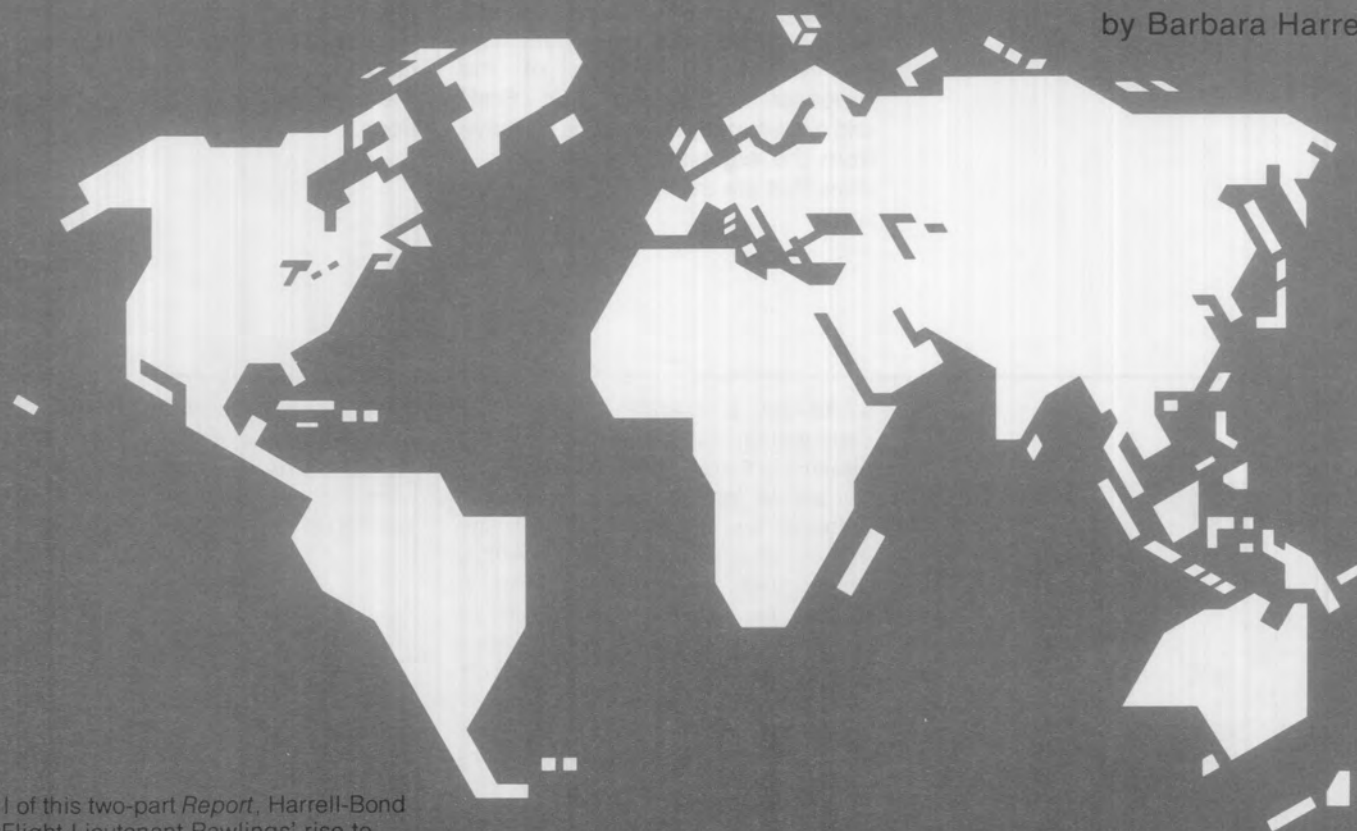


DIARY OF A REVOLUTION
"WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN"

Part 1: "Power was Virtually
Lying on the Floor"

by Barbara Harrell-Bond



In Part I of this two-part *Report*, Harrell-Bond traces Flight Lieutenant Rawlings' rise to power and analyzes his role in stabilizing the society, "cutting a real revolution right in the middle."

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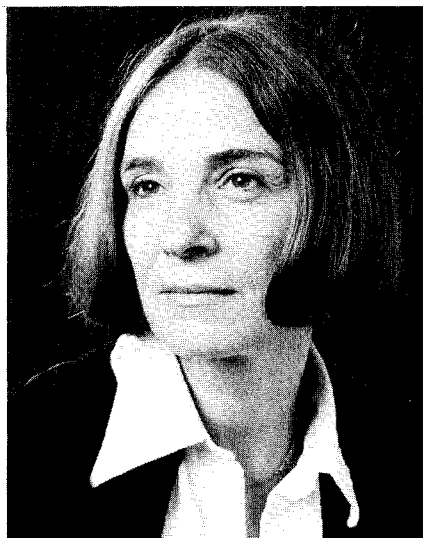
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Part I: "Power was Virtually Lying
on the Floor"

On Monday, September 24, 1979, Ghana celebrated its return to civilian rule in an august ceremony in Parliament House. The cynosure was not, however, the newly elected President, Dr. Hilla Limann, but Flight Lieutenant Jerry J. Rawlings who, as chairman of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, had presided over the affairs of state since the AFRC had seized power on June 4. The paradox of the occasion was symbolized by the contrast between the pomp and formality of the rich robes, wigs, and traditional costumes worn by the incoming civilian rulers, and the drab battle dress of the "revolutionaries" who were handing over the legacy of their 111 days of "action." As one observer noted, "It was as if there were two Ghanas present."¹

It was Jerry Rawlings who had become spokesman for the "other Ghana" and throughout the ceremonies it was he who was the focus of the crowd's adulation. Rawlings did not court this attention: after delivering his speech and passing the symbolic scroll of office to Dr. Limann, who then gave his inaugural address, Rawlings slipped away to join the ranks as he had promised he would do. But though the television cameras were circumspectly focused on the President as he inspected his first Guard of Honour, they could not avoid showing the excited crowds running after Flight Lieutenant Rawlings. Nor could the microphones filter out the general shouts of "J.J." as he marched with Captain Boakye Djan behind the last rank of the last platoon passing before the new President.

In his hand-over speech Rawlings set out clearly the context in which the

new civilian government would have to operate. The gains the AFRC could claim were modest; the question was whether or not the new government could meet the challenge they implied. As he pointed out, the AFRC had, during its short time in power, demonstrated openly what many people had hitherto only suspected—namely, that the holding of government office in Ghana had, in almost all cases, been exploited to plunder the wealth of the nation. In just a few months, however, the AFRC had managed to retrieve millions of cedis owed to the state.

The revelation of corrupt practices of such magnitude had made the Ghanaian people acutely aware that their sufferings need never have reached such terrible proportions. Rawlings summed it up:

It has been forcibly brought home to all our people that while they were starving because food prices were too high, while they risked death on falling sick because drugs were in short supply, while they were paying exorbitant rents and while they were dejected and despondent because of the intolerable heights to which inflation in the country had generally risen, there were others in the society who were dipping their hands freely into the nation's coffers so that they and their families could live in the opulence of conspicuous consumption.²

While the AFRC could take pride in having contributed to the development of a new consciousness among the people of Ghana, the message for the new government was clear: if the new leaders used their offices to pursue self-interest, they would be resisted and unseated no matter how inviolable their position might seem.

Rawlings appealed to the members of the new government never to lose sight of this new consciousness:

Never before have the eyes of so many been focused on so few, Mr. President. The few are you, the illustrious members of our new civilian administration. The many are those in the factories and on the farms, in the dormitories and junior quarters, who will be watching you, with eagles' eyes to see whether the change they are hoping for will actually materialize in their lifetime.

The AFRC, he concluded, was confident that the new government would continue the work begun. This would include the review of "some obnoxious agreements with international companies" and the reorientation of the education of children from the "rapacious norms of their elders" toward a secure future in which "class antagonisms will be absent." Their faith in the new government had led the AFRC to turn a deaf ear to those who sought to persuade them to stay on a little longer and, "We have every confidence that we shall never regret our decision to go back to the barracks."

We wish you good luck, Mr. President, and you too, Honourable Ministers and Members of Parliament. That you did not chicken out of the election but went ahead to seek representation of your people, in spite of the fact that we were on the scene, with plain evidence of our revolutionary intent, suggests that you are men of mettle. Ghana is looking up to you.

Dr. Hilla Limann assumed office under nearly impossible conditions. During the weeks following his election he necessarily cooperated with



Flight-Lt Rawlings was born in Accra on June 22, 1947 to a Ghanaian mother from Dzelukope, near Keta, in the Volta Region, and a Scottish father. He attended Achimota School from 1961 to 1966 and enlisted as a Flight Cadet at the Takoradi Air Force Station on August 25, 1967. He entered the Ghana Military Academy from September 4, 1967 to March 18, 1968 and completed cadet training at the Air Force Cadet Training School, Takoradi, on January 25, 1969.

With a short service commission in the Armed Forces, Jerry started a full military life as a Pilot Officer. He was promoted Flight Lieutenant—equivalent to Captain in the Army—on April 22, 1978.

