about their programs for the direction of civilian rule:

On the left as on the right, the problem is that of leadership, seen in many people's eyes as "sikadicious," discredited, opportunist, and with nothing to offer but promises. One person said: "You can think of somebody to vote for, then you see that he is together with some very dubious people." A lecturer in Kumasi said what the country needs is 20 honest men at the top. Others wonder if that many could be found... The point is that

in Ghana today, more people are having to struggle to survive than ever before. The economic situation is the dominant fact of life, and party politics has yet to become the issue of the day. Life is unquestionably hard for most Ghanaians, and a people that became cynical about politicians and soldiers several years ago has, at present, little time for civilian "redeemers."

The political parties were attempting to conduct their campaigns in a conventional manner in a social situation that was anything but conventional. The various commissions of inquiry were daily increasing the public's awareness of the extent to which those in authority had been enriching themselves illegally and at the expense of the society. The disqualification decree had caught leaders from nearly every party and had thrown their organizations into disarray. The general economic situation, together with the restrictions placed upon them by the SMC, made it difficult for the parties to use money in their campaigns in the "conventional" manner to win support. The issues of Acheampong and the probing of the military were not being faced directly, and the refusal to do so seemed to underline the futility of the campaigns being conducted. No one knew the extent of the economic crisis "and some people add that the mechanism for collecting economic and statistical data has broken down completely." "Ordinary people do not need statistics to know their hunger and tiredness," declared a writer for *West Africa* (March 12, 1979).

The daily struggle to live decently has become a fact of overriding importance in Ghana today. Party politics has to compete with unemployment, electricity blackouts, water shortages, long queues for transport, and a steadily rising cost of living. Ghana's problems are obviously too serious for party politics to be considered as anything more than a formal improvement on military dictatorship.

There is evidence that even in April Ghanaian politicians realized that public discontent had reached an explosive level. At a meeting with the SMC all but three of the registered political parties asked General Akuffo to *postpone the date of handing over of power* to civilian rule from July 1, 1979 to January 1, 1980! Not surprisingly, the Supreme Military Council declined the invitation to continue ruling the country any longer than they had already promised.

The Attempted Coup in May

Governments (as well as interested observers) are usually more preoccupied with identifying the *sources* of protest and revolution, with an eye to suppressing them, than in examining their *causes*. The role of students in the political developments in Ghana over recent years (as in many other politically troubled countries) has been one of increasing importance. While it is true that they welcomed Acheampong's takeover of the Busia government, they were also among the first to condemn his excesses. In Ghana, students are given credit by most everyone for sustaining the opposition to the idea of Unigov. Although the professionals and others joined in and supported the demands for the retirement of the military rulers, it was largely the students' consistent stand which resulted in Acheampong's downfall and the SMC's decisions to give up their idea of "National Government" and to return to civilian rule. The sacrifices that the students made in the process were not insignificant. On several occasions during the past three years, the university has been closed by order of the military as well as in protest by the students and these breaks have interfered with normal study, examinations, and graduation. Students have been beaten by the police and the military, and some have even died. That they continued to voice the growing public condemnation of the organs of government served to increase the tensions between themselves and the police.

Among the other issues taken up by the students during this period of transition was the outcry against the indemnification of the military. They pointed to the fact that many of Ghana's politicians seemed just as anxious as the military to let the guilty slip quietly from the scene without facing the charges against them.

The last straw for the restive population was the senseless and fatal shooting of one student and the wounding of two others by armed police in the middle of Accra during the first week of May. Student volunteers had been clearing the railway station of the filth that had collected as a result of the total breakdown of services. While waiting for transport to return to the campus, they were singing and drumming. One policeman objected to their "noise" and some provocative remarks were made by the students, who had long since lost respect for police authority. The policemen returned a few minutes later with armed riot police. It was alleged that the shots were fired in a scuffle over a gun, but there is evidence that the shots that wounded and killed came from another direction. Angry protests to the SMC came from nearly every organized body in the country. A summary of a statement delivered by the Ghana Bar Association to the SMC illustrates the general sense of outrage and the public's support for the students:

The Ghana Bar Association has called on the SMC to stop with immediate effect the issue of live ammunition to the police and military personnel assigned to duties among the public... [noting that] recent Ghanaian history was replete with police brutality against defenseless students of secondary school and the three universities, and that the impression could hardly be resisted that the police had set their faces against the enlightened and articulate sections of the public. The record of students in recent times was one of unparalleled patriotism, singular courage and selflessness in their stand against

oppression and political enslavement of the country. The statement recalled that throughout the colonial period with very few exceptions, the police were usually armed with truncheons and in the face of extreme provocation had used tear gas to disperse boisterous rioters. It was a great shame that after 22 years of independence from colonial rule that the government of Ghana should see fit to arm the police on ordinary duties with live ammunition which they readily used without the least provocation on defenseless students. The statement condemned these brutalities, particularly this last shooting incident, and said that acts of brutality was evidence of cowardice, irresponsibility and wanton disregard for human life (West Africa, May 21, 1979).

