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THE POLITICS OF TRADE UNIONISM  
IN GHANA : A CASE-STUDY OF  
THE RAILWAY WORKERS UNION

by

RICHARD DUNCAN JEFFRIES

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the Degree of Ph.D.  
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ABSTRACT

Trade unions in Ghana are, generally speaking, fairly recent in origin and politically ineffectual. The Railway Union is an important exception. This was the spontaneous creation during the 1920's of African skilled workers in the Sekondi workshops, who, together with the harbour workers of nearby Takoradi (conjointly the bulk and most active section of the Union's membership) have since maintained an exceptionally militant style of unionism. On several occasions, most notably the railway strikes of 1950, 1961, and 1971, these workers have demonstrated their importance as a major power centre within Ghanaian society, together with a notable readiness to engage in oppositional political activity against successive ruling regimes.

The political strength of the railway workers derives in part from their strategic position in the national economy, but also from the high degree of corporate solidarity which enables them to exploit this position so effectively. Concentrated in large numbers in the Sekondi-Takoradi workshop and harbour installations, and free of serious ethnic divisions, the skilled railway workers form a close-knit cultural community. Within this community, the ethic of corporate solidarity is strengthened by shared attitudes toward the developing social structure and by the force of historical tradition.

The railway workers' political orientation is not adequately conceived or explained in terms of their association with particular political parties. The most striking aspect of their historical behaviour has been its independent character, together with the ideological continuity which has informed their relationship with both colonial and post-colonial regimes. In

some respects, this might be described as a form of class-consciousness. It differs from the classical Marxian model, however, in that the railway workers see themselves as representatives of the urban 'masses' rather than a clearly differentiated working-class, and, further, in that this mass constituency tends to be communally defined.



ABBREVIATIONS.

The following abbreviations are used in the footnotes:

GNA:	Ghana National Archives
RAA:	Railway Administration Archives
RUA:	Railway Union Archives

INTRODUCTION

Of all groups of unionised workers, and, indeed, of all 'mass' groupings in Ghanaian society, the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi occupy a place of quite unrivalled importance in the history of their country's political organisation and development. Among the first groups of workers to unionise in the 1920's, they were the only group to sustain their organisation on an active footing throughout the inter-war period, staging a number of effective (if only partly successful) strike actions. Other workers were to establish union organisations after the Second World War, but the railway workers continued to occupy a position of unchallenged leadership over the young trade union movement as a whole. Dominating the executive of the first Gold Coast TUC which they had initiated in 1945, they attempted, in January 1950, to stage a General Strike in support of Kwame Nkrumah's 'Positive Action' phase of the nationalist campaign. Although most other workers failed to respond, the railway workers' own strike action, solidly maintained for two weeks' duration, undoubtedly had the effect of harrassing the colonial regime into speeding up the process of devolution of power, and of strengthening Nkrumah's personal claim to national political leadership. Having helped bring Nkrumah to power, the railway workers also, however, revealed their preparedness to pit their strength against him. They led the resistance against the attempt of the Convention People's Party to subordinate the trade union movement, and, in September 1961, staged a seventeen-day strike which the Government recognised as constituting the most serious challenge to its existence it had had to face since Independence (1957). Again, in October 1971, in response to the TUC's call for anti-Government demonstrations the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi led the protest against the character and policies of Dr. Busia's Progress Party regime.

All these strikes were clearly of major national political significance, and, taken together, appear to indicate a continuity of union orientation which might be described as highly political in an oppositional (reformist or revolutionary) sense. The further questions remain, however: To what degree or in just what sense, were they consciously conceived as political strikes by the railway workers themselves? Were they in fact informed by any clear consistency, or continuity, of ideological orientation? If so, does this merit description as a form of class-consciousness? And how, and why, have the railway workers come to develop such a political culture or orientation? The principal concern of this study is to attempt to answer these questions. It is thereby hoped to make some empirical and theoretical contribution to the current debate over the political role and orientation of trade unions in African societies.

Broadly speaking, two main positions in this general debate might be distinguished, (though, as we shall see, there are important differences of interpretation within the first of these, and a considerable amount of conceptual ambiguity within both). On the one hand, some writers have been concerned to emphasise the strength of factors inclining African unions, rank-and-file as well as leadership, to political activity and involvements.<sup>1</sup> On the other, it has been argued that such political

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1. See, for example: Bruce Millen, The Political Role of Labour in Developing Countries, (Washington: Brookings Institution, 1963); J. Meynaud and A. Salah-Bey, Trade Unionism in Africa, (London: Methuen, 1967); M. Neufeld, "The Inevitability of Political Unionism in Underdeveloped Countries", in Industrial and Labour Relations Review, XIII, (April 1960), pp.363-86; and, for the particular case of Ghana, L. Trachtman, "The Labour Movement of Ghana: A Study of Political Unionism", in Economic Development and Cultural Change, X, (January 1962), pp.190-99.

relationships and activity as the unions have developed, have resulted rather from the pressure of governments on a reluctant, and, by nature apolitical, union membership.<sup>1</sup>

Exponents of the first view point out that the locus of decisions affecting the economic status of unionised workers in Africa is usually in the political (or governmental) sphere rather than the economic (managerial and market forces) sphere. Government is often the largest employer of labour in these societies, and thereby determines the level and pattern of wages not only for its own employees, but also, more or less indirectly, for those in private employment. Further, its general economic policies carry direct and extremely serious consequences for the real living standards of urban wage earners. (The failure to control inflation, for example, can cost labour more in three months than any union could hope to gain in twelve through collective bargaining.) Consequently, the government policy areas of immediate concern to labour cover a very extensive field. As W. H. Knowles has put it:

"Unions cannot by themselves remove all the causes of labour unrest in the developing areas. They cannot bring about industrialisation, agricultural re-organisation, national self-determination, and land and tax reforms, nor eliminate city slums, nor improve communications. Since these issues cause labour unrest and are uppermost in the minds of union leaders, the emphasis placed on political action instead of collective bargaining is understandable."<sup>2</sup>

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1. The most impressive, and influential, exposition of this view is that of Elliot J. Berg and Jeffrey Butler, "Trade Unions", in James S. Coleman and Carl G. Rosberg (eds.), Political Parties and National Integration in Tropical Africa, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1964), pp.340-81.
  2. W. H. Knowles, "Industrial Conflict and the Unions", in W. E. Moore and A. S. Feldman (ed.), Labour Commitment and Social Change in Developing Areas, (London: S.S.R.C., 1960), p.306.

Beyond such generalisations, however, there are clearly important distinctions to be made as to the mode of political action favoured or practised by the unions, and the radicalism of their socio-economic aims. Much of the literature is deliberately vague or silent on such questions. Only Bruce Millen, one of the earliest writers on this topic, seems seriously to have considered the prospect of their involvement in radical political movements in opposition to post-Independence regimes. Most writers clearly did not have this in mind when talking of 'political unionism', but rather a desire to influence, or even ally with, actual or potential ruling regimes. In other words, the unions were expected to perceive a large, predominant measure of common interest between themselves and government in the struggle for development. The tendency toward a close, even formal or structural, association of unions with government, especially in allegedly socialist regimes, was likely to be further encouraged by the ties developed between union and party political leaders in the course of the nationalist movements.

Both of these interpretations of the tendency to 'political unionism' were challenged by Elliot Berg and Jeffrey Butler in their highly influential survey of trade union development in Africa.<sup>1</sup> In those cases, they argued, where close relationships between governments and labour movements had been established in the newly independent African States, this resulted simply from the desire of governments to control the unions rather than from any real political inclination on the latter's part. This attempt to subordinate the unions was to be seen as essentially an outcome of the general centralisation of power by the new African governments in their drive for economic development, not as an indication of the (oppositional) political potential

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1. Elliot J. Berg and Jeffrey Butler, op.cit.

or inclination of the unions. The latter were generally characterised by extreme weakness and a lack of any coherent ideology or interest in broad political issues and goals. They had played but a minor role in the nationalist movements, and were easily confined to an even more restricted political role after Independence. The one category of worker which possessed the organisational ability and collective strength to play a significant political role, the skilled workers, constituted but a small minority of the African labour force, and, having become a relatively privileged group since Independence, were anyway disinclined to oppose government. Berg and Butler concluded that, "There is no inner logic that invariably gives wage-earning groups a special political inclination, or makes them a potentially strategic element in political life."<sup>1</sup>

The case of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers clearly provides an exception to these generalisations, and would appear to lend support to Bruce Millen's position in the debate. It is important to recognise, however, that these various positions were not, and are not, properly conceived as theories of unrestricted applicability, but rather as general descriptions and explanations of the most prevalent tendencies in African trade unionism. The conclusions of a single, and somewhat exceptional, case-study cannot therefore be regarded as disproof of Berg and Butler's position. Indeed, this must still appear as a far more balanced general view than that of Millen which, in retrospect, seems more a product of fear (generated by the Cold War) of spreading communism than of sound empirical research. Nevertheless, it is argued here, in attempting to refute the 'political unionism' thesis, Berg and Butler repeat the mistake

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1. Ibid, p.380.

of those they criticise in casting their argument at too high a level of generality for any genuine balance of perspective to be achieved. In addition, their thesis is characterised by a number of serious conceptual inadequacies and theoretical naiveties. What this amounts to, for our purposes, is a tendency to seriously under-estimate the extent and significance of oppositional political activity or inclination on the part of African unions, informed if not by class-consciousness, strictly defined, then at least by a denial of legitimacy to the prevailing, highly inegalitarian socio-economic order, and, more particularly, the self-enrichment of the political class.

The following case-study of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers is intended to provide illustrative material for this argument. To this purpose, it is set in a comparative context in which the nature of railway worker attitudes and the dynamics of railway union behaviour are related to those of other groups of workers in Ghana, and also to those of similarly 'political' unionists in other African states. By adopting this comparative perspective, it is hoped also to go beyond the more general point to identifying those factors which might be considered conducive, or even essential, to the realisation of a radical political orientation among unionised workers, and, conversely, the major obstacles to such a development. The present writer's scepticism as to the genuinely accurate or balanced nature of Berg and Butler's position derived initially not from the following case-study but from certain general situational and conceptual considerations. Since these were logically and historically prior to the case-study itself, it is appropriate to outline the more important of these here (though they are to be developed more fully in Section Two of this thesis).

In the first place, Berg and Butler's definition of the term, 'political unionism', is excessively narrow. It is admittedly difficult to formulate any clear, generally applicable definition, for, as they themselves recognise, "There may be profound political elements in the most humdrum of wage disputes".<sup>1</sup> But one cannot accept the definition of a "political strike" as "one whose main objectives are not directly related to the short-run occupational interests of the wage-earners concerned."<sup>2</sup> This would be to exclude those many strikes where both short-run occupational interests and wide political motivations are clearly involved. A more satisfactory criterion would be that of whether the strikers' aims extend beyond narrow, or short-run, occupational interests. Beyond this, one would wish to differentiate various kinds of political interest or motivation, rather than rest content with a blanket term. Strikes staged overtly in support of economic demands inevitably have political dimensions when they contravene a legal prohibition on strike activity, and/or the situation is such that government is expected to perceive such strikes as political actions. This is not, however, to accept government's view unconditionally, nor to suggest that such strikes are necessarily so conceived. Even less is it to attribute revolutionary political objectives to the strikers. These latter are rather questions for investigation.

Secondly, the mere aim or achievement of forcing government to conciliate popular grievances is itself of considerable political significance in societies given to such pronounced authoritarian, "anti-political" tendencies. Documentation shows quite clearly that strikes by unionised workers have generally provided the main exception to the tendency to elimination of mass groupings as an active political force by post-Independence

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1. Ibid, p.364.

2. Ibid, p.364.



ruling elites. In a number of cases, moreover - the Nigerian General Strike of 1964, for example, or those of 1961 and 1971 in Ghana - strikes have presented quite explicit and extremely serious challenges to the legitimacy and stability of ruling regimes, of a kind which no other section of the 'masses' have proved able to stage. The large majority of strike actions in these countries may not have been of such overt or serious political significance. But then, political strikes, at least in the sense of Berg and Butler's definition, are bound to be the exception rather than the rule in almost any society. It makes but very simple-minded sense to generalise as to the nature and significance of trade union activity on the basis of the majority of strikes, or even the majority of unions. Indeed, statements at this level of generality are necessarily ill-conceived. This is especially clearly the case in developing African societies which are characterised not so much by a general prevalence of small, weak, apolitical unions, as by a sharp contrast between unions of this type and a minority of relatively large, strong unions of considerable political strength and radical potential. For the roughly similar situation of much of Latin America, H. A. Landsberger has been concerned to emphasise the importance of such a distinction, with corresponding differences in ideological orientation.<sup>1</sup> It is surprising and regrettable that Berg and Butler did not do similarly in their African survey.

Thirdly, Berg and Butler's curt dismissal of ideological influences as a significant element in African unionism suggests an extremely restricted conception of the nature of ideology. It

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1. See H. A. Landsberger, "The Labour Elite", in S. M. Lipset and A. Solari (eds.), Elites in Latin America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.267-90.

is clear from the context that they have in mind not any coherently related set of attitudes, values, and goals, but rather specifically Marxist ideology, or some other such highly sophisticated, textually-based form. If one adopts a rather wider conception of ideology, then the simple truth is that there is virtually no evidence on which to base such a conclusion. To the best knowledge of the present writer, there has been very little serious investigation into the attitudes of groups of workers in Africa, the level of their political consciousness, or the degree to which they share common conceptions of a kind which lend subjective legitimacy to oppositional political activity.<sup>1</sup> It is one of the purposes of this study to contribute to the filling of this immense and critical gap in our knowledge.