The tall and energetic ace pilot is a voluntary team manager of the Armed Forces boxing team. He is a horse rider, a keen swimmer, and a marksman. Odd jobs are also his pastime and he is often seen in his track suit driving the forklift, lifting heavy loads at the Air Force Station.

He won the "Speedbird" Trophy for the Best Cadet in airmanship at the Military Academy. He is married to Nana Konadu Agyeman, an Ashanti, and has a daughter who was a year old on June 4, the day of the take-over. (Ghanian Times, June 21, 1979 [Photo courtesy of Ghana Ministry of Information])

the AFRC, which meant his public acceptance of the "transitional provisions" attached to the new Constitution forbidding any revocation of the punishments and other decisions imposed by the revolutionary courts. While claiming the legacy of Nkrumahism, his party was torn by ideological conflicts and power struggles were complicated by the

taint of corruption that infected its leadership. Hedged about by external political and economic pressures, and lacking the imagination to innovate, the government set about reconstructing the old institutions which had already proved themselves hopelessly inadequate. Almost immediately prices returned to their pre-June 4 levels. Confronted by the scorn of an ever more cynical public, supported only by those whose interests it could serve, the government has attempted to consolidate its power by defining the enemy—the military.

Hoping that upon one principle all Ghanaians would agree—that the people would never again allow themselves to be ruled by the military—the new government has focused attention on the possibility of another uprising from the lower ranks. By seeking to discredit the events which took place under the AFRC's leadership, the government apparently hopes to shift the public's attention away from the actual source of instability—poverty—and play upon the fears of yet another military takeover. By suggesting (with the support of Western journalists) that Rawlings would inevitably be the leader of such an action, the government has paved the way for his removal from the scene.

Rawlings, after handing over power to the civilian government, returned to his post in the Air Force, as he always said he would. He rejected all offers of diplomatic posts, scholarships abroad, and the like, which would remove him from the domestic scene. As he explained to me in early October, he was not going anywhere. He was determined to show by example that he was willing to step down. "No one," he said, "would believe that I simply want to go back to the barracks." It was the old problem: "Ghanaians always think that someone who has been high, must remain there." He wanted only to be of service, to "use what we have accomplished in the country."

Rawlings never declared himself head of state, although he served in this capacity after being drafted by the lower ranks. His humility, simplicity, his air of sincerity, and his consistent declarations on behalf of the poor and oppressed, provide an embarrassing contrast to the arrogant

pomp and circumstance of conventional elitist politics in Ghana. Only a few days after the hand-over, a woman remarked how journalists were busy creating a "cult of the President" by constantly filling the newspapers with reports of his activities. She noted how he rides everywhere in a motorcade, siren blowing: "That's the kind of thing which makes people sick of politicians very quickly." She compared Rawlings's speech on September 24 with that of Limann. The first was short and to the point; the President, on the other hand, following the same "middle class model of political manners, intoning meaningless words—everything which Rawlings is against."

Rawlings had been consistent in his public statements of support for President Hilla Limann. And "he kept himself out of the limelight after the hand-over until subjected to considerable provocation,"³ Nevertheless, the foreign press, together with his own advisers, had been busy reminding Dr. Limann that he could not hope to consolidate his leadership with Rawlings there. In December Rawlings was forcibly retired from the Air Force. In a recent interview, Rawlings was asked if he thought that after all that had happened, the authorities would just let him sit there in the barracks and be a Flight Lieutenant; he replied:

I didn't expect them to retire me at all. I was doing what I could for the good of the country. And considering that I had also played my role to contain the tempers, the anger, I thought that the last thing they would try to do was to get me away from the boys, seeing the positive influence I had on them.

Rawlings noted that his retirement was just another attempt by a rather shaky government to assert itself.

Ironically, for the future of Ghana, the likelihood of a military uprising has been substantially increased by the removal of Rawling's moderating influence within the ranks. In his speeches as chairman of the AFRC he often commented on the numerous threats to his life which came from the radical elements within the military as well as from those sections of the society which were the focus of the revolution. His answer to such threats was always that if he were killed, it would not change anything. "There are dozens of other

J.J. Rawlings in the society." It is unlikely, however, that anyone who had taken his place then would have been able or even have wanted to "cut a real revolution right in the middle."

* * * * *

This two-part *Report* examines aspects of the period when Ghana was ruled by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council with Flight Lieutenant J.J. Rawlings as chairman. Ever since the abortive uprising on May 15, 1979, through the successful *coup d'état* on June 4, to the handing-over to civilian rule in September, there has been a widespread failure among observers in the West as well as by the "establishment" in Ghana to appreciate that it was the extreme sufferings of the Ghanaian public that had propelled a man like Jerry Rawlings into the position of a populist hero. No one doubts, however, that his continued popularity threatens those leaders whose power rests on reconstructing the status quo. The inability of the new government in Ghana to bring about any quick solutions to the economic chaos into which the nation has fallen, and the more serious failure to mobilize the energy for change which the AFRC had galvanized, is a stark reminder of the impotence of conventional solutions to poverty in the dependent economy.

How Rawlings Came to Power

The unsuccessful action on May 15 described in an earlier Report⁴ left one man dead and Flight Lieutenant Rawlings and six others facing court martial charged with attempting to commit mutiny with violence and to overthrow the lawful authority in Ghana's Armed Forces. The prosecutor quoted Rawlings as having alleged that there was widespread corruption in high places, that the Lebanese control of the business sector must be eliminated, and that Ghana should "go the Ethiopian way."

The foreign press was confused. Was the insurrection a reflection of disaffection within the military against the corrupt officers, as Rawlings alleged? But Major-General Wellington had announced publicly that there was *no* ill-feeling within the military. Or was it evidence of some larger plan by the military to maintain power and stop the elections which were scheduled for

June?⁵ For those who chose to listen, Rawlings explained the limited objectives of the attempted coup on May 15 at his trial. After years of cruel embezzlement of the country's resources by successive governments, mostly presided over by senior army officers, the other ranks were in a state of seething discontent. As one observer wrote, "His damning public statements about the conduct of the very officers who were trying him, though wildly popular with the ordinary public, did not exactly ingratiate him with the political-military machinery."⁶

According to Rawlings, the aim of the action on May 15 had been "to stop armed movements, break a division of arms away from the authorities, and put them on the carpet, accuse them of what we had against them, ... elect our own dedicated officers to carry out the necessary purge of the armed forces and the system before handing over." Why did it fail? It failed because Rawlings feared the consequences of lifting the lid off the rage of the lower ranks.

Had we started the exercise around midnight which was what we had in mind, I have no doubt in my mind that most of the officers would have ended up being killed. Most of Accra would have been no doubt burnt down. Because of the animosity, the temper, the anger that had been generated in the system. It was just going to take advantage of the dark of night and eat itself up. I just could not bear the thought of innocents having to suffer with it.

Believing that if the operation took place at dawn the daylight would inhibit the ranks from losing control, Rawlings delayed the start of the action.

I asked my boys to go to sleep, to take about two hours rest. So we started off about two o'clock in the morning. I decided ... we would be in position for cordoning off the fighting units just around daylight, because people would be suffering from what I call the "daylight complex" and wouldn't go about looting and butchering their colleagues, and things wouldn't take off in town. You can feel it ... One of the drivers of the other vehicles played a trick on me when he panicked or I have no doubt that we would have succeeded

in our objective, and it was a very limited objective

At his court martial the prosecutor read out a statement by Rawlings explaining his reasons for taking action and the crowds in the court broke out in applause. The press gave prominence to his statement and this drew enormous support from the public.

I was talking about the crimes, the social injustices, the economic mismanagement that had been taking place. How only a few people, as usual, as always, ended up monopolizing the wealth of this country much to the detriment of the vast majority of the people of this country. People were starving and they still are.

I was virtually exposing the crimes of the authorities. Naturally, if I was bringing out what people were afraid to say, to talk about, there is no doubt that they were going to acclaim it. It was just too natural. You know what I had actually done was to expose the conscience of the armed forces, because they were not all part of it. The mismanagement of this country—it was just a handful of the very senior ones. Nevertheless, the forces were being blamed for it. The ordinary soldier who was not enjoying the benefits of being harassed and they were on the butt end of both the senior officers and the civil sector as well.

Rawlings recalls that he had become aware of the injustices of Ghanaian society from an early age. He saw that the majority were suffering while some children, his classmates at the Achimote Secondary School, had much more than they needed. Something was wrong and when he was around 16 years of age he began to think seriously about a solution. When he left school he decided to make a career in the air force. His mother wanted him to continue his education through university, but he decided to go into the military where "I thought that would be one place where things would be either black or white, spick and span, not corrupt like the civil sector." He was soon disillusioned: the military, he found, was just as tainted. He began to identify with the group within the military who realized the urgent need to change a society in which the economic situation was rapidly deteriorating and the excesses of corruption

becoming daily more blatant. As the majority of Ghanaians' sufferings intensified, so did the public's hostility toward the military, the lower ranks bearing the brunt of their rage.