The situation had gone too far, however, for the public to be satisfied when the SMC set up yet another commission of inquiry to look into the confrontation between the students and the police. The scene was indeed ripe for civil unrest; later, the AFRC was to justify its actions on the grounds that unless it had acted, there would have been widespread riots and destruction of property.

It was on May 15 that the name of Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings was first heard over the international news as the leader of an attempted coup. Between 50 and 60 airmen had moved with armored personnel carriers and small arms to attack 3 targets in Accra. Forty hostages, including the British Military Attaché, were held for a short while before the group was overpowered. One air force officer was killed in the attempt and another officer and a number of airmen were arrested. The hostages later reported that the aim of the coup was to take over the government for two more years to prove that Ghana's army was capable of governing. They also said that the "rebels" aimed to expel all Lebanese from Ghana.

Life in Accra was reported to have returned shortly to "normal." This so-called normality included more

angry demands for those who had worked closely with Acheampong to be brought to trial.⁷ One such demand came from a member of the PFP who listed the names of those who should be charged under the Subversion Decree for economic and political crimes committed against the people of Ghana. The Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice reassured the public that it was still open to the present or future governments to prosecute Mr. I.K. Acheampong, but declined to say whether the SMC was prepared to do so. The topic was on the front pages of every newspaper.

As for the attempted coup, Major General N. Odartey Wellington, Army Commander, made a statement denying that abortive uprising in the air force was an indication of any conflict between the air force and the rest of the armed forces, or between other ranks and the senior officers. He was reported as saying that it was "purely an insurrection by a few misguided individuals." He was speaking at a ceremony in which officers and men were being honored for their gallantry in quelling the uprising and he called for peace and solidarity among the

members of the armed forces, saying that under no circumstances should a situation be created where members of the forces would have to fight one another.⁸

Major-General Wellington was to be one of those who died on June 3 when the *solidarity* for which he appealed developed among those who shared the objectives of those he labeled as "misguided."

(November 1979)

NOTES

1. For a brief review of Ghanaian politics, 1969-1978, see Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Politics in Ghana, 1978," *AUFS Reports*, No. 49, 1978.
2. "Foreign Economic Trends and their Implications for the United States," July 1977, United States Department of Commerce.
3. One study found that 18 out of 24 children examined in one rural area were suffering from malnutrition. Ewusi, K. *Planning for the Neglected Rural Poor in Ghana*, UNIRSD, January 1978.
4. When General Acheampong began in October 1976 to speak openly of a return to civilian rule, the Supreme Military Council established a 14-member ad hoc committee to consider what kind of civilian government would best suit Ghana's social conditions. After 27 public meetings in 9 regions of Ghana, it

submitted a report proposing "union government" consisting of a president having executive powers, a vice-president, and a unicameral legislature elected by universal adult suffrage. For reaction to the idea of union government, see my 1978 *AUFS Report*, "Politics in Ghana, 1978," No. 49, 1978.

5. *West Africa*, February 26, 1979.

6. The word "kalabule" was invented by Joyce Addo, who wrote a TV drama about bribery and corruption in Ghanaian society.

7. "Normal" during this week also included another large fire. This time the United Africa Company's warehouse burned down and firemen were blamed for failing once again to work efficiently. One Ghanaian accused the Fire Department of not showing the necessary "maturity." The truth behind

the repeated failures of this department in Accra, which has been the scene of so many large fires this past year, is more complicated and will be examined in more detail in a later report on corruption. It is sufficient here to say that one multinational, Chubb, supplied Ghana with two orders of used fire engines which were of 1939 vintage. On arrival they were found to be nonfunctional—wheels, lights, and other essential parts were missing. In 1979, Accra had only one functioning appliance.

8. "... This denial by the Army Commander seems to be a direct response to the suggestion that the uprising may have been inspired by the dissatisfaction with the way in which the SMC has handled the case of former Head of State Mr. I.K. Acheampong" (*West Africa*, May 28, 1979).