Without anticipating the findings of this investigation, it might be remarked here that a number of situational considerations argue for anticipating the probability of some unions developing, or seeking to develop, as an independent and (in the local context) relatively radical ideological and political force. In the first place, there seems more than Berg and Butler allow to be said for certain arguments of the 'political unionism' theorists. Granted the very direct interest of urban wage-earners in governmental conduct and policy-making, and also the expectation, central to the nationalist experience, that government

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1. One notable exception to this generalisation which might be cited here is Adrian Peace, "Towards a Nigerian Working Class: The Lagos Proletariat as a Political Elite", (paper presented to the Toronto Conference on Workers, Unions, and Development, April 1973).

should promote economic development in the interests of the masses, then one might surely expect unions to seek to play an oppositional or reformist role where successive regimes prove elitist and ineffectual. In the context of the immediate post-Independence period, the belief, implicit in most of the early literature on African trade unionism, that many of the new governments are genuinely committed to economic development on a relatively egalitarian pattern, was perhaps understandable. Few would now be so naive as to believe this of any but a few regimes, or to doubt the rapid emergence in these societies of degrees of socio-economic inequality quite startling even by comparison with the advanced capitalist countries. Yet the belief widely persists that unionised labour, even where it possesses the necessary strength and freedom of action, is disinclined to present any kind of radical opposition to this pattern of development. The reason for this advanced by Berg and Butler, and widely accepted elsewhere, is that unionised workers, especially skilled workers, have improved their relative economic position since Independence to the extent of becoming a privileged 'labour aristocracy'.

Somewhat ironically, Berg and Butler find themselves in essential agreement here with the 'Fanonist' position of John Saul and Giovanni Arrighi.<sup>1</sup> These scholars have argued that the 'peasantry' are the main, even the sole productive force in African societies, and the really poor, exploited class.

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1. Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul, "Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, 6, 2, (1968), pp.141-69; and, by the same authors, "Nationalism and Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa", in R. Miliband and J. Saville, The Socialist Register, (1969), pp.137-88.

In consequence, they are the only group possessing truly radical, or revolutionary, political potential. The unionised workers are rather seen as developing an increasing complementarity of interests, both economic and political, with the ruling class, and thereby becoming "the junior partners to the aristocracy".<sup>1</sup> A critique of this argument, together with an assessment of the relative position of skilled workers in the Ghanaian socio-economic structure, is presented in Chapter Eight of this study. It might be pointed out here, however, that, irrespective of the precise economic status of skilled workers, Saul and Arrighi would certainly appear, on superficial observation, to underestimate the size of the economic gap and the areas of potential conflict between skilled workers and the ruling class. More important perhaps, the assumption of a simple relationship between relative economic position, ideological orientation, and political behaviour is theoretically naive in the extreme. Comparative studies in the field of labour politics point quite conclusively to the central importance of factors other than objective economic situation - education and ideological influences, for example - in the generation of class-consciousness or the drive to political self-assertion.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Arrighi and Saul, "Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", op.cit., p.162.
  2. Studies which might be mentioned in this regard are simply too numerous for citation here. The reader's attention should be drawn, however, to two particularly outstanding works: E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1964); and, for a concise general statement, Giovanni Sartori, "Sociology of Politics and Politics of Sociology", in Government and Opposition, IV, 2, (1969).

There is, finally, one further and quite crucial theoretical point which both Saul and Arrighi, and Berg and Butler, overlook. Unionised workers, in contrast (by and large) to the peasantry or the urban lumpenproletariat, do at least possess some operative form of collective organisation, and, through organisation, a network of communication. Depending, of course, on the degree to which this is effectively controlled by the rank-and-file, such organisation does seem likely (in spite of Berg and Butler's claims to the contrary) to constitute a special potential for purposeful political action.

The following study is divided into two sections, the first of which is primarily historical in treatment, and the second analytical and comparative. This is, of course, only a rather rough distinction. The historical approach of the first section is also (necessarily) analytical, and in fact directed toward the consideration of particular theoretical questions: Whence have the railway workers derived their exceptional union militancy, solidarity and political orientation? What degree of ideological consistency, or continuity, have they displayed, and how significant is this in the explanation of their political behaviour? In class terms, should they be considered a radical or elitist political force, and how do other sections of the Ghanaian masses in fact perceive the relationship between their own interests and railway worker oppositional activity? Such questions are raised in somewhat cursory manner in the first instance, however, and only in the second section developed and elaborated in a comparative and theoretical framework.

The account of Railway Union history is based on both documentary and interview materials. The former consist primarily of records in the Railway Union archives which were made available to the writer by kind permission of A. E. Forson, the General Secretary of the Railway Union in 1971. This information was supplemented wherever possible by interviews with Railway Union officials, past and present, and also some ordinary members of longstanding. These interviews (a total of sixty-five), together with several hundred informal conversations held with railway workers in Sekondi-Takoradi in April-November 1971, were the main sources of the quotations presented in the narrative to illuminate railway worker perceptions. In addition, a lengthy, structured, but open-ended questionnaire was administered to some 90 workers at the Railway Location Workshops in Sekondi in July-August 1971 by permission of the Ghana Railways and Ports Authority. This served several purposes, the main being to ascertain the degree of consensus in attitudes among the Sekondi railway workers, and the most important determinants of such differences as obtained. But it also provided an additional source of illuminating comments on Railway Union political history. The questionnaire employed is presented in full in Annexure A, while an account of the manner of its administration, and an assessment of the representative status of the sample are provided in Chapter Seven.

Nearly all of the interviews with Union officials were conducted in English, since their command of the language was generally good and the presence of an interpreter might have impeded the development of that intimacy of relationship which I sought (often, I believe, successfully) to cultivate. As regards the questionnaire survey, most of the interviews were conducted in Fante, the first language of the great majority of railway workers, and the 'lingua franca' of Sekondi-Takoradi.

This was also the language normally used during informal interviews and conversations with railway workers (and some other local residents) in the bars and various leisure-spots of the city. Here, the special qualities of my interpreter, Jonas Kwablah, are to be emphasized. Himself a Krobo, but a fluent speaker of virtually all the main languages in Ghana, he had previously been employed on two occasions by British field-researchers, and rapidly developed a fine understanding of the purposes and requirements of the research in hand. My own knowledge of Fante, which I had begun to learn in London, increasingly sufficed, as the field-work progressed, to understand most of the content of responses; but it remained inadequate to converse fluently or conduct interviews without the assistance of an interpreter. The limitations of working through an interpreter are to be admitted, but these were, I believe, reduced to a minimum in this instance by Jonas' friendly and unofficious manner toward interviewees. It is worth observing, in this regard, that every effort was made to conduct interviews in as informal a manner as possible; that Jonas and I spent virtually every evening for four months conversing with railway workers in the bars of Sekondi-Takoradi; and that some of the most illuminating oral material for this study was obtained by simply 'listening in' to conversations on these occasions.

It should be noted that the period of field-work in Ghana was one during which a liberal atmosphere prevailed as to the expression of political opinions. Very little difficulty was experienced, therefore, in eliciting what were apparently frank, and often certainly outspoken, opinions. It was also a period free of the intensive political party campaigning of election times, and therefore one in which attitudes were unlikely to be severely conditioned or distorted by the passion of party allegiances. It is perhaps also worth remark that, by 1971,

Ghanaians were generally inclined to take a more balanced and dispassionate view of the Nkrumah regime (1951-66) than they would (or could) have done in the years immediately following its downfall. In attempting to gather the full potential harvest from such fruitful conditions for attitudinal research, every effort was made to keep the restricting influences of the researcher's own preconceptions to a minimum, and to listen to what people felt it important to say. It is to be hoped that, withstanding the constraints of academic generalisation, some of the immediacy and subtlety of the railway workers' own view of their world is communicated in the following pages.



## SECTION ONE : A POLITICAL HISTORY OF GHANAIAN RAILWAY UNIONISM.

The seven chapters which make up this section provide an account of Railway Union history from its origins in the 1920's through to March 1972. The treatment is selective in that three main aspects of this history receive special consideration: the reasons for the railway workers' early development and successful maintenance of relatively strong, democratic union organisation; the role played by the Railway Union in national politics and, conversely, the role of national issues in internal Union politics; and, finally, the nature, role, and sources of the distinctive ideology (or 'political culture') which, it is argued, has informed the railway workers' political behaviour with impressive consistency over the period of the past twenty-five years.

The opening chapter deals with the origins and early growth of the Union, and, in particular, the part played therein by the various categories of worker within the Railway labour-force. The differences in style and degree of participation displayed by these various categories in the early period, (with the 'skilled workers' playing by far the leading and most militant role), continue to characterise Railway Union politics throughout the period under consideration.

The second chapter deals with the role played by the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi (the bulk and most active section of the Railway Union's membership) in the Ghanaian nationalist movement, and the nature of the ideology which informed their involvement. This ideology, expounded in its clearest and most extreme form by the railway workers' 'strong man' hero, Pobee Biney, is characterised as a radical 'populist' brand of nationalism, entailing expectations of an independent government which were far from generally shared by the leading members of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party.

Chapters Three and Four trace the progressive deterioration of relations between the railway workers and the C.P.P. regime, culminating in the highly political Sekondi-Takoradi strike of September 1961. This, it is suggested, was essentially a protest against the regime's failure to live up to the railway workers' minimal expectations, particularly with regard to egalitarian reform of the national socio-economic structure and the desire for a more open, responsive political system than had characterised the colonial regime. But there was also a strong communalistic dimension to this conflict which helps to account for the Sekondi-Takoradi workers' especial sensitivity to these general failings.

The fifth and sixth chapters deal with the attempt made under the National Liberation Council (Feb. 1966 - Oct. 1969) and Progress Party regimes (Oct. 1969 - Jan. 1972) to develop the structure and role of the TUC along lines similar to those consistently advocated by the railway workers since 1950. Given the likelihood of governmental opposition, the united support of the railway workers was crucial to the success of this experiment in independent, reformist trade unionism. Ironically, this was not forthcoming in the Government-TUC confrontation of September 1971, even though the majority of railway workers were enthusiastic supporters of the reformed TUC. A large splinter-group had seceded from the main Railway Union in January 1970, and refused to join the strike of their fellow-workers in defence of the TUC.

Chapter Seven analyses the sources of this unprecedented division in the ranks of the railway workers, and considers its implications for the general argument developed in previous chapters. A number of qualifications have accordingly to be made as to the consistency of railway worker ideology, its influence in determining behaviour, and its strength as a unifying

force. It is nevertheless clear that the split of 1970-71 resulted from a quite singular coincidence of divisive factors, and that attachment to the historical principles and ideals of railway unionism created powerful pressure for the re-unification which was eventually achieved in March 1972.

CHAPTER ONEORIGINS AND DYNAMICS OF GHANAIAN TRADE UNION DEVELOPMENT.<sup>1</sup>

Trade Unions developed in Ghana by three main processes and in response to three main sets of stimuli: (i) the spontaneous, creative response of Ghanaian workers to their economic situation and grievances; (ii) the encouragement and assistance of 'responsible' trade unions by the British Colonial Government; and (iii) the legal institutionalisation of a centralised, all-embracing trade union structure by the first independent Ghanaian government of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party.

Each of these processes might be conceived as operating toward the development of a different model of trade unionism. The spontaneous process, by which workers organise themselves in response to a situation of perceived conflict between themselves and their employer, naturally tends to emphasise the upward representation function of the union, and the crucial importance of the strike weapon in providing the membership with bargaining power. Since, in Ghana, government has been responsible for employing a large and increasing proportion of the wage-earning labour force (some 73 per cent by 1968), and private enterprises have generally set their wage levels by reference to those for

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1. It is proposed, in the interests of simplicity, to use the denotation "Ghana" or "Ghanaian" rather than "Gold Coast" throughout this study, except in the case of proper names or where the reference is historically very specific.

government employees, representation of workers' economic demands has tended to bring unions into direct confrontation with government on the most important issue of public policy: how are public funds to be distributed? In its militant expressions, therefore, representative unionism is almost inevitably 'political unionism' of a kind.

Nevertheless, the Colonial Government was concerned during the last decade of its rule, to encourage adherence to an apolitical model of unionism. The distinction implicit here was obviously fine, but, in the contemporary context, real enough. 'Proper' trade unions, it was suggested, eschewed resort to strike action, appreciating the advantages of peaceful negotiation. Most important, they did not involve themselves in nationalist, or party, politics. This purified "good behaviour" model was, of course, far from being the objective description of historical British trade unionism which it was presented as being, but the evidence suggests that its propagation met with some success.

The Nkrumah Government's model, consciously though somewhat formalistically based on the Israeli Histadrut, emphasised not only the advantages of peaceful negotiation but also the need for worker sacrifice and higher productivity. Moreover, it aimed to ensure this through legal prohibition of strike action and a rigid downward control structure. Succeeding Ghanaian governments have favoured a similar model, though generally displaying far less determination to impose it.