The insults [thrown at the ordinary soldiers] here and there. There have been incidents where some of them have ended up in the market and, look, this is a very disgraceful thing in this society for a woman to take her pee in her hand and throw it at a soldier. You know, pour it on you. She is virtually telling you that you are emasculated. How hopeless you are and that there is nothing you can do about it. If you try, she will get in touch with your senior officers and you are going to be put on the carpet. You are going to end up being kicked out of the forces. That has happened, and as a matter of fact, some of the people who came back to fight for the 4th of June were people who had been kicked out of the forces when they insisted on buying commodities in the market at the controlled prices. Some of them, in fact, had gone so far as to stand over goods and ensure that these goods were sold to the public at controlled prices. This [information] got to the authorities and they wasted no time, they just kicked them out.

Thus, the lower ranks of the military identified with, and tried to alleviate general suffering, brought about, they realized, by the self-serving co-operation between those in control of the civil sector, the retail traders, and the corrupt senior officers. They deeply resented that the average Ghanaian saw them as sharing the guilt of their corrupt seniors. Rawlings's solution was not armed opposition but moral reform: purge the military of corrupt officers, enforce price control regulations, retrieve monies stolen from the state, and reinstate the good image of the military by electing officers who personified conventional ideals. Throughout his days as chairman of the AFRC he struggled to maintain the institutions of government and to control the radical elements who saw the solutions to Ghana's ills in quite different terms. As he put it,

I think in a way we ought to be given credit for being able to cut a real revolution right in the middle. That's what I am talking about. It's not play. It's not a funny word and those red

hot months are a period I will never forget....

Look, power was virtually lying on the floor and it was just a question of it being picked up by the most violent person, the angriest person, who could be the leader in those days.

In the middle of the night of June 4 Rawlings was released from prison by a group of dissidents among the lower ranks. As he explained, "They came firing around the place, broke down the iron gates and we ran to the Broadcasting House, just about 500 yards away. I mean it didn't surprise me. I knew just too well that anything of this sort could happen. So it didn't surprise me when it did happen. So we went down to the broadcasting and I said my piece." This was an understated description of what Ghanaians heard on their radios early that morning. To the background of gunshots, his voice rising at times (shown in bold) to a scream of urgency, Rawlings entreated:

*The ranks have just gotten me out of my cell. In other words, **the ranks have just taken over the destiny of this country.** Fellow officers, if we are to avoid bloodshed, I plead with you not to attempt to stand in their way because they are full of malice, hatred, hatred we have forced into them through all these years of suppression. They are ready to get it out, **the venom that we have created.** So for heaven's sake do not stand in their way. They are not fools. If you have any reason to fear them, you may run. If you have no reason to feel guilty, do not move. Like I said, they are not fools. The judgment will come...[indistinct] will be our meeting place today. **We can't sustain them**[indistinct].*

*This is what will take place in every unit outside Accra. All ranks are to choose their own representatives to the new Revolutionary Council that has come to replace the Supreme Military Council which is no more. The Ghana Armed Forces will be handing over to the civilians in due time. Elections will still take place. But before the elections go on justice which has been denied to the Ghanaian worker will have to take place, I promise you. Some of us have suffered for far too long. [And then his famous phrase which became a watchword of the revolution] **You are either part of the prob-***

*lem or part of the solution. There is no middle way. Now I do not expect all senior officers to take to their heels the way they normally do. We know those among us who are honest, some even within the SMC, the NRC, we know them. So for heaven's sake, **do not runaway.** Be the man that you are and come to work [indistinct]. Come to [indistinct] will be our meeting place where our elections will take place. Those who are looking out for our welfare will be elected. If you think you are for the welfare of your subordinate, you have nothing to fear. Elected leaders will now emerge, not those imposed on us.*

The broadcast was concluded with a list of civilians, including Archbishop John Kojo Amissah of Cape Coast, Bishop Peter Akwasi Sarpong of Kumasi, and several captains, lance corporals, and a sergeant, who were requested to come immediately to Burma Camp.

I say again, let no one attempt to run away. If not, there will be further bloodshed [indistinct]...it is not necessary. This country can solve its problems without participating in bloodshed, if they don't stand in our way [indistinct] for heaven's sake [indistinct] Further announcement will come later. Meanwhile, citizens are to carry on their normal duties.

The theme of this first speech was one which Rawlings stressed throughout the period of AFRC rule. He recognized the danger in the rage that had been unleashed. He understood its basis in identification with the sufferings of the masses, and in particular, the years of suppression by corrupt senior officers. New senior officers would have to be elected by the lower ranks, officers who would be concerned with their problems, their plight. He did not see the solution in altering the structure of the military, only in replacing the corrupt elements with officers whom the lower ranks could respect. Above all, he hoped to avoid bloodshed. Once the purge of the senior officials had been carried out, elections would be held and power would be handed over to the civilians. Clearly, Rawlings was a reformist, not a revolutionary.

However, in order to understand fully subsequent events, it is important to realize that although Rawlings was trying to moderate the

objectives and course of this second uprising, he was not at this stage in charge—"...the ranks have just taken over the destiny of this country." During the hours of fighting that day, Rawlings is said to have suddenly appeared walking out of the bush onto the campus of Legon University, located several miles from the center of Accra. He talked to three members of the university staff, asking them what was happening in the town. One of them is said to have advised Rawlings that "now that you have started this, you will have to complete it." But Rawlings wanted to know if he was going to be killed along with the other officers. It was obvious that he would have to be hidden until it was clear just what was happening in the city. He was taken to the house of a foreigner where he slept until later in the day, when the call came from Accra that the coup had been successful and that he had been nominated by the ranks as chairman of the new Armed Forces Revolutionary Council.

In the meantime, inside the city of Accra, fighting had continued. Only one hour and twenty minutes after Rawlings' first broadcast on June 4, Major-General Odattey Wellington, the army commander, came on the air to announce that the uprising had been successfully quelled:

...I am hereby offering all officers and men of the Ghana Armed Forces to return to their respective units. Steps are being taken to restore the armed forces to normalcy. All officers and men of the Ghana Armed Forces, I repeat, are to report back to their respective units, whilst steps are being taken to protect life and property. I would like to assure all citizens to go about their normal duties whilst they can be sure that all steps are taken to ensure that life and property are protected. I would also like to add that all officers and men, whether they were actively involved in the uprising or not, are to report back to their units whilst steps are being taken to iron out any grievances or any alleged injustices. Thank you.

But not long after this broadcast, Major-General Odattey-Wellington was back in the studio.

I have come to the studio once again. This time to make a personal appeal to all members of the Ghana Armed Forces. I urge all ranks who are out to

cease firing forthwith. I also urge Flight Lieutenant Rawlings and any following who he has with him to meet me at headquarters...I give you all the full assurance that there will be no victimization, no arrests of any sort whatsoever. All other personnel are to report to their respective units as previously instructed. All flights of Air Force planes are to cease. I urge you all to cooperate fully to enable speedy normalization of this mission. Thank you.

Skirmishes continued, and later in the afternoon a broadcast was made by an unidentified person warning all supporters of the SMC who had taken refuge in the Police Headquarters to evacuate the building as it was "earmarked for bombing." In the meantime, Odattey-Wellington had been shot.

At 8:30 that evening, Major-General Joshua Hamidu, Chief of Defence Staff, came on the air to announce the success of the revolutionary forces and appealed to all who were continuing to resist to lay down their arms and return to their barracks to avoid further bloodshed. Later that same evening, another broadcast ordered all commissioners who had served since 1972 and all the officers of the NRC and SMC One and SMC Two to give themselves up at the nearest police station or the air force station, Accra, immediately. The announcement was repeated several times.

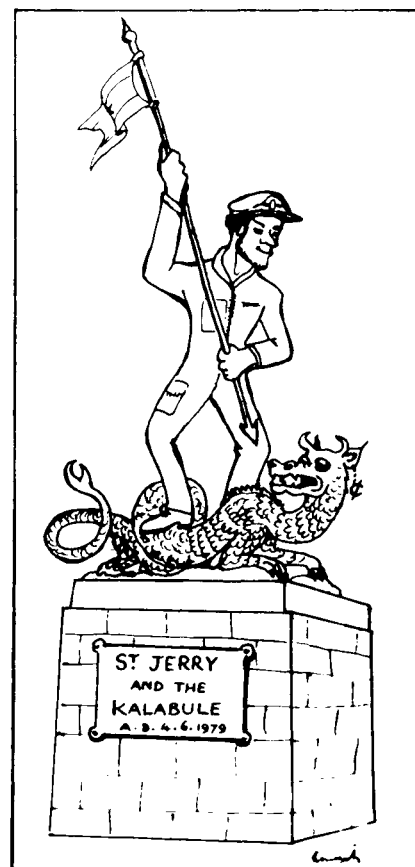
Major-General Hamidu returned to Broadcasting House again that night to announce that Flight Lieutenant Rawlings and his men had taken over control of the country.

I am happy to announce that the hypocrisy of Acheampong, Akuffo [indistinct] since 1972 has been brought to an end. All members of the said regime are to report to the air force station or any nearest police station now for their own safety. We wish to assure [that] election procedures will go on as planned. It is in the national interest, therefore [that] we are pursuing this course. We [indistinct] have suffered too long. [Indistinct] we are taking control of all [indistinct] in the country. Please stay by your radio for further announcements. May God bless this nation. The following should report to the air force station in Accra...

Hamidu's statement was repeated several times, along with a rather poignant appeal by the announcer to all members of staff of Ghana radio and television to come to work the next morning!

On June 5, Ghana and the world were informed that this was not a "standard" African military *coup d'état*.⁷ As Rawlings later put it, "...it's not the same old kind of coup going on, led by officers in order to elevate or betray somewhere along the line.... So it was very symbolic to have the ranks being part, you know, and members of the council." An unidentified speaker broadcast the following message early in the morning, and it was repeated three times during the day:

Good morning fellow Ghanaians. I am in the studio this morning to inform you that the junior officers and men of the Ghana Armed Forces yesterday successfully overthrew the last vestiges of the SMC regime. We, the junior officers and other ranks wish to assure the nation that we are firmly in control of the situation and in the meantime, an Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, com-



prising junior officers and the other ranks has been set up. Countrymen, I do not wish to recount here the maladministration of the SMC government and the shambles in which this government has thrown our economy. In the area of appointment, square pegs were put in round holes. These things are so well known to you.

Countrymen, we the junior officers and the other ranks are very much disturbed about the sunken reputation of the Armed Forces. We have felt that the SMC would do the housecleaning exercise and put the reputation of the Armed Forces on an even keel before handing over, but all attempts to have the SMC do this have failed. In these circumstances we have no alternative but to take over the administration of the country. In the period at our disposal therefore we have plans for a housecleaning exercise and we are going to act on it immediately. In this exercise, if you have been seconded from the Armed Forces to the civil establishment, you will be called upon to give an account of your discipleship. If you have been honest in your appointment, you do not have anything to fear. But if your hands are soiled, then the full rigours of the law will be brought to bear on you.

We wish to assure the nation that we do not intend to cling to power. The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council will ensure a full transition to consti-

tutional rule as planned. In this way the preparations for the elections should go on uninterrupted.

Countrymen, our actions should not be viewed as license for lawlessness. Any act of lawlessness will therefore not be tolerated and will be ruthlessly crushed. In this connection all armed forces and police personnel not detailed for specific duties shall remain in barracks. The dawn to dusk curfew shall remain in force until further notice. In case of those providing essential services, arrangements will be made to provide these services without interruption. All members of the SMC, NRC, and other public affiliated bodies put there by the overthrown government since 1972 and all principal secretaries, regional commissioners should report themselves to the nearest police station or military barracks [indistinct] Accra. We are at this juncture appealing to the civilian population to cooperate with us and assure them that they are safe to go about their normal duties.

Finally, we are urging all essential goods be strictly sold within the control prices. I repeat, are strictly sold within the control price. Failure to do this will invite serious reprisals from the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council. All borders and entry points into the country are closed. Long live the revolution. Long live Ghana.

That evening, Rawlings came on the air saying, "All we have done and will

do for this country is nothing more than our duty, first and foremost as citizens of this country and secondly as soldiers." He appealed to the nurses who were on strike to return to work: "We need them. Times are rough." He warned members of the newly formed AFRC not to entertain the idea of enjoying special benefits or luxuries from their positions. On Thursday June 7 the press could report that Accra was returning to normal. The nurses were back at their posts caring for the sick and there was "fresh hope on the faces" of those in the market. The curfew had been lifted and all airports and points of entry had been reopened for normal traffic.⁸

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council

Rawling's idea had been for a council to be formed on the basis of elections of leaders from each unit. This did not materialize, however, and, as he put it,

...there was really no time to waste. For instance, I remember the first time we had all those elected representatives from all over the regions, 200 people. I mean we were spending hours on just one item. Meanwhile tempers were very hot and something had to be done. So we had to restrict the council membership. And besides, bringing them down to Accra was taking the effective polarizing force within the units away from them, and anything could be sparked off behind them. So we had to send them back to their units and just keep the elements within Accra. You know, just about 13 of us.

At the time the AFRC handed over power to the new civilian government, there were 14 members on the council. Lieutenant-General Hamidu was named liaison officer between the AFRC and the government bureaucracy. Captain Boakye-Djan was elected council spokesman. Although Rawlings asserted very early in his career as chairman that he was not a public speaker, it was his ideas and his ability to capture the imagination of his audiences which earned the AFRC its enormous public support.



Rawlings addressing students at Burma Camp. (Photo courtesy Ghana Ministry of Information)

The Agenda. The AFRC promised the people of Ghana early elections and a swift return to civilian rule. It also promised a "house cleaning" of the military and alleviation of the sufferings of the public through enforcement of price controls. There were also strong indications that corruption would be dealt with, not only within the military, but also among sections of the civilian population, a promise widely supported by the public.

Only three days after the coup, the AFRC convened a conference with the 11 presidential candidates to consider the timing of the elections and the date for the hand-over. Rawlings opened the meeting by pointing out that what had happened on the past Monday "was not a planned thing but a spontaneous reaction of the other ranks within the Armed Forces to get rid of a system which was compounded to break down the country."⁹ When one candidate argued, supported by others, that it would be advisable to delay the elections until after the house cleaning had been completed, Rawlings is said to have smiled briefly and retorted: "I believe you have wasted a lot of money and you may need more if the elections are postponed."¹⁰ Dr. Hilla Limann was among those who suggested that the elections should go ahead as scheduled, but that the date of handing over should be deferred. The majority of the candidates supported this view. The AFRC promised it would take a decision very shortly on the basis of the advice received at this meeting, and the next day it was announced that the elections would be held, as scheduled, on June 18.

Rawlings cautioned the group of politicians at the conference.

No matter the quantity of money that's going to be pumped into this country or the systems devised, the success or failure of this system will depend on one thing—integrity, accountability, a certain degree of honesty. We've lost most of these values: things that were imparted to us by our ancestors, things adapted from the Bible, things imparted to our very own children. Then why all these contradictions when we grow up? These mistakes, these rapes, are becoming a part of us, becoming a mentality, we are accepting them as a norm. So much so that we are not

seeing them as evils any more. But you see, if you're smart, you take your time, and go through introspections. To retain your sanity, you become a very lonely man because you are not part of that crowd. You want to get it back, you want to restore the old values because they are healthier. That's what makes progress. I don't know how many people would brand you a communist for saying things like this, but these are the very bare facts of life. Man, we've been suffering. Twenty-two years after independence, you look at that guy—what does he have to show for it? You want to tackle it from the foundations."¹¹

It was at this meeting, following a regret expressed by Dr. Kofi-Awoonor, a member of the Action Congress Party, that Rawlings had not tried to do the house cleaning earlier, that Rawlings remarked that he had been thinking of this exercise for the past four years. The elections did take place on June 18, but not before the revolution had taken a much more dramatic and ominous turn.

The Executions. The local press carried notices that the AFRC had ordered General Akuffo, the chairman of the overthrown SMC, and 14 other top-ranking military officers and civilian commissioners to report to the air force base in Accra. On June 12, the papers carried photographs of a site which had been prepared for a firing squad. An AFRC spokesman explained that people arrested thus far would be tried by the military courts and those "caught in the net" would be executed at the Teshie Military Firing Range.

At the range, soldiers were guarding six propped-up stakes onto which convicted persons would be tied with sandbags piled up behind. One person interviewed about what he saw said: "I thank God that for the first time we are seeing proper revolution in the country." A second one remarked: "The offenders deserve what will be meted out to them. The revolution must go on."¹²

"Let the blood flow!" "Action, action!"—these were the battle cries of the lower ranks of the military, widely echoed by the university students and general public throughout the first weeks of AFRC rule. For those who have known Ghana over

the years, it seems incredible that violence and bloodshed were not only welcomed but demanded. Even after Rawlings had gained more control of the situation and it was known that there would be no more executions, the *Catholic Standard* carried an editorial by Father Kwabene Damua:

This revolution is not a wedding party.... This is the time to literally baptize the whole nation.... We do not love those executed less, but we love our country more.... Of course, the executions are not the only solution, but they certainly form part of the solution.¹³

To those who had listened to Rawlings from the outset of his time as chairman of the AFRC, it was clear that he did not favor the executions. On June 7 a BBC camera crew filmed a meeting of the Council at which the fate of the senior officers was being discussed. Rawlings recommended penal labor and humiliation, but others maintained that once civilian rule was reinstated, the guilty would be released, later if not sooner. In a recent interview Rawlings was asked if he had sent soldiers to arrest all the senior officers who had mismanaged the affairs of state. His reply was a firm "No."

What I did make clear was that if you had nothing to be afraid of you had no reason to run away. The point is that the soldiers, like I said, are not stupid. They are not fools. They know who cares for them, who's watching out for their interests, who commands respect.... Meanwhile, if you think you've got something to be afraid of, don't make it worse by standing up against them. The best thing you can do is just give in. Meanwhile, most of them had taken off, you know, running away.