It is a useful starting-point to conceive of the politics of trade unionism in Ghana as revolving around conflict between these three models and their proponents.

#### Overview of the Historical Process.

On first sight, it would appear that the major role in

the development of trade unionism in Ghana has been played by government initiative, involving the imitation, whether voluntary or compulsory of governments' preferred models. It might even be thought that Ghanaian workers have shown little spontaneous inclination to organise in furtherance of their collective interests. For, although, one discovers instances of strike action and labour organisation dating from the early days of Colonial commerce,<sup>1</sup> it was not until the Second World War, and then with the encouragement of the Colonial Labour Department, that any substantial expansion of union organisation and membership occurred - from 500 officially registered members in 1943 to 6,000 in 1945, (see Table 1.1).

Superficially at least, the initiating activity of the Nkrumah Government appears to have been even more far-reaching and crucial in character. Trade union membership continued to grow to 38,000 by 1949, and then, after a temporary recession in the wake of government reprisals over the 1950 'Positive action' strike, to more than 60,000 by Ghanaian independence in 1957. But this total membership was divided amongst some 95 unions, most of which were badly organised, poorly funded, and correspondingly incapable of effective industrial action. Under the new compulsory structure established by the 1958 Industrial Relations Act, however, the leadership of the Ghana TUC introduced union organisation to virtually every group of wage-earners in the industrial and commercial sectors. This created a total

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1. The earliest recorded strike would seem to be that of the Cape Coast canoemen in 1896. And, in 1898, the first Commissioner for the Northern Territories was deploring the formation of "a trade union of a most pernicious kind" among the carriers from the coast. See D. Kimble, A Political History of Ghana, 1850-1928, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1963), p.44.

Table 1.1 : Trade Unions and Membership in Ghana, 1943 - 70.

Year Ending	Number Unions <sup>a</sup>	Paid-up Members (approx) <sup>b</sup>	Number African Wage-Salary Employees
3/1944	11	482	
3/1945	14	6,030	
3/1947	24	10,976	
3/1949	41	38,135	
3/1950	56	17,985	
3/1951	61	28,170	
3/1952	65	32,908	
12/1952	73	35,129	
12/1953	69	46,309	
12/1954	66	44,092	240,000
3/1956	91	67,173	261,849
3/1957	95	57,845	271,714
3/1958	95	40,583	286,266
3/1959	85 (24)	116,000	313,566
9/1960	24	201,991	326,664
9/1961	16	320,248	343,752
9/1962	16	320,295	350,111
9/1963	16	324,648	367,832
9/1964	16	351,711	381,326
9/1965	10	n.d.	387,643
9/1966	16	n.d.	357,031
12/1967	16	270,149	357,249
6/1968	16	338,154	387,170
6/1970	17	342,480	402,500

Sources: J.I.Roper, Labour Problems in West Africa, (London: Penguin, 1958), p.107, for early years; Gold Coast (later Ghana) Reports of the Labour Department, annual editions, 1951-52 to 1965-67 and TUC, Report on the Activities of the TUC, 3rd Biennial Congress, 1970, (mimeo), p.1, for 1967-70 figures. The estimates of the number of wage and salary earners are drawn from Kodwo Ewusi, The Distribution of Monetary Incomes in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, p.1971), p.17.

<sup>a</sup> Fluctuations in the number of unions reflect not only growth/decease but amalgamations.

<sup>b</sup> Labour Department figures include only those members the Department considered paid-up, and are therefore incomplete. TUC estimates were consistently higher, but, for obvious reasons, must be considered unreliable in the C.P.P. Period.

union membership of 320,000 by September 1961, or some 17 per cent of the total male labour force, these being divided amongst a mere 16 national unions.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, this picture of reliance on government initiative and education in trade union establishment is largely misleading. In the first place, the figure for 1943 substantially understates the number of wage-earners possessing organisation, since, prior to that year, there was no official provision for trade union registration, and, thereafter, many previously organised groups, displaying understandable caution, were slow to register. In practice, moreover, spontaneous and government-initiated processes overlapped in the growth of unions after 1943. The Colonial Government initiative was no simple matter of introducing unions where no intrinsic potential was apparent, but rather of responding with the Government's preferred alternative to indications of widespread labour unrest and indigenous organising activity. This was specifically designed to counter the threat that union organisation might spread outside of Government influence, under the leadership of nationalist politicians, or, even worse, the radical leadership of the Sekondi-Takoradi unionists.

It was, in part, fear of the latter's influence which similarly motivated Nkrumah and the industrial wing of the Convention People's Party leadership to establish unions wherever sizeable groups of workers were to be found. In addition to insulating particular groups of workers from the influence of the radicals, this policy also had the advantage of increasing

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1. The total adult male labour force of Ghana was given as 1,884,552 in the 1960 Population Census of Ghana, (Accra: Census Office, 1961), vol.iv.



the C.P.P. unionists' voting strength in the TUC and thereby their control over the structure of the union movement as a whole. Many of these new unions were in fact little more than paper-organisations, unreal, empty, and inactive at the rank-and-file level. Where they actually possessed a participant body, (and this was generally where informal organisation or potential for spontaneous organisation already existed), then the supremacy of the C.P.P. unionists and their bureaucratic model of trade unionism was often extremely fragile. Their control only became more secure when the Industrial Relations Act of 1958 buttressed their position with the legal authority of the state. In any case, and even where government initiative was clearly crucial in the original establishment of union organisation, the rank-and-file showed themselves quite capable, after the coup d'etat of 1966, of taking over such tutelary organisation and moulding it to express their own, rather than government's conception of union operation and objectives. With the post-Independence development of conditions more favourable to labour solidarity and militancy - e.g. a higher level of job commitment, and declining living standards - this conception was increasingly akin to the conflict-orientated, political unionism of the one group who had spontaneously developed strong union organisation in the inter-War period, the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi.

If, then, the initiating and educative activity of government was less crucial and less effective than has sometimes been suggested, why was union development so limited and weak in the pre-War period? <sup>1</sup> A number of factors must be

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1. See, for example, Ioan Davies, African Trade Unions, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966). pp.108-10.

considered here. In the first place, there simply were not many non-agricultural wage-earners prior to the huge expansion of employment opportunities during and after the Second World War. In the second place, those who did work for wages, with the exception of the mineworkers and the railway and harbour workers, were generally employed in very small businesses or highly dispersed amongst the various branches of the civil service and the expatriate firms. Such a situation was not congenial to the development of collective organisation or a sense of labour solidarity. Thirdly, even where large concentrations of workers were to be found, in the mining townships for example, the short-term migrant character of much of the labour-force militated against the growth of interest in trade union activity. (This, of course, is the one element of truth in the suggestion that trade unionism did not come naturally to Ghanaian workers.) Collective organisation of the labour-force was also made difficult by its ethnically heterogeneous character, and by the tendency for occupational and ethnic divisions to coincide. Finally, the labour surplus conditions which obtained in the Gold Coast after 1925 placed wage-earners in an extremely weak bargaining position. Employers could dismiss 'agitators' who tried to organise their fellow-workers, or even whole groups of workers, without fear of being unable to replace them. It was in this more limited sense that the change in Colonial Government policy in the early 1940's was really crucial to the development of trade unions: without some form of legal or political protection, workers could not hope to organise successfully in prevailing market conditions.

The Growth of a Wage Labour Force, and Early Instances of Collective Action.

Before 1874, when dealing in domestic slaves was abolished and existing slaves were declared emancipated, wage-earning existed only in the then very restricted sphere of government and European commercial and missionary employment. The remarkable expansion of cocoa-farming towards the turn of the century involved the employment of increasing numbers of hired labourers, most of whom migrated seasonally from outside the area of cultivation - i.e. the Colony area of Southern Gold Coast and, later, Ashanti. The highly scattered character of this labour force, however, together with the great variation in the terms of its hire, meant that it possessed little potential for collective action.<sup>1</sup> More important from the perspective of trade union development was the fact that this expansion of the cocoa export trade, in turn resulted in the development of communications, commerce and government administration.<sup>2</sup> These new employment opportunities, located mainly in the coastal towns, were reflected in the 1891 Census figures, although these cannot be taken as either accurate

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1. On the growth, and terms of hire, of the agricultural labour force, see D. Kimble, op.cit.p.40; and A. B. Holmes IV, "Economic and Political Organisations in the Gold Coast: 1920-45", (Ph.D. thesis, Social Science Faculty of the University of Chicago, 1972), pp.49-53.
  2. G. B. Kay has recently argued that the railway network of Ghana was constructed with less concern for cocoa, than for gold exportation. G. B. Kay The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana: A Collection of Documents and Statistics, 1900 - 1960, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.20. While this may have been true for the first line constructed, subsequent lines appear to have been specifically geared to the expansion of cocoa cultivation.

or exhaustive<sup>1</sup> :

Farmers and agricultural labourers	3,510
Mechanics	3,091
Civil Servants	1,376

The 1911 Census gave figures for twenty-nine Colony towns, which are obviously not comparable with those for sixteen in 1891, but nevertheless informative<sup>2</sup> :

Farmers	8,802
Labourers	5,198
Clerks	2,349
Carpenters	1,445
Bricklayers and Masons	557
Engine drivers	15

The 1921 Census figures record the continuing expansion of urban employment, though, again, these are not strictly comparable with the earlier figures, and probably incomplete<sup>3</sup> :

Occupations of Men in 32 Main Towns.

Farmers	21,272	Blacksmiths	825
Clerks	12,273	Goldsmiths	802
Fishermen & Boatmen	9,502	Motor drivers	536
Carriers & Labourers	8,870	Teachers	458
Traders	5,555	Fitters & Mechanics	347
Domestic Servants	3,243	Printers	120
Carpenters	2,159	Ministers of religion	66
Tailors	1,204	Lawyers	50
Bricklayers & Masons	1,024	Doctors	7

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1. Cited in D. Kimble, op.cit., p.40.

2. Ibid., p.41.

3. Ibid., p.41.

These figures did not, incidentally, include the mineworkers, by then the largest concentrated labour force in the Gold Coast, (estimated at over 10,000 in 1921).

Several groups of these wage-earners were stimulated to collective action by the economic conditions of 1918-21. A boom in cocoa production coincided with an extension of public works programmes to precipitate a serious shortage of labour.<sup>1</sup> Urban and industrial employers were most seriously affected as workers rushed back to the cocoa farms. At the same time, wages for urban workers generally failed to keep pace with the rise in prices.<sup>2</sup> Recognising their increased bargaining power, and dissatisfied with the falling value of their wages, the Artisans and Labourers of Accra founded a Union and went on strike when their demand for a wage increase was refused.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, the Civil Service clerks elected spokesmen to articulate their grievances, a strategy which met with success when they were awarded a salary increase in November 1921.

It seems likely that this latter award sparked off the second recorded African railway workers' strike. The first had occurred in June 1918 following the granting of a War Bonus to European and Permanent African Staff in the Civil Service in belated recognition of the war-time increase in the cost of living.<sup>4</sup> Skilled and unskilled manual workers were not included

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1. See J. I. Roper, Labour Problems in West Africa, (London: Penguin, 1958), p.30.
  2. The Government clerks claimed, in 1920, that the purchasing power of the £ had fallen by more than 50 per cent in the previous eight years. See Kimble, op.cit., p.45.
  3. J. I. Roper, op.cit., pp.52-54.
  4. L. A. Lacy, "A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana", (M.A. thesis, African Studies Institute at the University of Ghana, Legon, 1965), p.45.

in this award, it being argued that the greatest increases had occurred in the prices of imported goods which only the 'permanent' staff were expected to consume. Incensed at such discrimination, the artisans and labourers in the Railway Administration downed tools for a week, but with no success save an assurance that wage rates would be reviewed in the near future. By the end of 1921, these manual workers were understandably impatient at government's inaction, and in December they staged another week-long strike. Management refused to negotiate. But Governor Guggisberg intervened to appoint a committee of enquiry which reported in favour of a wage increase for all lower-paid servants of the Government.<sup>1</sup>

The fact that no durable union organisation emerged from this period was largely due to Guggisberg's careful handling, and the growing prosperity which wage-earners experienced in the mid-20's as prices declined from their 1921 peak. But, also, there were few groups of workers, with the exception of the railway and mines' workers, concentrated in sufficiently large numbers to develop a sense of solidarity and maintain their organisation in the face of official hostility. The skilled railway workers were in the process of developing such a sense of common interest and social identity, and this soon led them to form a union. As this case illustrated, unionisation was not necessarily a simple reaction to objectively declining financial circumstances. In the case of the mineworkers, on the other hand, similarly concentrated in large numbers in the mine townships, factors other than economic prosperity were to prevent their establishing a union during the 1920's. And these

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1. Guggisberg's initiative should probably be seen as an attempt to restore Government's competitive position as an employer of labour, rather than simple capitulation to the railway workers' demands.

factors were to continue to undermine all attempts at collective organisation even when this was most obviously called for by the situation of declining real wage levels which obtained in the 1930's.

Obstacles to Unionisation amongst the Mineworkers.