When Rawlings was asked if he had caught up with them, he replied, "Oh yes, the other ranks caught up with them." Rawlings was then reminded that eight of these senior officers, including three former heads of state, had been executed.

Yes, had this not been done I have no doubt in my mind that the entire officer corps would have ended up being eliminated because they would have seen this as just another example of officers' solidarity, another conspiracy of the officers corps to protect itself.

During the early days following the coup, Accra was full of rumors concerning the numbers of people who would be executed by the AFRC: it was speculated that from 50 to 150 people had already been assumed guilty and put on the black list. There were also rumors that Rawlings's life was being threatened, both by those from within the ranks who were determined that the revolution would be carried out on their terms and by Lebanese businessmen who feared arrest and deportation.

While all the evidence has not yet come to light, it would appear that Rawlings and many of his colleagues did everything within their power to rein in the violence which had been unleashed, and to legitimize their procedures through new laws. A People's Revolutionary Court was set up which heard cases *in camera*. While no records of its sittings have been published, the press did publish lists of the assets of many of those arrested, the first appearing only a few days after the coup. This documented evidence of the flagrant corruption among the officers only served to further inflame the public. As Captain Okai Koi has since reported, another procedure was established to introduce some justice into the process.

In an effort to stave off the clamour from the ranks for the people who had been apprehended during the June 4 uprising being sent to the firing squad, we proposed the formation of a pre-trial investigation team in an effort to establish legal grounds for the prosecution, on an experimental basis at first. This proposal was accepted by the AFRC and the team was formed.... The duty of this team was to collect and collate information from the country's information and security agencies and from our own resources for use by the People's Court to conduct investigations, interviews, and interrogations; to prefer charges and prosecute persons who were to appear before the People's Revolutionary Court.¹⁴

Some excerpts from an interview with four of the members of this pre-trial investigation team (PIT) give something of the atmosphere of those first few days. The interviewer is asking the men about accusations that people were beaten and brutalized by the special courts. The men

admitted that some "special pressures" were applied during the interrogations by the PIT.

The application of these pressures was strictly controlled. In fact, a number of times Flight-Lt. Rawlings called the members of the PIT into his office and said that he had received calls or complaints from certain people about the brutalities meted out to some of the people being interrogated. What really happened was that there were certain individuals, like Mr. Benny Eshun, who went out of his way to make remarks in the presence of certain soldiers, such as that if we couldn't run the Armed Forces we should just scrap it because he didn't know why he was being held there and the Armed Forces owed him money for equipment he had supplied. Inevitably, this provoked the guards and they beat him up. I was there and I saw it.

There were a couple of others, mainly military officers towards whom the soldiers at that time felt a great deal of resentment. Maybe they had appeared before them on certain charges, or knew about certain cases where those officers had used them for their own ends. So even before they got to the interrogation room, some of these soldiers dealt them a few slaps and things. But as I said, I do not know of any case where such beatings produced any permanent injury of any kind throughout the period we were around.

Q: Those administering the slaps and cigarette burns, were they from Military Intelligence of Special Branch and in use for this purpose under Acheampong or Akuffo?

A: No. These were ordinary soldiers. In fact, we always had an audience.

Q: Because I know there were specialists for this.

A: No, no, no. These were ordinary soldiers who would, during the interrogations.... You must understand the circumstances leading to June 4 and the immediate urgency surrounding the trials of these people. The soldiers were agitated and raring to go. So whilst you were interrogating somebody, a soldier could just walk into the room. I must say that we kept this to the minimum as much as we could.

Q: So you officers were regulating the violence?

Captain Koda: *I wanted to add that. It was a bargain we took against their lives. We had gone forward to say that, OK. We shall do something to them, that is, if everybody agreed that we were not going to kill them.*

Q: You were telling the ranks this?

A: Well, this was the bargain we took. Jerry had been pressurized. It was not on, killing people, going on killing people.

Captain Okai Koi: *They were clamouring for the kill. The soldiers were just saying "Kill them, kill them" and "Let the blood flow." Students as well.*

Captain Koda: *We started this PIT by trying just three people.*

Captain Okai Koi: *On an experimental basis to find some legal basis.*

Q: Who were those three?

A: Colonel Kwame Baah, Colonel Takyi and Squadron Leader Tagoe.

Captain Koda: *You realize that there was a whole brief on them....*

Captain Okai Koi: *So that they had the most beating, as a matter of fact.*

Captain Koda: *We staked our lives to have this done, so the beating they had was nothing near their death, nothing near that. We couldn't stop them completely. We want to admit, we just had to allow some measure of....*

Captain Okai Koi: *We had to compromise to a certain extent but I think we got a good compromise.*

Captain Koda: *Jerry can't deny what happened on the night of June 7—ask him. We were all going to be killed.*

Q: Officers?

Captain Koda: *Yes, of course.*

Captain Okai Koi: *That was the initial cry. "Death to all officers."*

Captain Koda: *Everybody! After they realized that nothing was happening after June 4 and we weren't doing anything.*

Captain Okai Koi: *They were saying that you don't want to kill them, it's the same old story, get done with it,*

get going. This was how those people, Acheampong, Utuka and the others, got killed at all. It was pressure from the ranks....

Captain Koda: So after that we said no, no, this cannot happen, couldn't go on.

Captain Okai Koi: We took the initiative of establishing the PIT. the AFRC didn't do it. We wrote the terms ourselves and presented it to the AFRC and it was accepted verbatim.¹⁵

The pressure to kill did not come only from the lower ranks of the military. On June 13 the press reported four separate demonstrations by students in Kumasi, Accra, Cape Coast, and Winneba in support of the AFRC. In Accra, hundreds of students paraded through the streets chanting war songs. The students called on the AFRC to take quick and decisive action "if the momentum gained by the revolution is not going to be lost." Placards read, "No more kalabule," "Eye control price," "Kill saboteurs of the economy," "No compromise this time," "National Clean-up before civilian government," "Death to the traitors," "Probe the banks, the Golf car girls and the universities," and "Shoot the kalabule businessmen."

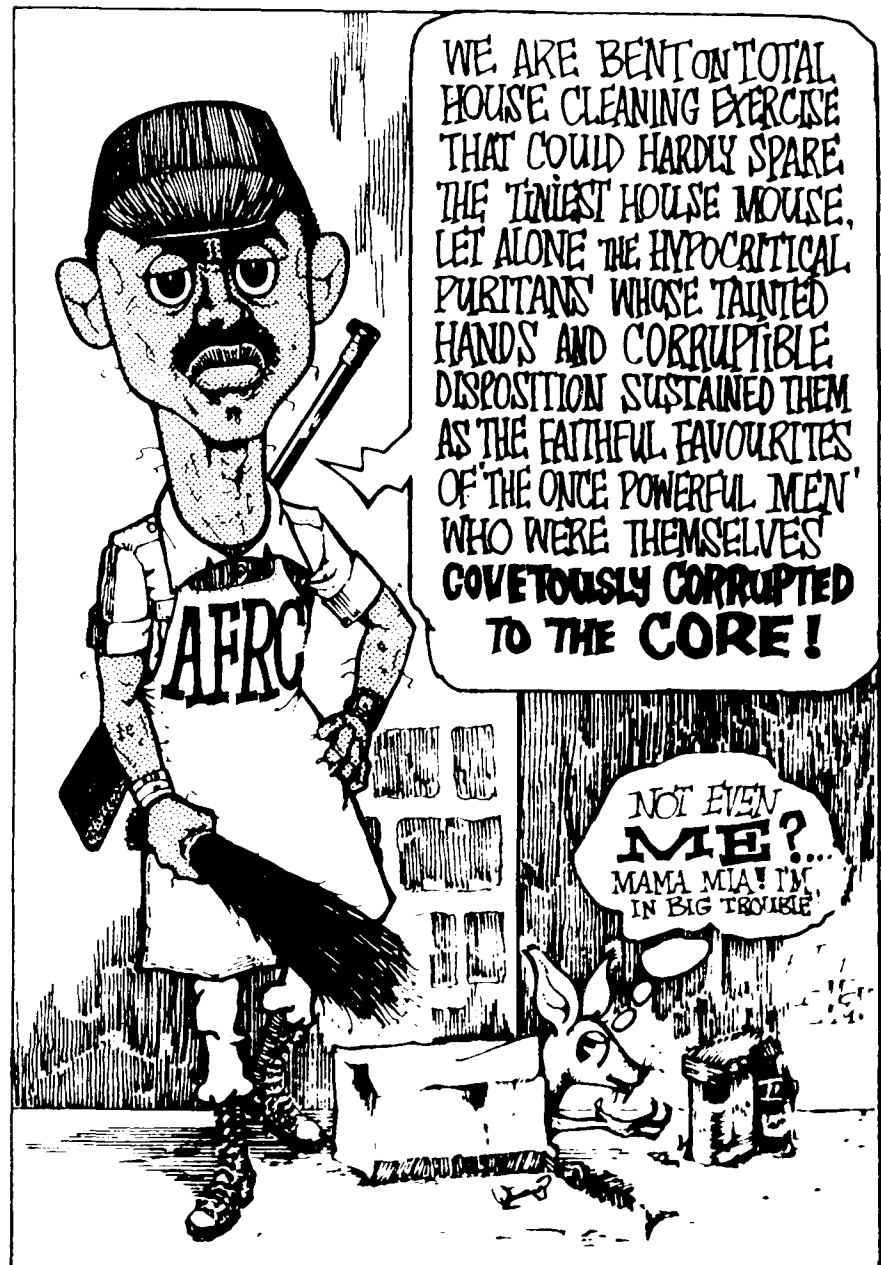
The mood expressed in the battle cry "Let the blood flow!" extended far beyond the military and the students. Not only was it shared by the vast majority of ordinary Ghanaians, even those from what might be described as the "sober-minded establishment," including religious leaders, were sadly voicing the view that things had gone so far in Ghana that a change of direction could only be achieved through just such an exercise of violent retribution against those who had "chopped Ghana small." Moreover, there were calls from all sections of the society for the executions to include civilians as well as the military. The AFRC announced that a court had been established to hear cases, pointing out that there was no cause for general alarm as every case before the courts would be handled justly. On June 16, the press carried a report of a rally in Kumasi where the AFRC had been urged by the coordinator of the National Youth Council to establish regional revolutionary courts and firing ranges in all the regional

capitals to make it possible to shoot offenders in their own areas to serve as a deterrent to others.¹⁶

A letter from Dr. Seth C.K. Agodzo published in *West Africa* (July 2, 1979) is typical of the comments one heard in Ghana from all sections of the population.

...I fully support the toppling of the SMC, and I endorse absolutely the determination of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council to wash the country clean with the blood of the corrupt. I have been telling my friends for some time now that

Ghana's only cleansing lotion is the blood of those who so badly let her down through selfishness and corruption. My only fear now is that the AFRC may not do a thorough job of cleansing which requires the execution of at least 500 people. This figure is a studied guess. Ghana is so heavily soiled with corruption that the blood of 500 can be enough only for the removal of surface dust. To remove the grime and ingrained dirt, the AFRC has to go a great deal further. Let us pray to Almighty God that they have the nerve and stamina to go the whole distance. To those of



us not directly involved in these matters, we owe it as a duty to Ghana to receive the news of these executions with the utmost courage as the good of the common man in Ghana depends on these executions encouraging future politicians to behave.¹⁷

The AFRC permitted Acheampong to hold a press conference on June 13 at which he declared his innocence of the many charges of corruption against him. While no one believed him to be innocent, Acheampong did confirm the public's suspicions concerning the reason for Akuffo's refusal to try him earlier for these charges, by making detailed allegations of his and other officers' involvement in corruption. Acheampong claimed that his own overthrow the year before had been motivated by the personal interests of the other SMC members as, at that time, they knew that he was considering dismissing some of them for their involvement in corrupt deals.

On the morning of June 16, I.K. Acheampong, former head of state and chairman of the Supreme Military Council, and Major-General E.K. Utuka, former Border Guard Commander, were executed at the Teshie Military Range in Accra. They had been found guilty by the Armed Forces Revolutionary Courts of "using their positions to amass wealth while in office and of recklessly dissipating State funds to the detriment of the nation." In a recent interview, Rawlings commented on these trials.

Q: Did they have a fair trial for these people?

A: It was impossible to carry out a thorough investigation of their crimes, because of the heat. The explosiveness of the situation at that time wouldn't allow it. It was almost as if people's minds had been cued up as to what had to be done to satisfy them.

Q: Well, if they didn't have a trial, their guilt wasn't proved. Therefore how was anybody to know for certain that they were guilty.

A: I don't know. You are the one who is telling me that they didn't have a trial.... I was saying that it was incomplete.... That all I can say is that the mismanagement by the deposed

leaders or elected leaders of this country, all black African countries, hardly ever satisfy the aspirations of the people.... You see the way and manner the underdog is supposed to react to this, to years of exploitation, to slave master-slave relationship. It [what happened in Ghana] must be understood in the light of the way the French people had their revolution, the Russians, et cetera. In other words, a lot more could have ended up being executed, could have ended up being annihilated.

Captain Koda and Captain Okai Koi have also provided further information about the conduct of the revolutionary court.

Q: Part of the objections to AFRC procedure have been that nobody knew the actual reasons why people were being shot or heavily sentenced. What was the motive for secret trials?

Captain Koda: *The actual trials wouldn't have been termed secret or otherwise. Let's take the case of Takyi, Baah and Tagoe. [These three were sentenced to 80, 3, and 95 years respectively.] A whole brief was written out and presented to the press as to what they had done, their pleas in court and the sentences they had been given. Subsequent ones, nothing like this [the press coverage] was done. This was because we were doing those things initially. It was felt in certain quarters in the AFRC that we were taking too much, even handling publicity. We were to leave that to the press section. And this press section couldn't come out to explain to Ghanaians what these individuals had done. All that came out was the following people had been sentenced to so many years' imprisonment by the AFRC People's Court. You see, there will be cries to know what they had done. This should have been made known to the public so that if the Court was wrong or right, it should have been known.*

Q: Were the press allowed to attend the court?

A: No.

Q: Quoting from Henry Djaba, the Court was set up in such a way that you couldn't see your judges.

A: Well, there was a screen behind which members of the Court sat. They asked the questions, the

accused sat in front of the screen with guards around. The only thing they can be faulted on was that members of the court could not be seen by the accused.

Q: Was the rest of the procedure normal? Was there a defence?

A: Yes, the prosecutor from the PIT could be seen by the accused. No, there was no counsel for the accused. It was a revolutionary court, I do not know of any yet that has, except maybe in the West. But then again, I do not know of any revolutionary court in the West. It was a revolution, and I think there was nothing wrong with the way the trials were conducted.

Captain Koda: *And again, during interrogation, the individual had every opportunity to submit any paper, anything, in his defence. They could ask people to come and testify in their cases, right there at their interrogations.*

Q: There were allegations of tribalism in the choice of people executed, and in some of the appointments.

Captain Koda: *We cannot comment about the people executed because we were not at the session where they were selected.*

Captain Okai Koi: *I think the criteria used for the executions was that ultimate responsibility for the rot in the country rested with the people who had held the highest appointments in government. The people who were members of the SMC I and II. The only reason Major-General Osei Boateng [Border Guard Commander] was not included was that there was not a seventh stake at the shooting range on the day they were being taken for execution.¹⁸*

Elections were held on June 18 as scheduled, and the People's National Front Party won an overall majority of 71 of the 140 seat National Assembly: the Popular Front Party, 42; the United National Convention (the party which was formed out of a split in the PFP), 13; the Action Party Congress, 10; the Social Democratic Front, 3; Independent, 1. Although the PNP candidate, Dr. Hilla Limann, had won the majority of votes, he did not have the necessary 50 percent, thus requiring a second ballot. In the meantime, and even as the final results were being published, speculation mounted in the city that more

executions had taken place. Later, I wrote in my notebook:

Five jets flew over Accra. Excitement, rumours everywhere—then confirmation that six more were executed. Akuffo, Afrifa, plus. Jubilation everywhere—back on the campus the one o'clock news raised a spontaneous shout of approval from all the dorms which could be heard all across the grounds. Many rumours of threats on Rawlings's life over the weekend to keep up the momentum. Executions were a response? Atmosphere while at times charged, still quiet and calm. Ghanaian character shining through it all. It is raining and everyone here says rain is a sign of God's blessing on the executions. I am reminded that it also rained the day of the first executions.

The six executed were General F.W.K. Akuffo, former head of state, and chairman of the SMC; Lieutenant-General A.A. Afrifa, chairman of the former National Liberation Council; Major-General R.E.A. Kotei, former Chief of Defence Staff; Air Vice-Marshal G.Y. Boakye, former air force Commander; Rear-Admiral J.K. Amedume, Navy Commander; and Colonel R.J.A. Felli, former Commissioner for Foreign Affairs. The AFRC release said that the men had been tried and found guilty by a special court set up under AFRC Decree 1979, Section 3(1) Sub-Section A-E. The offences under this decree include obtaining any loan, the acquisition of property, material, promise, favor or advantage whatsoever by any person who uses, abuses or exploits his official position in any public office. The penalty under the decree was death by firing squad, or prison with penal labor for not less than three years plus confiscation of illegally acquired assets.

International Reactions to the Executions

Response from foreign governments came swiftly. The British press described the situation as "an odious mix of secret trials and public executions" and members of parliament called on the government to "summon up the public opinion to stop the executions." Judith Hart recommended that Britain should offer a refuge to those under threat of death and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesman was reported to have ex-



pressed deep regret at the lack of tolerance shown in Ghana since the coup.¹⁹

Upper Volta, Togo, and Ivory Coast—Ghana's immediate neighbors—sent a delegation to Rawlings to express their concern: they stressed that this approach was only humanitarian, and not intended to interfere in Ghana's internal affairs. Later, however, Upper Volta refused to allow meat exports to Ghana and there is evidence that some West African countries cooperated in an attempt at a food embargo.