For the extraction of the Gold Coast's mineral deposits, mainly located in the Western Region of the territory, the European Mining Companies principally required large supplies of African unskilled labour.<sup>1</sup> Southern Ghanaians proved reluctant to do such work for cultural reasons, associating unskilled labouring with slavery, as much as out of lack of interest in the low rates of remuneration.<sup>2</sup> Since the Colonial Government would not permit the forced recruitment of labour by the Companies, at least not in any overt manner, a major proportion of the mines' work force had instead to be drawn from the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast or from the French colonies. During the period before the mid-1920's, that is to say before transportation improved and the cash economy extended deep into the hinterland, labour had to be induced, if not forced, out of such areas by the

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1. According to Kuczynski, the mines employed more than 19,000 Africans by 1917, though this figure subsequently fell to 11,000 in 1920, and proceeded to fluctuate between 10,000 and 15,000 during the rest of the decade. R. Kuczynski, Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire, Vol.I: West Africa, (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), p.425.
  2. The rulers of the Ashanti Empire had in fact used a large slave labour-force to mine for gold during the first half of the previous century. See Ivor Wilks, "Ashanti Government" in D. Forde and P. Kaberry (ed.), West African Kingdoms in the Nineteenth Century, (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), pp.206-38.

payment of "conscience-money" to the chiefs.<sup>1</sup> From approximately 1925 onwards, in contrast, the growing need and desire of northern youngmen for cash in hand resulted in a swelling supply of 'voluntary' labour which rapidly outran demand. This situation of an abundant supply of cheap labour clearly placed the mines' employees in an extremely weak bargaining position.

As late as 1939, some 54 per cent of the mines' workforce continued to come from the Northern Territories, Northern Nigeria, or the French colonies.<sup>2</sup> These workers generally aimed merely to save a certain financial 'target', and then to return home. Those who stayed longer in Southern Ghana tended to change their job frequently, and the Mining Companies, adapting themselves to this fact, operated a card-system by which an employee could have a friend or relative substitute for him. In consequence, the Mines' labour force was, (and has remained), characterised by an extremely high turnover rate. By 1940, for example, annual turnover in the Mines amounted to nearly 80 per cent of the labour force, and about 40 per cent of those leaving the Mines had been employed for less than six months.<sup>3</sup> This

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1. See Elliot Berg, "The Development of a Labour Force in Sub-Saharan Africa", in Economic Development and Cultural Change, XIII (1965), pp. 394-412 and for the particular case of Ghana, A. B. Holmes IV, "Economic and Political Organisations in the Gold Coast: 1920-45", (Ph.D. thesis, Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Chicago, 1972), 337-40.
  2. J. I. Roper, op.cit., p.35.
  3. A. J. Murray and J. A. Crocket, Report on the Prevalence of Silicosis and Tuberculosis among Mine workers in the Gold Coast, (Accra: Government Printing office, 1941), p.13. Tenure tended to be associated with skill level, 23 per cent of blast boys, for example, having served five or more years continuously.



did not, of course, make either for industrial efficiency or for strong labour institutions. As Richard Wright has remarked, "The lessons learned last year are washed down the drain of tribal life."<sup>1</sup>

Additional obstacles faced those who might have wished to organise the mineworkers for united action. The migrant northern workers organised themselves in the Mine townships in a modified form of the traditional tribal system, dividing into small groups under a 'headman', who acted as their intermediary with the Management.<sup>2</sup> This arrangement had to be radically transformed, if not entirely destroyed, before a more efficient, centralised organisation could be developed.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, while most of the underground and unskilled labour was supplied by northern Ghanaians, or aliens, the majority of skilled workers were from the south. This tendency for ethnic and cultural divisions to coincide with occupational divisions exacerbated sectional jealousies and vitiated labour solidarity.

In spite of these several obstacles, isolated strike incidents did occur in the mines, the first recorded one being in 1924, and there were several reports of attempts by the

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1. Richard Wright, Black Power, (London: Dobson, 1956), p.304.
  2. GNA Accra, ADM 26/5/44, Report of D.C. for the Wasaw District of the Western Province, 1936.
  3. For a fascinating account of how the founders of the Zambian Mineworkers' Union overcame just this problem, see A. L. Epstein, Politics in an African Urban Community, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958), pp.48-101.

skilled workers to organise the labour force in the mid-30's.<sup>1</sup> But, in such cases, the repressive policy of the Mining Companies, made possible by the labour surplus conditions of the period, provided, as it were, the final straw which broke the back of miners' organisation. A. B. Holmes has described the Mining Companies' policy:

"The general reaction of the mines toward strike activity was to force all the leaders as well as any persons who remained adamant after deadlines for returning to work. Political officers were strongly pro-management and backed anti-strike activity with arrests of leaders as rioters or intimidators." 2

Hence the significance of the Colonial Government's change of policy and introduction of protective union legislation in 1941-43. Labour organisers stood no chance of success in a straight contest of power with management. Only when the Government proved willing to provide some compensatory support to the weak position of labour could durable organisation develop.

The story of the founding of the Mines Employees Union illustrates the continuing obstacles to effective organisation presented by the character of the mines' labour force, as well as the rather ambiguous role played by the Colonial Labour Department. According to J. B. Blay, the official historian of the

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1. For example, in 1936, the Secretary for Mines wrote that "Serious consideration must be given to the possible formation of Trade or similar Unions. At least one body has been formed to interest itself in labour matters, and there are other signs that attempts are being made to induce workers to form themselves into trade or occupational groups." GNA Accra, ADM 26/5/44, Secretary for Mines to Colonial Secretary, 5th March 1936.
  2. A. B. Holmes, op.cit., p.358.

Union, the initiative came from skilled workers at the Abosso mine, where a strike in the electric shop against a white supervisor in June 1944 proved successful and encouraged the creation of a general union.<sup>1</sup> The Abosso mines workers summoned a delegates' meeting at which J. N. Sam was elected President. In December, Sam toured the rest of the mines, stressing labour's unity of interest and the benefits of organisation. An attempt was made to register the embryonic union, but I. G. Jones, Labour Inspector for the Western Province, expressed his opposition to an amalgamated union and urged a separated union for each mine. At a second delegates' meeting in January 1945, it was nevertheless decided to insist on a single mines' union, and in September of that year, the Gold Coast Mines Employees Union was officially registered with 1,780 paid-up members. Six months later, however, the Union could claim to represent no more than 5,000 of the 40,000 workers then employed in the mines. It was not until the first successful strike was staged in October 1947 that the paid-up membership grew to a more impressive figure.

This brief consideration of the major obstacles to unionisation amongst the mines workers serves to illuminate the full range of those special characteristics which facilitated the railway workers' early development of strong and durable organisation.

#### Characteristics of the Railway Labour Force.

At the end of the nineteenth century, Sekondi, in the Western Province of the Gold Coast (about 140 miles east of Accra) was little more than a fishing village. Its only claim

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1. J. B. Blay, The Gold Coast Mines Employees Union, (Devon: Arthur H. Stockwell, 1950), pp.11-12.

to distinction was the location there of both British and Dutch forts, established in the seventeenth century, but by then long disused. In the depths of its coastal waters, however, it possessed a resource of as yet unrealised value. As one of the few natural ports along the coast suitable for large ships, it was chosen, in 1897, as the site for the railway terminus and workshops.<sup>1</sup> In the following year, construction began on a thirty-nine mile section from Sekondi to Tarkwa, and this had been extended to Kumasi by 1903. A second line was begun from Accra and had reached Kumasi by 1927. Within this triangular network, a third line was constructed from just north of Tarkwa stretching into the Central Province in 1923-27. By 1928, the rail system of Ghana, as it now exists, had been virtually completed, (see Map 1).

In the early years of the construction of the railway, the principal labour requirement was, as for the mines, a large army of unskilled and semi-skilled workers. The Railway Administration likewise experienced difficulty in recruiting southern Ghanaians for such work, and most of the labour required was drawn from Nigeria and the Northern Territories of Ghana. Unlike their fellow northerners in the mines, however, many of these unskilled labourers proved prepared to stay and work for several years. In particular, many of the 'Lagosians', as the Nigerians came to be called locally, ended up settling relatively permanently in Sekondi and its outlying villages, to work, rather appropriately, on the Permanent Way (i.e. the railway track). This difference is probably to be explained by the more healthy conditions of work in Sekondi, and the more

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1. Gold Coast Handbook, 1928, pp.123-24.

congenial social life to be found there, relative to the overcrowded conditions of the mining townships, with their forced sexual asceticism. Later, a growing number of southern Ghanaians joined the Permanent Way labour force, and these too have displayed a higher degree of job commitment than characterises the unskilled mineworkers.<sup>1</sup>

Largely in consequence of their illiteracy and the fact that they work out along the track, away from the centre of union activities, the unskilled railway workers have not themselves participated very actively or directly in trade union organisation and policy formulation. But they have recognised the relevance and benefits of trade unionism sufficiently to follow the lead of the skilled workers with considerable discipline and enthusiasm.

From approximately 1910 onwards, the Railway Administration employed a growing number of African clerical and skilled workers, (or artisans), to man the administrative headquarters and locomotive workshops at Sekondi. By the 1930's, the artisans and the semi-skilled employees working with them constituted almost a third of the total work force (see Table 1.2).

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1. Interview with Mr. J. Amisah, Personnel Manager, Railways Administration, 14th June 1971. It was, unfortunately, impossible to obtain comprehensive statistics on the ethnic composition, or rate of labour turnover, of the Permanent Waymen. The Personnel Manager estimated that, as at 1970, some 35 per cent of Waymen were southern Ghanaians, and that there was an annual labour turnover rate of approximately 40 per cent. A similar labour turnover rate (of 43 per cent) was estimated on the basis of an examination of Engineering Department statistics for 1960 - the only year for which a full set was available in the Railway Administration Archives.

Table 1.2 : Railway Department Employees of April 1936.

European Staff	107
African Clerical Grades	509
African Artisans	1,688
African Platelayers, and other Semi-skilled	1,179
African Labourers	2,296

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Source: RAA, Gold Coast Railway Department Staff List  
(April 1936)

These artisans were genuinely highly skilled (unlike many of the so-called skilled workers in the mines). The Railway Administration instituted a five-year Apprenticeship Scheme to train them, which included sending some to Britain for experience in the railway workshops at Crewe. It was perhaps out of concern for the considerable capital investment they represented, that the Railway Administration adopted a far more progressive policy towards their skilled workers than did the Mining Companies. Aiming to achieve a high degree of labour stabilisation, the Railway Administration proved relatively responsive to demands for improved conditions of service, and disinclined to resort to mass dismissals when the artisans sought to organise themselves. In turn, the artisans, who were mostly literate Fantis from the nearby coastal towns of Cape Coast and Elmina, regarded skilled technical work as hopefully providing a relatively permanent and prestigious form of employment, a suitable alternative to clerical work.<sup>1</sup> Indeed,

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1. Interviews with H. B. Cofie and J. C. Vandyck, retired railway artisans, 5th June 1971.

the skilled African railway worker, and especially the engine driver, was a figure of very considerable status, certainly of great popular admiration, in the Gold Coast society of the inter-war years. He was the pioneer of technological progress, familiar with the white man's magic, opening up the country to a new pace of social and economic life. It was natural that he should expect official recognition of his high social status in terms of an appropriate financial reward.

The Railway artisans were concentrated in large numbers in the Sekondi Location Workshops. This situation made for the rapid development of a sense of solidarity, and of the power they possessed as a corporate group. It also facilitated communication and organisation. It was fairly easy, moreover, to communicate quickly and secretly with fellow-workers stationed at the 'up-country' branches through the agency of the itinerant engine-drivers.

One further factor which encouraged the spontaneous development of trade unionism amongst the railway workers, and lent the union such significance for its members, deserves brief mention here. As we have seen, Sekondi was a new town, or, as a railway general manager described it in 1912, "an upstart town, practically the creation of the railway".<sup>1</sup> As young workers floated in, beyond the control of the local chiefs, and without the close supervision which the Mining companies provided in the mine townships, new forms of social organisation, or mutations of traditional organisation, were required. The northerners and Nigerians developed a modified form of their traditional organisation, with workers from each tribe or area grouping together

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1. Quoted by R. B. Davison, "The story of the Gold Coast railway", West Africa, (1956), p.587.

under a headman who was often also their 'ganger' or supervisor on the Permanent Way.<sup>1</sup> These were in turn subject to the arbitrating authority of a Zeriakin, (or supreme-chief), generally a relative of the man who had originally gained permission for the 'stranger' community to settle in the 'zongo', (as the area came to be called).