Diplomatic representatives from the United States, British, French, Canadian, and German embassies met Rawlings to explain what pressures their countries were prepared to put on Ghana's economy should the executions continue. There is no doubt that these moves only heightened the determination of the ranks to continue and placed Rawlings in a more difficult position in his efforts to stop the killings.

But the reaction that was to bring the most immediate suffering to Ghanaians came from Nigeria which effectively stopped all oil coming in to Ghana by reducing its credit from 90 to 30 days and demanding immediate payment for accounts outstanding. In the meantime, "technical difficulties" were given as the reason for the immediate cessation of oil exports to Ghana. Akuffo had been a classmate of Obasanjo, the head of the then military government in Nigeria. His last state visit had been to Lagos, where the two had renewed their acquaintance. More to the point, Nigeria's military government was itself in the last stages of the process of handing over to civilian rule.

Petrol queues became a permanent fixture in cities all over Ghana.

The transition to civilian rule in Ghana had been abruptly interrupted by a coup only two weeks before the elections were to take place. In Lagos, the Supreme Military Council had already suppressed numerous such attempts since Obasanjo had taken over power after Mohammad's assassination. The widespread popularity of Rawlings and the general approval of the objectives of the Ghana revolution throughout West Africa was a threat to all corrupt governments, and Nigeria had every reason to fear the possibilities of the fever breaking out among its own military. (There was, in fact, another attempted coup in Nigeria in July. After that time, all the members of the Nigerian SMC kept moving about the country giving speeches in various communities, a strategy which was widely interpreted as a means of avoiding arrest in the event of an uprising.)

In Ghana, petrol rationing was imposed immediately. At first, the limit was six gallons for odd- and even-numbered license plates on alternate days. This amount was soon reduced to three gallons, the hours of sale were restricted, and Sunday sales were banned. Within a few days, the petrol queues extended for miles throughout Accra, and more serious shortages were reported outside the city. A wait of three or four hours for your ration was normal and it was not unusual to discover when your turn came that the supply had been exhausted. Before the end of July, the queues were permanent and it was necessary to position one's vehicle at least 24 hours in advance. Not only did this crisis adversely affect transportation, it intensified

the problems of food distribution. By the end of September, there was almost no diesel in Ghana and lorries which could have hauled the food being harvested in the interior to feed the starving city were paralyzed in petrol queues all over the country.

The response of ordinary Ghanaians to such callous pressures from foreign governments reveals how completely outsiders misunderstood what was happening in the country. Indeed, this outside pressure on the AFRC to halt the executions only served to intensify the determination that the violence would continue. Later, a German diplomat admitted the mistake of the West was to say nothing while the Acheampong regime ravaged the economy, only to confound the present situation. A student demonstration was held in Kumasi in support of the "secret trials" and executions.

*They chanted revolutionary songs such as "let the blood flow" and carried branches of trees and placards some of which read: "Farming is not a punishment—kill them" [Referring to Rawlings's recommendation that the guilty be sent to penal farms]. "Down with foreign pressure," "lawyers do not pay taxes—away with them," "Nigeria hoard your oil—we shall clean our house," "let the blood flow," "A half revolution is no revolution,"... "Can Col. Slater weed? Kill him"... and "For heaven's sake kill"... The eight point resolution which was read before it was handed over condemned in no uncertain terms the unwarranted interference in the internal affairs of Ghana by countries and bodies who had never shown any concern for the suffering people of this country and who can have no appreciation of the revolutionary process which is unfolding in the country today."*²⁰

The All Africa Students' Union warned "the Western imperialists and their African allies" not to interfere in the affairs of Ghana. No economic blockade against Ghana, it said, would dampen the spirit behind Ghana's revolution.²¹

The general reaction to the oil blockade was one of scorn. References were made to the hypocrisy of Nigeria, which holds regular public executions of armed robbers. Moreover, Ghanaians asked, could Nigeria

even count the numbers of deaths which had resulted from its civil war? Ghana, on the other hand, could be rightly proud of its own record since independence as far as bloodshed was concerned. Ghanaians were reminded that there is a price to pay for the house cleaning.

And if there is a price to pay in the form of hardships caused by those who don't want the house cleaning to succeed, it means that the only way to ensure the success of the process is for the people to be resolved to accept the hardships and withstand them. This is really the crux of the matter. All the pressures from external sources and whatever internal collaborators they have are aimed at crushing the people's capability to support the AFRC to go on with its programme...once Ghanaians begin to complain about the problems being caused by, say, the petrol shortage, and the shortages of other commodities resulting from their being diverted on the high seas to other countries or being withheld at the ports of departure, the hope of the enemies is that Ghanaians would begin to oppose the AFRC.

...And those who have suffered from the corruption span the entire range of the society—from labourers to professors—and they all have stakes in the success of the AFRC's programme. So we're all in it. And we must make it clear to all the sources of pressure that they have a

*whole nation, a determined people to destroy to the last man before Ghanaians' determination to back the AFRC to total victory can be destroyed.*²²

On July 3, the students at Legon University organized a massive demonstration, another significant episode in the important role these students had been playing in Ghana's political life.²³ There was no question of their power to control university organization, and they had more than once closed the institution. More frightening for many of the lecturers who had collaborated with the last regimes, there were many calls for the AFRC to extend its house cleaning to the university.

The students began to gather around 7:15 in the morning. They were on their way to deliver protests to the embassies of those countries whose interference they most resented. The mood of the large gathering of students was fairly awesome. Many carried green branches and the placards read, "Hands off Ghana," "Imperialist Britain," "Expose the British hypocrisy," "British solve the Irish Question," "Gadhafi, help us, we need oil," "Keep your oil, we'll burn wood," "Obasanjo, who are you," "Shut up Nigeria." Some comments I overheard by three professors as I stood watching the gathering of the students, conjure up something of the atmosphere.



"Nigeria, eat your oil, we will walk."

"I'm so scared [repeated several times]. I don't think we need universities. When are the exams? Let's give them their exams and send them home. I think I should take my family to the village. I am going to take my family to the village today."

"When this thing first started on campus, we looked down on them [the students] then as drunkards and rascals. We then realized that it would grow and grow. We never expected this."

"Yes, but without this, there would have been a coup very shortly after the civilian government came in."

As I drove along in the midst of the unruly demonstration, students hissed "CIA" at my car and shouted "Go warn your ambassador, we are coming!"

Notes of protest were delivered to the Nigerian and British High Commissioners, and to the United States, Upper Volta, Benin, Ivory Coast, and German ambassadors. The American flag was torn down from the embassy, students shouting "Let the blood flow!" In a letter to the AFRC chairman, the students advised the council "not to rest on its oars" nor "allow itself to be harassed by those who hide their vices under the appearance of their opposite virtues. We do not want our enemies to tell us to respect human rights of our murderers when these murderers have not respected our rights to live

as human beings." The letter went on to warn the AFRC to "be wary of the evil machinations of the Western world," noting that it was "not for Britain or United States or Nigeria to tell us what human rights were." The students informed the United States it had no more right to preach human rights to Ghana, because the U.S. herself had never respected human rights. In the note handed to the British High Commissioner the students cautioned Her Majesty's government to "keep her hands off Ghana's internal affairs" since the British government did not care a hoot about Ghana's plight when she was forced to consume yellow corn meant for poultry and cattle.²⁴ On hearing about the incident at the American Embassy, one other university lecturer commented on this "ostentatious building, perched provocatively beside Ghana's government offices," and said he wished the students had sacked the building. As one writer noted:

While students were telling Nigeria to eat her oil and other people were calling the Francophone neighbours all kinds of names for welcoming Ghana's smuggled cocoa, soap, toothpaste, and corned beef all these years, but now, "when we are trying to do something, they are actually trying to interfere with our stomachs."