For the Fanti and other southern Ghanaians, however, no such simple adaptation of traditional organisation seems to have appeared practicable or adequate to the new circumstances. In the first place, the traditional urban organisation of the Fanti "youngmen" of Cape Coast and Elmina in their "Asafo" companies was characterised by intense inter-company rivalry. The overriding need in this new situation was for an organisation promoting peace and solidarity among the mass of skilled railway workers. In any case, there are indications that these companies were already becoming ill-adapted to the economic and political realities of the twentieth century in Cape Coast itself.<sup>2</sup> It is certainly arguable that relatively elaborate forms of social organisation such as had been developed in the 'old' towns of Cape Coast and Elmina proved less flexible, and less easily adaptable to a new urban situation, than did the less sophisticated patterns characteristic of the northerners. Certain stylistic characteristics of the "Asafo" companies were, we shall see, to find expression in the developing cultural idiom of the railway workers union. But, fundamentally, a different form of social organisation was required. And, in part at least, this was to be provided by the union, with its officials acting as

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1. Interviews with Chief Ibrahim, Zeriakin of Sekondi Zongo, 17th May 1971; and Moses Braimah, Permanent Way Association Chairman, 4th June 1971.
  2. Ansu Datta, "The Fante Asafo: A Re-examination", in Africa (October 1972), Vol XLII, No. 4., p.365.



organisers, arbitrators, and spokesmen for the railway workers in many areas of social life other than the narrowly occupational.<sup>1</sup>

#### Origins of the Railway Union.

The first permanent unions in Ghana, strictly speaking, were those of self-employed craftsmen, organised on guild lines. In 1909, the Gold and Silversmiths' Association was formed in protest against the Gold Mining Protection Ordinance, and two years later this was reported to be a powerful organisation in Accra, ruled by its own Chief and councillors.<sup>2</sup> In 1910, the Gold Coast Carpenters' Association was registered under the Companies' Ordinance, and there were soon also guilds of other self-employed craftsmen, including masons, blacksmiths, and coopers. They were all especially concerned to formulate elaborate rules concerning apprenticeship and mutual help.

It is hardly surprising that the first attempts at formal organisation among the skilled railway workers, themselves craftsmen and in need of some arrangement for mutual help, should have been modelled on these earlier craftsmen's associations. In 1923, a railway officer wrote; "Men are forming into associations in the Railway Workshops, which will probably form the nucleus of the trade union in years to come."<sup>3</sup> The early organiser was a carpenter, Atta Payne, and, as in the craft associations, members were required to take an elaborate

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1. Interviews with H. B. Cofie and J. C. Vandyck, founders of the Railway Association, 5th June 1971.
  2. D. Kimble, op.cit., p.44.
  3. RAA., Brown, Chief Mechanical Officer, to General Manager, 5th October 1923.

oath, and various traditional ceremonial trappings were adopted.<sup>1</sup> But, in spite of the use of these traditional trappings, the main function of the Association was to help workers adjust to unionised life in an industrial community. Arrangements were made for the provision of funds to members who needed to travel or meet expenses incidental to funeral and wedding ceremonies. The leaders would sometimes help newcomers to find accommodation. And, in 1926, the Association even attempted to bring cinemas to the Location. This, like many other schemes, failed because of inefficient management. There was no provision for regular dues collection, and meetings became increasingly irregular. Hence, the Workshop Association seems to have been barely active by 1928, when the Railway Association was established. This latter organisation was, from the start, less influenced by traditional cultural forms, and more specifically concerned with industrial grievances. Nevertheless, it made use of what organisational infrastructure remained from earlier days in the creation of its own structure, and maintained the concern of the Workshop Association with the general social and cultural welfare of its membership.<sup>2</sup>

The establishment of the Railway Association perhaps owed something to its organisers' knowledge of the operation of British trade unions. As already noted, some of the apprentices were sent to Crewe for experience in the workshops there. But it was not simple imitation of British practice which motivated these trainee-artisans to develop a union at Sekondi. Rather

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1. L. A. Lacy, op.cit., p.55.

2. According to one of the founders of the Association, "We did not know much about trade unionism in those days. We moved by experimenting. Whatever we felt was needed by our fellow-workers we tried to provide. We interested ourselves in everything: sports, entertainment, even disputes among our members." Interview with H. B. Cofie, 5th June 1971.

they wanted a vehicle to express their frustration at the Railway Administration's refusal to accord them equal status with clerical staff. As one of the founders explained:

"I was among the first batch of Africans to be given proper Railway training. I was even sent overseas. Yet, when we educated people became acquainted with technical work, we found ourselves regarded as inferior to the clerks, even though we had as much qualifications. Those on the clerical side were on monthly salary and enjoyed leave, but we were given only a daily rate with no leave. We apprentices decided to do something about it." 1

In November 1928, J. C. Vandyck, H. B. Cofie, W. A. Adottey, H. Renner, F. H. Wood, S. W. Owiredu, and J. Eshun formed a Railway Association Committee, and set out to incorporate all the African artisans and apprentices at Sekondi Location in a single body. Their principal immediate objective was to attain for themselves "permanent" status, thereby gaining entitlement to monthly pay, (a generous conversion from the daily rate being assumed), and annual leave. They soon found themselves on the defensive, rather than the aggressive, however, and accordingly sought to extend membership to the unskilled workers, so as to attain greater solidarity in the face of threats of dismissal.

#### The 1931 & 1939 Strikes.

In 1928-32, the Gold Coast suffered a severe economic depression, related directly to that which hit Europe in the same period. Cocoa prices fell drastically, prices of imported foods rose in spite of a reduction in customs duties, and a

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1. Ibid.

severe restriction of the import-export trade culminated in the staging of a remarkably widespread and effective hold-up of cocoa during the 1930-31 season.<sup>1</sup> The Colonial Government was forced to cut back its expenditure, and several hundred government workers were dismissed, including, in May 1930, the whole of the labour force employed on the construction of Takoradi Harbour.

The Railway Administration itself suffered a drastic reduction in the volume of its traffic, and a corresponding decline in revenue, (see Table 1.3).

Table 1.3 : Gold Coast Railway Revenue.

Year	Net Revenue
1928/29	+ £644,566
1929/30	+ £539,323
1930/31	- £120,543
1931/32	- £181,930
1932/33	- £204,576

Source: P. R. Gould, The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana, (Northwestern University Studies in Geography, No. 5, 1960), p.58.

Alarmed at this growing threat to the job security of its members, the Railway Association demanded improved and more secure conditions of service. The Administration responded with the elimination of some existing benefits and a warning that some dismissals could be expected, while the more fortunate could be employed only four days per week. The Association leaders organised a mass meeting of all non-Permanent railway workers

1. See Kimble, op.cit., p.51.

in Sekondi-Takoradi at which agreement was reached on a proposal to withdraw their labour entirely until they could all be re-employed full-time. This met with the Administration's consent, on the condition that a small skeleton staff should continue to work. The rest of the men then retired to their home villages and towns for two months. On return, they were all re-employed, though at slightly reduced rates of pay, (see Table 1.4).

Table 1.4 : Railway Wages, 1910-1939.

Occupation	1910	1921-29	1929-30	1931-32	1939
Labourer	9d to 1/3	2/-	1/6 to 1/9	1/3	2/-
Artisan	2/- to 3/-	3/6 to 5/6	3/- to 5/-	2/8 to 5/-	3/6 to 5/6
Engine-Driver	n.d.	n.d.	3/8 to 7/-	2/8 to 7/-	4/- to 7/-

Source: L. A. Lacy, A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana, (M.A. thesis, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1965), p.48.

It hardly requires stating that the sense of strategy, and level of solidarity, displayed by the railway workers in 1931 was extremely impressive. Nevertheless, the whole experience had been a somewhat daunting one, and it was not until toward the end of the decade that the taste or confidence for aggressive ascertainment of demands was regained. In addition, the economic conditions of the mid-30's, with the world depression only gradually lifting, and labour in abundant supply, were hardly propitious for effective strike action. The Railway Association did petition Management for the restoration of the 1929 rates of pay in April 1934, and again in November 1936.

But, when they were requested by Management to be patient, the railway workers apparently felt unable to press their demands more forcefully. During this period, the efforts of the Association leaders were primarily directed to the gradual improvement and extension of their organisation. Dues payment was introduced and branches were established all along the line from Sekondi to Kumasi. In November 1938, the Association was renamed the Gold Coast Railway African Workers Union. According to the General Manager of Railways at the time, "it is claimed to be the representative of the whole of the daily-rated staff of the Railway, and has delegates from all Branches on the Committee".<sup>1</sup> Although the Union could not be accorded official recognition (there was no legal provision for union registration at this date), its leaders helped aggrieved groups of employees to draw up petitions to the Management, and were sometimes allowed to participate in the settlement of disputes on an informal basis.

In November 1938, with the cost of living rising rapidly, the G.C.R.A.W.U. again petitioned the Government, via the General Manager of Railways, for "the restoration of the 1929 rates of pay, and an increase in the number of pensionable posts."<sup>2</sup> There were a number of subsidiary points connected with the age of retirement, annual leave, uniforms and the like. When no reply had been received by the beginning of May 1939, the Union threatened strike action. On 9th May, "all classes of workers, from the highly paid engine drivers and artisans to the porters and labourers, with the exception of twenty drivers who were on

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1. RAA, General Manager to Colonial Secretary, 9th November 1938.
  2. Report of the Labour Department, 1939-40. Cited in E. A. Cowan, Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana, (Accra: TUC, 1961), p.12.

the pensionable establishment, downed tools." <sup>1</sup> Two days later, the Governor agreed that the 1929 rates of pay should be restored (no increase had been granted since the reductions of 1930-31), and promised to establish a Board of Enquiry to investigate the remaining grievances. But, the men refused to return to work, according to Management "intimidated by the ringleaders", <sup>2</sup> until the Union leadership had had time to consider the proposals. Certainly, these leaders saw the strike as an opportunity to elevate the status of the Union as well as an economic protest. On 15th May, J. G. Vandyck, the Union Secretary, informed the General Manager that they would return to work on the one further condition that the General Manager "recognise the Gold Coast Railway African Workers' Union as the body to which all matters affecting the interest of individual workers in his employment should be referred". <sup>3</sup> When the General Manager replied that existing laws did not provide for the recognition of trades unions, the strike continued. Eventually, a demonstration of workers was routed, with considerable violence, by the police, and eighteen unionists were imprisoned.

The severity of Government's reaction was clearly intended to reduce the likelihood of similar occurrences amongst other government employees. As an official report stated,

"There were naturally repercussions in other government departments and there were one or two cases where anxiety was caused. Steps were taken immediately to put into effect the decisions of the Wages Board and, so far as possible, to place other departments on the same footing as the Railway. Any danger of a general upheaval died away though it has taken time to settle down, and even yet petitions are being received from Government employees, the principal demand usually being to be made pensionable." <sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. RAA, Vandyck to General Manager, 15th May 1939.

4. Cowan, op.cit., p.13.

Against the background of the beginning of the Second World War, with instructions arriving from London "to take every possible step to guard against the contingency of the possibility of friction between employers and workers in Colonial Dependencies"<sup>1</sup>, it was essential to control this unrest and channel the development of union organisation by Ghanaian workers. For this had received considerable impetus from the large measure of success of the 1939 strike.<sup>2</sup> It is in this context that the establishment of a Labour Department by the Colonial Government to assist the formation of unions must be seen.

#### Dynamics and Divisions in Early Railway Union Development.

At this point, it is worth considering some of the salient features of early Railway Union development. Of particular interest from the general perspective of this study are the differences in union orientation and degree of participation displayed by the various categories of railway employee. Attention should also be paid to the most serious sources of divisions which manifested themselves during this early period. For, generally speaking, these differences and divisions have continued to characterise Railway Union politics down to the present day.

Firstly, the establishment of the Union owed nothing to the activity of clerical workers, nor did members of this occupational category seek to participate in Union affairs prior to the protective trade union legislation of the early 1940's. In part, no doubt, this was because unionisation was of particularly dubious legality, and most clearly guaranteed to meet with official disapproval, in the case of 'white-collar' members of the civil service. These people were certainly not without

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1. GNA Accra, ADM 26/5/44, Macdonald to Colonial Secretary, 16th January 1940.
  2. In addition to the restoration of the 1929 rates of pay, the railway workers won an increase in annual leave and in the number of pensionable posts. Only their request for pay on Public Holidays was turned down.



their grievances but felt it advisable to articulate them through petitioning Government in an informal, 'ad hoc', and expressly respectful fashion. This did not, however, reflect merely a difference of official attitude toward unionisation for manual and clerical employees. When union membership was declared legitimate for African clerical staff in the civil service, (as it was in the early 1940's legislation), 'clerical' unionists continued to display a marked moderation, even humility, in their approach to grievance representation. Indeed, many clerical workers chose not to join the Union, while those who did were rarely to be seen in attendance at mass-meetings. In explanation of this attitude, it should be observed that the career structure for clerical workers was not (and has not been) such as to encourage a high level of trade union activism. They enjoyed greater mobility opportunities - both in number and degree - than the skilled workers, and recognised that the path to promotion lay in examination-passing and the good opinion of supervisors. They focussed their efforts accordingly, showing little inclination to collective action, and avoiding involvement in disruptive trade union activity. Hence they had followed Management's instructions to refrain from participation in the 1939 strike. In addition, they were, of course, highly conscious of their superior status to the artisans, and therefore inclined to regard the "rowdy", militant style of unionism of the latter as very much beneath them. In their own view, no doubt, they were also sufficiently well versed in the bureaucratic processes and financial problems of Government, to understand the reasons for delay in settling grievances. Manual-worker militancy might be seen as resulting from pure ignorance, and consequent impatience at what they (incorrectly) saw as deliberate delaying tactics on the part of Government or Management.

The Railway Union was rather the creation of a dynamic, elementary-school educated, labour elite of artisans, who aimed in the first instance at attaining for themselves a socio-economic status equivalent to that of the African clerical workers - i.e. providing a quasi-European life style and a secure footing in the existing social order. This apparently elitist impulse was in fact productive of a highly militant style of unionism, informed by a well-developed sense of solidarity. A number of factors accounted for this. The artisans worked within close distance of each other in the Sekondi Workshop concentration, and lived side by side in the nearby railway villages. They shared a common sense of grievance at their conditions of work and the general shortage of promotion opportunities. Moreover, they were generally more aware of these common interests and frustrations than of tribal divisions within the group. The skilled railway workers were in any case nearly all southern Ghanaians and shared a common Akan cultural background. They were in the majority Fanti, and the Fante language rapidly became the 'lingua franca' of Sekondi. Since the Fanti were assured of numerical predominance at both rank-and-file and leadership levels of the Union, they were quite happy, within this framework, to elect suitable candidates from other tribal groups to positions of leadership. In consequence, tribal divisions among the skilled workers were, from the start, of negligible significance in union politics.

Almost half of the artisans, moreover, were of common Cape Coast origin and cultural background, and were heirs to a Cape Coast tradition of popular political participation. The Cape Coast 'young men' (or 'common men'), as distinct from the elders and chiefs, were members of "Asafo" companies, semi-military organisations which also had recognised political

functions. During the first half of the twentieth century, the "Asafos" were frequently and centrally involved in political disputes over the legitimacy of particular chiefs and their policies, and sometimes implicit in this, over the institutional reforms the Colonial Government sought to introduce.<sup>1</sup> While the rules governing "Asafo" politics were vague and highly changeable - as one historian has observed, "they were little more than a reflection of the existing balance of power in the state"<sup>2</sup> - there can be no doubting that they were, in an important sense, democratic institutions, both in internal structure and as regards their function in the wider political system. Stylistically, the Railway Union's borrowing of Asafo cultural elements can be seen in the use, from early days, of an "Asafo" "gong-gong" (literally, a gong), an Asafo battle-cry, ("Kyor-be" - "Prepare yourselves for the coming struggle"), and, more generally, in the quasi-military atmosphere of mass meetings of the Union, with speakers trying to outdo each other in bravado. The "Asafo" tradition may well have influenced the railway-workers' understanding of union organisation and objectives, and certainly provided a cultural referent for the concept and practice of solidarity.

However, these same factors making for solidarity within the skilled worker strata set them off the more sharply from the unskilled workers, illiterate Nigerians and Northerners in the main, speaking little or no Fante, firmly attached to their own cultural traditions, working in small gangs out along the Permanent Way. As we have seen, the artisans extended their union organisation to the unskilled workers in a particular situation

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1. Ansu Datta, "The Fante Asafo: A Re-Examination" in Africa, (October 1972), Vol. VLII, No. 4, p.365.
  2. Alan Cawson, "Traditional Organisation and Urban Politics: Political Parties and the Cape Coast Asafo", (Paper presented to the African Politics Seminar of the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1973).

of common grievances and insecurity, and essentially for the opportunistic reason of enhancing their own bargaining position. But it was perhaps to be anticipated that, once granted the permanent status and conditions of service they desired - monthly salary, two weeks annual leave etc., - they would then be inclined to practice a more particularist ("elitist") form of unionism.

Certainly, cultural differences and social distance between unskilled and skilled worker strata were such as to make any deeper and more lasting solidarity seem unlikely. As a senior colonial official remarked in 1936,

"The manual labourer has no standing in the social scheme. He is regarded by the educated classes as an inferior - also the term 'labourer' is closely associated with the word 'strangers' which defines the status of the natives of neighbouring countries and the Northern Territories. Under the present order of things it would not be possible for the son of an educated man to become a labourer.

"The artisan class is on a different footing, for this worker has his niche in the social life of the colony, and there is a tendency for sons to follow the vocation of their fathers.

"It is obvious that it will be some time before any labour movement is created. The probability of any co-operation between the artisan and the labourer is remote." 1

Surprisingly, this coincidence of ethnic, cultural, and economic lines of division was not to be a source of serious political disunity within the Railway Union. Labour unity, however, has implied the condition that the unskilled workers and their representatives, (generally speaking their gang headmen), should accept second-class status, and a subordinate role,

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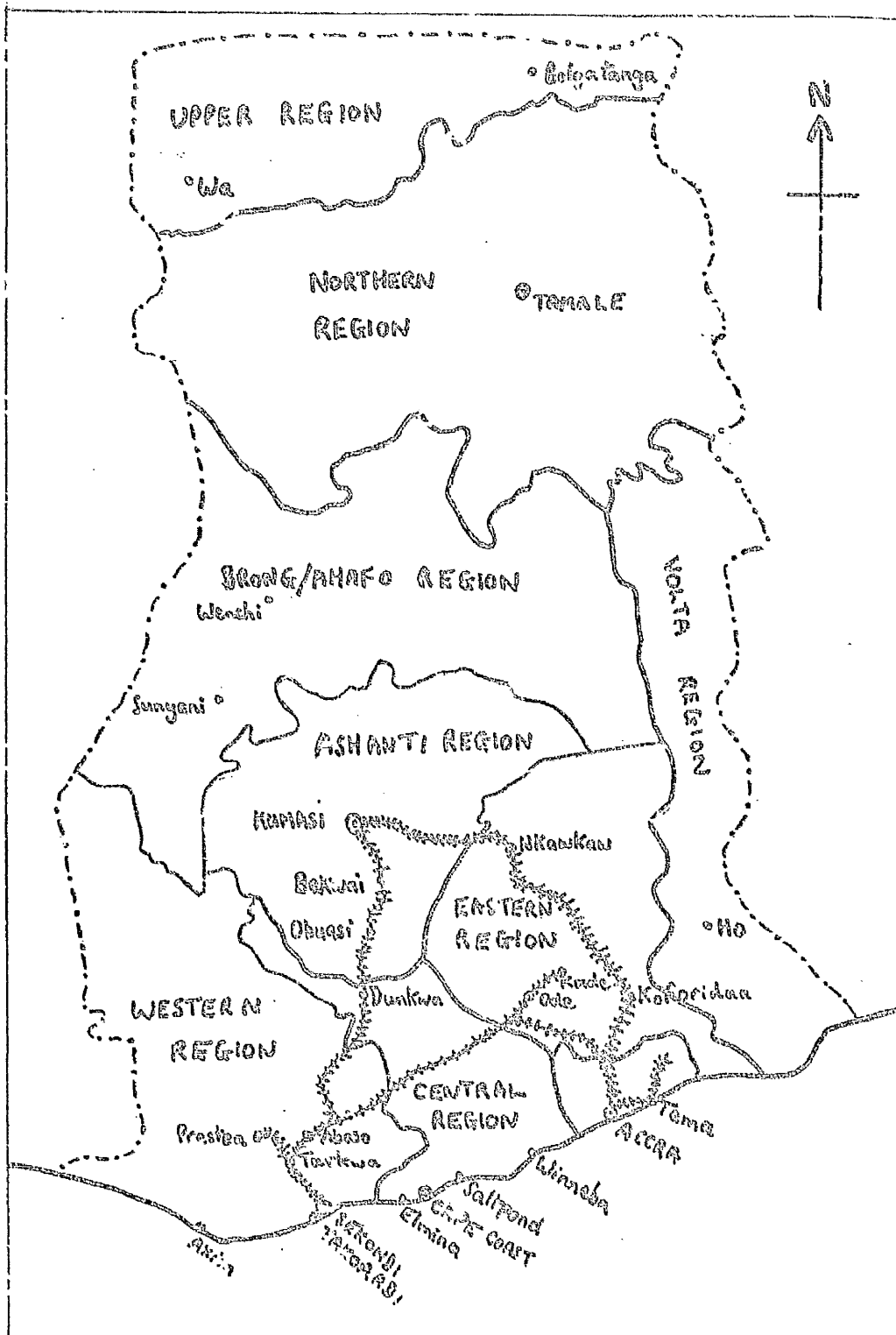
1. GNA Accra, ADM 26/5/44, Report of Western Province Commissioner on "Labour Conditions in the Gold Coast", 1936.

in the Union's power and policy-formulating structure. This they have generally been prepared to do out of recognition of their dependence on the powerful bargaining position and collective strength of the artisan class. In turn, the artisans have been concerned, in nearly all their strike actions, to fight general battles for an improvement in the wage-levels of all "lower-paid workers", (i.e. skilled and unskilled manual workers). This might be explained in part by the artisans' continuing failure to attain that distinct economic and occupational status which they have long felt themselves to deserve, and which, once attained, might have served to differentiate their interests more clearly from those of the unskilled labourer. But their relationship to the unskilled workers has certainly also come to involve a genuinely protective, paternalistic attitude. In accounting for this, the ideological influence of Pobeey Biney, the railway workers' leader in the nationalist period, must be reckoned one important factor.


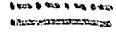


The most serious lines of division within the Railway Union, (or the Railway Union's potential membership), have been, firstly, between the skilled workers and the clerical workers: and, secondly, between the Workshop artisans and the engine-drivers. Both were clearly presaged in the early period of the Union's history. Enough has already been said of the difference between skilled and clerical workers' union attitudes to indicate the nature of this conflict. The artisan-enginemmen division derived not so much from attitudinal or cultural differences as from the almost inevitable sectionalist tendencies of militant craft unionism. The enginemmen, being the most highly skilled of the railway manualworkers, were at an early date accorded special privileges which they guarded jealously. In 1939 they were initially amongst the most militant advocates of strike

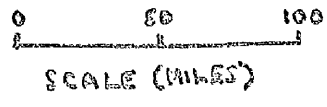
action. Yet they later opposed prolongation on the grounds that it might cause the loss of pensions and other privileges, (which very few artisans enjoyed). In the event, the strike was maintained, but shortly afterwards, the formation of a separate Railway Enginemen's Union was announced. With the exception of two brief periods, (1943-49 and 1962-66), the enginemen have continued to maintain a separate union, evidently believing that their own grievances over increment rates, promotion opportunities, job classification, etc. are sufficiently particular to require specialised handling.

Nevertheless, the enginemen have generally been in accord with the artisans on major, general issues, and have acted solidly with them at times of political crisis - the 1950, 1961, and 1971 strikes, for example. At such times it has been the practice to establish a Joint Council of Railwaymen to co-ordinate activity between the two Unions. The maintenance of this artisan-engineman cohesion, as of that between artisans and unskilled workers, owes a great deal to the educative experience of Pobe Biney's leadership in the nationalist era.



MAP 1: GHANA'S RAILWAY SYSTEM

-  International boundaries
-  Regional boundaries
-  Cities
-  Towns



CHAPTER TWO.

THE RAILWAY WORKERS IN THE NATIONALIST MOVEMENT -  
THE MEANING OF POLITICAL COMMITMENT.

Most of the literature on African trade unionism emphasises the significant influence of the nationalist experience on the subsequent development of relations between post-Independence governments and labour movements.<sup>1</sup> Where, as in Ghana, the labour movement became closely affiliated to the ruling party after Independence, this is sometimes held to have largely resulted from the close ties forged between such parties and the unions in the period of nationalist agitation. Other writers, most notably Berg and Butler, have argued that, in the case of Ghana as of most other African countries, the unions displayed a marked lack of political commitment in the nationalist period.<sup>2</sup> This is said to explain their reluctance to accept party control in the immediate post-Independence period, a control successfully asserted only because of the unions' inability to resist.

Both positions, it should be noted, tend to assume that political involvement in the nationalist movement where it existed, implied commitment to a particular political party. Such an assumption should perhaps not be so glibly made. Both also posit a simple continuity in relations, or preferred relations, between unions and parties in the two eras. Yet it should be fairly obvious that such ties as pre-dated Independence, (or the period of "dyarchy") underwent a radical change of nature when the party became the state, and the superficial unity of the nationalist period gave way to an increasingly manifest differentiation of interests.

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1. See, for example, Ioan Davies, African Trade Unions, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966); and Meynaud and Salah-Bey, Trade Unionism in Africa: a study of its growth and orientation, (London: Methuen, 1967).
  2. Berg and Butler, op.cit.



The case of the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi brings home in vivid manner the false simplicity of both of these arguments. The foremost proponents of political unionism in the nationalist era, (when they staged a two-week strike in support of Nkrumah's "Positive Action" campaign), the railway workers were subsequently to lead union resistance to control of the labour movement, by the Convention People's Party. Why did they become the leading opponents of party affiliation, and how did this relate to their conception of nationalist aims? In short, what was the meaning of political commitment for the railway workers?

This question assumes importance not only from the perspective of general arguments as to the nature of union politics in Africa, but also within the particular context of Ghanaian politics. In 1949-50, it is apparent, in as far as Nkrumah possessed a radical, organised mass basis of support, this consisted above all in the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi. One looks in vain, as did Nkrumah himself, during these years, for any alternative, organised section of the masses, able or willing to back up his demands with direct physical threats to the continued stability of the colonial regime. This is not to cast doubts on the extent or enthusiasm of popular support for Nkrumah's programme; but only the railway workers were able to make this support conspicuous and politically telling. It is important, then, to understand just what this politically most crucial of groups conceived to be the aims of their nationalist activity.