Britain and the United States were equally taken to task for their "customary hypocrisy." The normal way

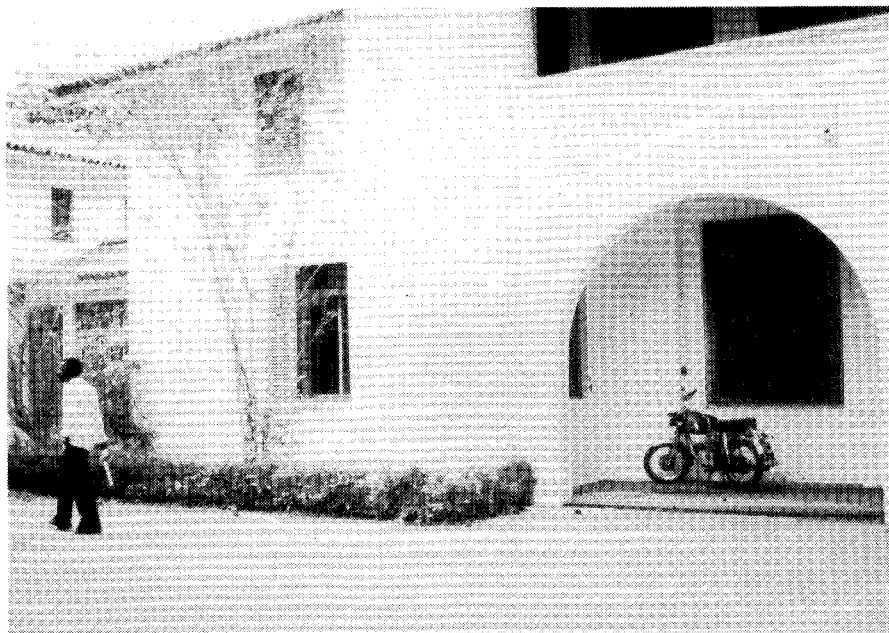
to sum up all this has been as follows: while we were going hungry and things were going wrong nobody came to help us and now we want to put things right everybody wants to stop us.²⁵

And while the British government was pleading for the life of Sir Stafford Cripps's son-in-law, another Englishwoman, married to a Ghanaian, wrote a long letter to *West Africa* (July 30, 1979), defending the eight executions by tracing the process of "de-development" and the extreme sufferings of the people, much of which had resulted from the activities of those who had been executed.

Perhaps some notes from my own observations will help to describe the extent of that suffering:

A woman in a government office begs me for some [illegal] dollars. There is no milk to feed her child. She had to wear it because she has to work. "I have to go to Lomé on Saturday to buy food." It is painful to accept the hospitality in the home of a friend. She hasn't eaten all day and there are four of us who have to share two cups of Kenkey [corn meal] with a little sauce. Walking past a food seller in the market with her miserable benches and tables one observes her customers eating the rice covered only by palm oil and pepper. I have a car. My friend has nothing in his home to use for fuel to cook for his family. We look everywhere using up my week's ration of petrol, no kerosene, no charcoal, and of course, no bottled gas. Later that day I am lucky, I stand with 84 children to get one miserable gallon of kerosene. How long can my friend's family manage on that? Evidence of malnutrition everywhere. The hospitals have no medicines, no anaesthetics. People spend most of the day looking for food so almost no work is possible. The numbers walking grow. On one corner in the middle of the town I see two women, each with a pair of infant twins. They're begging. And yet when the soldiers broke into Afrifa's house to "make an inventory," they found three gold-plated beds and 10,000 cedis worth of drugs. Can one blame Ghanaians for their rage?

Graphiti on the university buildings expressed the revolutionary spirit of the students.



But there is still order and a kind of beauty. The streets are still being swept. Not only that, there are workers trimming the trees in the park, flowers are still planted in neat rows. Hanging plants twine from the balconies of Nkrumah's "low-cost housing" flats. The few oranges, groundnuts and vegetables that are for sale are all stacked in lovely order in the market stalls.

By July 17 I am walking too. Walked to High Street along the "bush" path. Beside the path a madman, hair in thick dusty coils, only a T-shirt with one sleeve cut away as though he was wearing a chief's cloth flung proudly across his shoulder. Past groundnut sellers, who in the midst of all the squalor and poverty are neatly stacking their wares, nut by nut. Past a woman peeling oranges with a small child tugging for its last month's share from her breast. Past another woman selling onions, her child baby-talking to a few chickens daring close enough for something edible. Past a compound where cooking pots preoccupy those who stir and those who wait. On through the backway, a bar with music pounding through the open doorway—a cheeky youngster shouts an invitation to come in. Nearly to the market, the din of commerce grows louder, dulling the stench of the open sewers. Bells, bells, bells, calling customers to buy tin-openers, nuts and bolts, no food. I duck into a shop which is air-conditioned. Its shelves

are empty, but one table boasts plastic pails, bowls, and a flask. The flask is just like the one I bought for \$3.00. Here the price is 260 cedis—can anyone in Ghana pay \$100 for a three-dollar flask? Refreshed, and out on the street, an old man waits by six piles of onions, nothing else to attract buyers. Women sell combs, thread; someone is struggling to repair a hand sewing machine. I avoid another madman who urinates in the open sewer. He's fastidious though, he walks on to a mud puddle where he stops to wash his hands. Another mad boy talks in low tones as I pass.

July 26: I see a woman with a baby on her back searching through a dump site for wood, later on a small boy searching through a garbage can. Our dinner [for three] costs 428 cedis plus the taxi we were lucky enough to board. In one embassy a diplomat treats me to a long harangue on how Ghanaians cannot manage anything. They don't understand "flow charts" or proper organization, nothing works. Food runs out because no procedures are taken to ensure it's in the pipeline. No one here can organize a letter of credit [but there's no foreign exchange, I remember]. No one plans ahead, nothing is organized. But outside in the street, a petrol crisis of unparalleled seriousness is being organized perfectly and drivers aren't shooting each other. Didn't they do that in California?

Last night I spent 100 cedis for a meal. Today I talk to a civil servant who earns 180 cedis a month, and he has a wife and two children. She used to do petty trading, but now—nothing, there is nothing to sell. He wants to go to Paris or Germany to try to find work but he can't leave them. He is a sad, demoralized person: "All the troubles are from the soldiers, since the 1966 coup, they haven't had the interests of the nation at heart." How does one bear the burden of affluence in a situation like this? Kwame does the laundry. He wants me to visit his family just a half-mile from the campus. We walk. Kwame's brother is very ill. His chest is small and shrunken, and now he can't breathe properly. The family has called a diviner to find out why he is ill. I do not ask them why they haven't consulted a doctor. They want to feed me! Lunch in one diplomat's house. Huge, watered green lawns, three white-uniformed servants pour our drinks. The wife explains how Ghana is, for the diplomatic corps, a "hardship area" as we eat their imported food.

As Rawlings said in one of his addresses to a crowd:

Be wary of those who preach virtues but practice vices. . . . the society has been bled to death and the people have been subjugated to slavery because of such contradictions.

Some members of the Armed Forces risked their lives to overthrow the last military regime because a lot of evils were being committed against the people. The June 4 revolution was carried out to enable Ghanaians to benefit from the fruits of their labour. Our predecessors only took power to amass wealth to the detriment of the people. . . . Ghanaians must unite, avoid tribal tendencies and resist attempts by anyone who would try to cheat them.

And the crowds, chanting "Rawlings, Rawlings" mobbed the chairman as he approached his helicopter to leave the scene.²⁶

(May 1980)



Students demonstrating support for the AFRC (Photo courtesy Ghana Ministry of Information)

NOTES

- 1 *West Africa*, January 1, 1980
- 2 Rawlings's hand-over speech was published in Vol 1, No 1 of the official report of Parliamentary Debates for September 24, 1979. In this report quotations of Rawlings's speeches which have not been published were obtained through interviews, taped recordings of radio broadcasts, and television interviews broadcast by the British Broadcasting Corporation
- 3 *West Africa*, April 7, 1980
- 4 See my "Ghana's Troubled Transition to Civilian Government," *AUFS Reports*, No. 48, 1979.
- 5 *West Africa*, June 4, 1979
- 6 *West Africa*, June 18, 1979
- 7 In other words, this coup was not one in which one group of officers replaces another in order to enjoy the spoils of power with no significant change in the system in mind. There was a coup in Sierra Leone in 1969 in which the ranks arrested virtually all the officers and locked them up in Pendembu Road Prison. It is said they were motivated to take this action and then hand over power immediately to the civilian government which had actually been elected the year before by the promise that their salaries would be increased.
- 8 *Ghanaian Times*, June 7, 1980.
- 9 *Ghanaian Times*, June 8, 1980.
- 10 *Ibid*
- 11 *West Africa*, June 18, 1979
- 12 *Ghanaian Times*, June 12, 1979.
- 13 July 29, 1979
- 14 *West Africa*, December 24/31, 1979
- 15 *West Africa*, January 7, 1980.
- 16 *Ghanaian Times*, June 16, 1979.
- 17 This is not, of course, to suggest that everyone was in favor of executions. Serious objections came, first of all, from the new Acting Editor of the *Daily Graphic* who called on professional bodies to make their views known. But as one writer rather cynically remarked, "opposition to the executions comes from the sections of society most threatened, directly or by implication, and from the spiritual and political leaders whose authority is also threatened by such unilateral and conclusive action" (*West Africa*, June 25, 1979)
- 18 *West Africa*, January 7, 1980.
- 19 *Guardian*, June 19, 1979
- 20 *Daily Graphic*, July 3, 1979
- 21 *Ghanaian Times*, July 13, 1979
- 22 *Ghanaian Times*, July 13, 1979
- 23 For comments on their role in forcing Acheampong's resignation, see Barbara Harrell-Bond, "Ghana's Troubled Transition to Civilian Government," *AUFS Reports*, No. 48, 1979
- 24 *Ghanaian Times*, July 4, 1979
- 25 *West Africa*, July 16, 1979
- 26 *Ghanaian Times*, July 7, 1979