#### The Impact of the Labour Department's Model of Trade Unionism.

In 1938, against the background of serious labour disturbances in the Caribbean colonies, the Gold Coast Government established a labour Department. As the Colonial Secretary

had noted in October 1937,

"The recent spread of labour unrest throughout the British Colonial Empire points to the necessity of an organisation with accurate knowledge of labour conditions should the day come when we have to face serious labour disputes in the Gold Coast." 1

Within eighteen months, the Government had to deal with a major strike action by the railway workers, and there were clear indications of mounting unrest among other workers. In November 1941, the railway artisans and labourers again came out on strike in support of a demand for more speedy implementation of the 1939 agreement. The Governor, shocked at the railway workers' failure to give advance warning of their intention, and, even more, at the lack of consideration for the war effort their action implied, instructed Police and Management to deal severely with the strikers. 2 Many were imprisoned, and temporary labourers were taken on by the Railway Department, thereby inducing some of the unskilled workers to return to work. 3 The Workshop artisans remained solid, however, and retaliated against the Government by persuading workers in the Public Works and Posts and Telecommunications Departments in Sekondi to join them. There were even reports that the strikers were intending to storm Sekondi prison "to release the prisoners and so obtain their help." 4 After twelve days they were forced

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1. GNA, Accra ADM 26/5/44, Colonial Secretary to Secretary for Native Affairs, 2nd October 1937.
  2. GNA, Sekondi, Acc 351/15, Governor's telegram to Commissioner for the Western Province, 26th November 1941.
  3. GNA, Sekondi, Acc 357/17, Commissioner for the Western Province to Colonial Secretary, 3rd December 1941.
  4. GNA, Sekondi, Acc 357/21, Prison Superintendent, Sekondi, to Director of Prisons, Accra, 27th December 1941.

to capitulate and report back to work in return for the release of most of their imprisoned fellow-strikers. J. C. Vandyck and John Ashun, President and Secretary of the Union, were detained until May 1942, and then, predictably, the Railway Department refused to reinstate them. The Union approached Nana Kobina Nketsia, Chief of British Sekondi, and later J. B. Danquah, to lobby for their reinstatement but to no avail. <sup>1</sup>

In the aftermath of the December 1941 strike, Government representatives visited Sekondi Location and gained an assurance that the railway workers would refrain from further strike activity until the conclusion of the War. <sup>2</sup> Then, the railwaymen were promised, Government would give speedy and sympathetic consideration to their claim for a compensatory wage increase. Nevertheless, the Colonial Government was understandably anxious to take additional measures so as to prevent similar disturbances recurring. Accordingly, in February 1942, the Labour Department recruited Mr. I. G. Jones, a former official of the British Union of Mineworkers, to man the Trade Union section. It was his responsibility to organise, or re-organise, Ghanaian unions along the most suitable lines (from the Government's point of view), and to instruct local unionists in the proper procedures to be followed.

These procedures had already been laid down in outline. In February 1941 the Colonial Government had issued a Trade Unions Ordinance authorising the combination of five or more persons, and subsequently a series of legislative orders, modelled largely on equivalent war-time measures in the United Kingdom, defining a 'trade dispute', the proper settlement procedures, and the cir-

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 28th January 1942.
  2. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 7th January 1942.

cumstances in which strike action was illegal.<sup>1</sup> Initially, the Labour Department stipulated that industrial disputes be settled through the local chiefs and elders in the Native Councils, in the hope that these Councils would moderate the demands of workers and keep them from approaching Government directly. The railway workers immediately protested this idea, however, and in compromise the Labour Department suggested that the more exalted Provincial Council of Chiefs should act as a mediating body.<sup>2</sup>

The Colonial Government's conception of legitimate trade unionism was clearly stated in a pamphlet circulated to union organisers:

"A trade union is not an organisation with political aims. It is an association which has as its main objective the regulation of relations between workers and their employers."<sup>3</sup>

Such regulation, it was stressed, was better achieved through peaceful negotiation than through strike action. This was the lesson which Mr. I. G. Jones set out to teach, though with considerable sympathy for the predicament of Ghanaian

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1. The most important of these measures were: The Conspiracy and Protection of Property (Trade Disputes) Ordinance, 1941, which incidentally did not cover Civil Servants; The Trades Dispute (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, 1941; and The Defence (Settlement of Labour Disputes) Order, 1941. An important measure with specific reference to the Railway Union was The Trade Union (Gold Coast Railway African Employees' Union) Order in Council, 1943, which authorised Civil Servants - i.e. the permanent staff - to join the Union, and therefore made possible incorporation of the clerical staff. For fuller details of this legislation, see E. Cowan op.cit., pp.15-19.
  2. Interview with H. B. Cofie, 5th June 1971.
  3. J. S. Patrick, What is a trade union? (London: 1939).

unionists and employing a rather more flexible approach than the preceding quotation suggests.

The Labour Department's Report for 1942 noted that:

"Early in this year, this officer toured the country holding informal meetings with groups of people in order to explain the principles of Trade Unionism and the Provision of the Trade Unions Ordinance. In the early stages this officer met with considerable suspicion as to Government intentions and with a great deal of ignorance as to the aims and objects of trade unionism. He has been successful in obtaining the confidence of all those with whom he has come into contact, and his advice on procedure has been willingly accepted by the Railwaymen whose Union - the Gold Coast Railway African Employees' Union - shows the most promise of those so far registered." 1

The Railway unionists were indeed highly suspicious of Government intentions at first, and informed Mr. Jones that they would co-operate with him only if he helped them to secure the re-instatement of J. C. Vandyck and John Ashun as Railway employees. 2 This he was able to achieve towards the end of the year, and the Railway unionists kept their promise to follow his advice on re-organisation.

The remarks of H. B. Cofie, Assistant Secretary of the Union at this time, testify to the confidence which I. G. Jones managed to establish in his intentions: "It was a surprise to us that he really fought for us, showed us the proper channel to pass, and was most energetic on our behalf in many ways." 3

1. Annual Report of the Labour Department, 1942. Cited in E. Cowan, op.cit., p.13.
2. Interview with H. B. Cofie, 5th June 1971.
3. Ibid.

Mr. Jones' plans for re-organisation involved incorporating the African clerical staff in the re-named Gold Coast Railway African Technical and Clerical Employees Union (1943). Clerical staff representatives, (or 'clerical unionists' as we shall henceforth refer to them), soon came to dominate the Union Executive, partly through the numerical predominance which 'ex-officio' representation gave them, and partly through their possession of the literary and administrative skills, required by more sophisticated procedures. <sup>1</sup>

This development was largely responsible for giving considerable currency in Railway Union deliberations to the peaceful, apolitical model of unionism propounded by the Labour Department. Most of the skilled worker, or 'technical', unionists, while appreciating the usefulness of the more neutral advice Mr. Jones had to offer, listened to this 'apolitical' line with increasing cynicism as the decade progressed. The clerical unionists, on the other hand, took the reasoning behind it more seriously. There were a number of possible reasons for this. The skilled workers were later to argue that the clerical staff were relatively contented with their situation under the colonial regime, and more particularly with the pay increase awarded them in 1946 by the Harragin Commission. But this was no adequate explanation, since the clerical workers, too, suffered a severe subsequent decline in living standards from the inflation of 1947-50, and the slow rate of Africanisation of senior posts in the Civil Service provided a source of real resentment. More important were the general situational considerations and cultural characteristics, outlined in the previous

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1. Frank Wudu, A Fallen Labour Hero of Ghana, (Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1968), p.3. Frank Wudu (or Woode) was General Secretary of both the Railway Union and the Gold Coast TUC in 1947-49.

chapter, which made for clerical worker moderation and a marked concern to do things "the correct way" - i.e. by emulation of British ways and institutions, as communicated to them of course, by the British in the Gold Coast. Viewed from their own perspective, they were sufficiently well educated to understand the reasoning behind the model of strict separation of trade unionism from politics. In particular, they adopted the argument that, since not all Railway Union members were supporters of the Convention People's Party, it would be undemocratic to stage strike actions in support of Nkrumah's nationalist campaign. <sup>1</sup>

Most of the leaders of the new unions established in 1943-50 might also be classified as clerical unionists and, since they owed their institution largely to the education and assistance of the Labour Department, were similarly inclined to uphold the 'apolitical' model. By 1945, unions with a total paid-up membership of 6,030 were registered, and in that year the Railway Union took the initiative in establishing the first Gold Coast Trades Union Congress to co-ordinate their activities. The TUC central office was at Sekondi, and this fact, together with the greater experience and dynamism of the Railway unionists, assured them a large measure of influence over the trade union movement as a whole. In spite of the militancy and radical nationalism of the skilled worker rank-and-file, however, Railway Union leadership of the TUC did not make for direct involvement of the whole trade union movement in the nationalist struggle. Delegates from most other unions on the TUC Executive Council, including the first President, C. W. Techie-Menson (1945-48), opposed such a policy: and the Railway Union Executive was itself far from characterised by singularity of purpose. <sup>2</sup>

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1. Interview with David Sam, ex-clerical officer, Ghana Railways, 5th March 1971.

2. Frank Wudu, op.cit., p.8.

The Colonial Labour Department succeeded, then, in raising considerable obstacles to trade union involvement in the Nationalist movement. And, although the militant nationalism of the skilled railway workers eventually gained expression in the "Positive Action" strike of January 1950, this requires explanation in terms of leadership politics as well as the strength of rank-and-file feeling.

#### Railwayworker Nationalism: Economics and Ideology.

The factors making for an upsurge of popular unrest and nationalist consciousness in the immediate post-war period in Ghana have received detailed and most satisfactory treatment elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> Here it is necessary merely to point out certain salient features of the railway workers' conception of nationalist aims and the most important influences on their thinking.

In the first place, nationalism, for the railway workers as for most Ghanaian nationalists, was in large part an expression of acute economic discontent, a response to post-War conditions of rapid price inflation and falling real incomes. The Colonial Government signally failed to produce the increased prosperity or financial opportunities for Africans that had been expected. In 1941, we have seen, the railway workers had been assured that their refraining from strike action during the war would be rewarded with improved conditions at its conclusion. But these did not materialise without the pressure of a major strike action (in 1947); and even the wage increase of that year proved only a temporary hiatus in the general pattern of declining real wage levels. This may be seen from the evidence presented by

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1. Dennis Austin, Politics in Ghana, 1946-60, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp.49-103.



W. B. Birmingham on fluctuations in the real value of the government minimum wage <sup>1</sup> :

Table 2.1 : Fluctuations in the real value of the minimum wage, 1939-50.

Date	Daily Wage	Money-Wage Index	Cost of Living Index	Real Wage Index	Food-Price Index
May 1939	1/6	100	100	100	100
Nov 1945	1/10	122	186	66	202
Nov 1947	2/9	183	212	86	250
Dec 1948	2/9	183	227	81	264
Dec 1950	3/3	217	285	76	391

Source: W. B. Birmingham 'An Index of Real Wages of the Unskilled Labourer in Accra', in Economic Bulletin of Ghana, Vol IV, No. 3, (1960).

In such conditions of rapid inflation, as David Apter has cautiously put it, rightly avoiding any simple equation of the two, "the urban population suffered the most. It is in the urban areas as well that the most aggressive feeling for independence resides." <sup>2</sup> More specifically, a number of groups were especially severely frustrated. Ghanaian businessmen, or would-be

1. Birmingham's Index can be accepted as providing a fairly accurate indication of fluctuations in the real wage levels of both skilled and unskilled workers in government employment, since these maintained a steady relation to each other throughout the period in question.
2. David Apter, The Gold Coast in Transition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1955), p.69.

businessmen, chafing at the virtual monopoly of trade enjoyed by European firms, were inclined to lay the blame directly on oppressive discrimination by the Colonial Government. The rapidly expanding class of elementary school leavers, finding themselves with little hope of employment in Government clerical service, were anxious for increased mobility opportunities, and therefore more rapid economic and political development. The skilled railway workers, while better off than many of their fellow elementary school leavers were still without the improved conditions of service and life-style, equivalent to those of the clerical workers, to which they had long aspired. Such frustration could be greater for those to whom the goal seemed nearer to attainment: and greater still when, with their situation deteriorating, that goal started to drift ever further away. Living in the city of Sekondi-Takoradi, moreover, the railway workers were very aware of the worsening situation and mounting discontent of other groups. Most disturbing was the growing number of "pilot-boys", a semi-criminal group of unemployed young school leavers. <sup>1</sup>

Indeed, several of the phenomena which Meyer Fortes identified in 1945 as making for mounting unrest in the colonies after the War, were to be found in particularly acute form in Sekondi-Takoradi. <sup>2</sup> The influence of foreign soldiers and

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1. The 'pilot-boys' were so termed because they earned a living from acting as guides to sight-seers, and directing visiting sailors and soldiers to prostitutes. Many of them had "no settled place of abode", and also engaged in petty theft. Their numbers swelled during the War, when there were so many sailors and soldiers about in Takoradi, but there were still quite a number there in 1949: Busia and his assistants came into contact with 150 in the course of a Social Survey. See K. A. Busia, Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, (Accra: Government Printer, 1950), pp. 96-100.
  2. Meyer Fortes, "The Impact of the War on British West Africa" in International Affairs, Vol.21, No. 2, (April 1945), pp.206-20.

sailors, calling in at the colonies, for example, was clearly most strongly felt in the harbour-towns. The British and American soldiers who drunkenly toured the brothels of Takoradi hardly conformed to the colonial stereotype of the dignified, self-disciplined white man, and might have done much to undermine respect for whites in general, (though it is unclear to what degree such a stereotype was still widely prevalent). More important perhaps, the radically discontented mentality of the American negro troops seems to have had a considerable impact on many of the youths and workers of Sekondi-Takoradi, offering them a new social and ideological dimension in which to conceive their own situation and sense of grievance. Many of the older railway workers interviewed in 1971 spoke of exciting and influential meetings with some of these American blacks during the War years.

The nationalist activism displayed by Ghanaian ex-servicemen has often been remarked upon.<sup>1</sup> Recently, it has been questioned whether they were, proportionately, much better represented in the ranks of C.P.P. activists than any other section of the population.<sup>2</sup> But the important point, for our purposes, lies in the influence which some of them, at least, had on the thinking of the railway workers. A number of ex-railway workers and other inhabitants of Sekondi, after serving in the Allied Forces in 1943-45, were prominent in the organisation of the Gold Coast Ex-Servicemen's Union. Many returned to Sekondi to communicate something of their sense of power and scorn for the fragility of British Colonial Government to friends still working in the Railway:

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1. See, for example, Dennis Austin, op.cit., p.74.
  2. Richard Rathbone, "Businessmen in Ghanaian Politics", in Journal of Development Studies, Vol. 9, No. 3., (April 1973), pp.391-402.

"I can remember when my friend Francis came to see us one Christmas-time, just after the War. We were expecting just to celebrate, but after much 'akpoteskie' (local gin) he wanted to talk about how we were going to throw out the Government. I can honestly say it astonished me, because I had started thinking politically but he had not been serious at all when he left us but just a cheerful sort of fellow. And when I asked him, 'How can we possibly throw out the British Government which has shown it can beat the Germans?', he just said, 'There is an army of us here now who helped defeat the Germans, and we show the British our strength on our own land, with all the people behind us'." 1

It might appear, therefore, that railway worker nationalism was simply an extension of economic grievance, lent what ideological dimension it possessed by a growing sense of confidence and of solidarity with other blacks against the white man. It is significant in this context that the personal qualities which, in the railway workers' view, distinguished both Nkrumah and their own great nationalist leader, Pobee Biney, were simply 'courage' - the courage to boldly act out their sense of grievance, challenging the colonial authorities directly - and 'understanding' "it was as though he could tell us our thoughts before we ourselves knew them".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, this identification with the courageous 'strong man' leader entailed defining the struggle as being against the 'effete', detached African educated elite, (as well as against the British). Progressively, it also involved a vision of a new, more brotherly and egalitarian order, 'self-government' meaning government by and for the 'common man' rather than a mere taking over of colonial structures.

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1. Interview with J. Piadoo, railway artisan, 6th June 1971.
  2. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, railway artisan and Union official, 10th June 1971.

Some of the radical railway unionists conceived the struggle in overtly Marxist terms. J. S. Annan, for example, a member of both Railway Union and TUC Executive Councils, attended the 1945 World Federation of Trades Unions Conference in Paris, and returned to report:

"I believe that the time is now ripe when organised labour in the Gold Coast should commence to struggle against economic and socially militating forces: there should be no room for fear: we know these reactionary forces - the might of Imperialist Capitalism that has exploited the working-classes for years must be stayed. Let me say, however, that our struggle is not only against foreign capitalism and merciless exploitation - it is also against unbridled Capitalism of our own people, the Africans: we do not intend to remove foreign Capitalism that exists to make excessive profits at the expense of African cheap labour and put similar Capitalism in black skin: our fight is directed against Capitalism of any description that refuses to give fair and adequate remuneration to labour. Our slogan must be, "Workers of the Gold Coast Unite: You have nothing to lose but your Chains". 1

The influence of Marxist ideas with some of the railway unionists can be traced back to the activity of Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth League in the mid-1930's. Born in Sierra Leone, and trained for a time in the Soviet Union, Isaac Wallace-Johnson attempted between 1933 and 1937, to introduce a socialist, anti-colonialist mass movement to the Gold Coast.<sup>2</sup> To this end, he combined the articulation of radical anti-imperialist ideology with the representation of local grievances, (for example, miners' grievances over the lack of compensation for industrial injuries), making use of his contacts in the British Parliamentary Left. By December 1936, the Youth League claimed a total

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1. RUA, J. S. Annan's Report to the Railway Union Working Committee, 27th October 1945.
  2. All details on Wallace-Johnson and the West African Youth League are taken from A. B. Holmes, op.cit., pp.670-732.

membership of 7,000. This was probably an exaggerated figure, and the movement largely collapsed when Wallace-Johnson himself was forced out of the country in 1937. But there can be no doubting the continuing influence of his ideas and strategy on many members of the Gold Coast sub-elite of skilled workers and their leaders. In particular, Pobee Biney, the railway workers' great nationalist leader, was a local organiser of the Youth League, and the branch at Sekondi-Takoradi is reported to have been one of the largest and most active.<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, the most striking aspect of the history of the Youth League in the Gold Coast is its failure to attract a larger or more militant following. Admittedly, economic and political conditions in the mid-30's were, as we have seen, hardly propitious for self-confident political assertion. But one might also hazard the suggestion that, for many of the railway artisans, with their love of 'plain speaking', Wallace-Johnson's Marxist rhetoric was more a handicap than an attraction. Certainly, Pobee Biney, though himself much influenced by Marxism, found it necessary, when mobilising the railway workers in support of political action in the late '40's, to speak in common words which the ordinary artisan could readily understand. This involved articulating the 'class' element in the nationalist revolution only in extremely vague terms, and playing down the differences between Biney himself and the right-wing of Nkrumah's followers. Only after 1950 did the full extent of these differences clearly emerge.

Biney's 'ideology' will receive more detailed treatment later in this chapter. Here, the important point is that in the immediate post-War period, the 'class' element in railway

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1. A. B. Holmes quotes a report in the African Morning Post of 28th April 1938 on a meeting of the W.A.Y.L. at which, "Comrade Pobee Biney was charged with having misappropriated the funds of his branch. He appeared to be guilty." A. B. Holmes, op.cit. p.720.

worker nationalism, though real enough, was generally speaking more implicit than explicit, and somewhat narrowly defined. Hostility to elitism was directed specifically against the existing educated elite and was primarily expressed in terms of non-attendance at meetings of the United Gold Coast Convention.<sup>1</sup> The two leading representatives of the U.G.C.C. in Sekondi were especially unappealing political figures from the railway workers' point of view. The lawyer R. S. Blay had on more than one occasion attempted to intervene with the railway unionists to persuade them of the advantages of official arbitration procedures, and was therefore cast (among the militants) as a Government sympathiser.<sup>2</sup> And the lawyer F. Awonwoor Williams was well known locally for his extreme, and somewhat eccentric, elitist views which, to his credit, he made no attempt to conceal from the masses.<sup>3</sup> Kwame Nkrumah was a startling contrast with this kind of politician. Nevertheless, he appears to have remained suspect with the railway workers so long as he remained within the fold of the U.G.C.C. It was not until 1949, when he broke with the elite, and came to speak to the railway workers in the streets of Sekondi (rather than the 'chambers' of the U.G.C.C.) that he made any great impact.<sup>4</sup> Only then did he

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1. Interviews with R. S. Blay, ex-Sekondi Branch Chairman of the United Gold Coast Convention, 2nd July 1971; and with H. B. Cofie, J. C. Vandyck, ex-Railway Union officials, 5th June 1971.
  2. Interview with J. C. Vandyck, 5th June 1971.
  3. For instance, in a statement to the press, F. Awonwoor Williams expressed his view that "true Aristocracy after true religion is the great blessing a nation can enjoy - of the old school of politics were men of education and substance, and merchant princes, working in the interests of the country. Apart from one or two members of the Convention People's Party, their leaders and supporters are the flotsam and jetsam and popinjays of the country. It is therefore the bounden duty of every informed citizen to unite to save the social and political order." Cited in E. Cowan, op.cit., p.102.
  4. Interviews with Kofi Imbeah, railway artisan and Union official, 10th June 1971; and J. Piadoo, railway artisan, 6th June 1971.

come to express radical nationalist ideas, already current among the 'common men', in sufficiently extreme form to give the impression of courageous and genuine leadership.

Interviews held with the older railway workers in 1971 left little doubt that Nkrumah's rhetorical ability endowed him, for a time at least, with truly 'charismatic' status. Even some of the leaders of the 1961 strike against the Nkrumah Government described his impact in terms as rapturous, if not quite so poetic, as those of Ayi Armah's hero in The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born:

"I stood there staring like a believer at the man and when he stopped I was ashamed and looked around to see if anybody had been watching me. They were all listening. The one up there was rather helpless-looking, with a slight, famished body. So from where had he got this strength that enabled him to speak with such confidence to us, and we waiting patiently for more to come? Here was something more potent than mere words. These dipped inside the listener, making him go with the one who spoke." 1

Yet it would be wrong to over-emphasise Nkrumah's personal hold over the railway workers. The militant artisans, unlike most other Ghanaian social groups, already possessed in Pobee Biney a leader of their own of similar rhetorical power

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1. Ayi Kwei Armah, The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born, (London: Heinemann, 1969), p.101. A. Y. Ankomah, a prominent organiser of the 1961 strike against the Nkrumah Government, admitted that, "He (Nkrumah) had even me captured with his sugar-coated words in those days, and I've always been a straightforward man. There were no exceptions. It was irrational. He just swept you along with his determination. It was only later we discovered he wanted to be a dictator." Interview with A. Y. Ankomah, 3rd August 1971.



and equal charismatic stature to that of Nkrumah. Indeed, many of them came to hold the view that he was greater than Nkrumah, more courageous and more consistent to his principles. Certainly, his influence was more continuous and direct, and his leadership was crucial to the success of the 1950 'Positive Action' strike (from which, the railway workers claim, Nkrumah would have backed down had not Biney forced his hand). Since his role in Railway Union politics in 1945-50 was so central, and illustrates vividly many of the continuing characteristics of rank-and-file attitudes, it is worth focussing on his part in these events. The following account presents the way in which Biney's character, role and ideology were perceived, (or, more accurately, subsequently perceived), by the skilled railway workers themselves. Although this runs the risk of over-emphasising his personal importance, and over-glamourising his real character and personality, such an account is the more informative as to subsequent attitudes and behaviour. For the 'legend of Pobee Biney' still provides the 'ideal' model of Railway Unionism for many members.

#### Pobee Biney and the Politics of the 1950 'Positive Action' Strike.

Alfred Pobee Biney was born at Cape Coast on January 13th, 1914.<sup>1</sup> Educated at the Government Boy's School there, he left in 1932 and took a series of jobs with the Mining Companies before entering the training scheme for engine drivers in the Railways in 1935. He soon took an active interest in trade union affairs, becoming a member of the Enginemen's Union Executive in 1941. Two years later, he appears to have been

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1. The following account of Biney's career and ideology is based on F. Wudu, op.cit., and interviews with many of the older railway workers in June-August 1971.

influential in persuading the enginemen to re-amalgamate with the main Railway Union. His militant style of unionism was to earn him the nickname "Let Go the Anchor" - a reference to the phrase he himself coined for declaring strike action, and intended to express the idea of downing tools (or 'dropping anchor'), thus bringing the Railways to a grinding halt.

His initial participation in trade union officialdom was no doubt inspired by the ideological stimulation he received from membership of Wallace-Johnson's West African Youth League, and can be seen as clearly directed to building up a powerful radical political following. But, even more clearly than Wallace-Johnson, he was no mere ideologist but was rather sincerely concerned to right particular grievances. From the point of view of the skilled railway workers, his career is seen as having developed from that of mere branch unionist to major nationalist leader, and emphasis is placed on the fact that he was not a 'politician' in the conventional derogatory usage of the term, but a real workers' leader. To this is often added the significant qualification, "He was a real workers' leader, but not just the railway workers' leader, rather a community leader. I should say he was a fighter for the suffering masses, a real humanitarian." <sup>1</sup>

Biney initially developed this reputation as a 'fighter for the suffering masses' on the basis of his bold and successful, if constitutionally improper, spokespersonship for the railwayworkers' grievances. As we have seen, the Railway Union emerged from the Second World War period as the Gold Coast Railway African Clerical and Technical Employees Union, its Executive dominated by clerical unionists who mostly accepted

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1. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 10th June 1971.

the British model of apolitical unionism and favoured a policy of peaceful negotiation rather than direct action in the settlement of grievances. This policy proved markedly ineffective and, to many of the skilled worker rank-and-file, their officials seemed insufficiently concerned, urgent or courageous in their handling of grievances.

It was in this situation that Pobe Biney began to lead groups of aggrieved employees, skilled and unskilled, irrespective of their job category and proper channel of representation, to impromptu interviews with foremen and other supervisors to press for redress. He held no official Executive rank in the Union at this time: in 1945-49, he was merely Takoradi branch representative for the enginemmen on the Working Committee, (with the exception of a brief period in 1946 when he stood in as Interim President on the retirement of S. Wood). But he is remembered as having been almost invariably successful in gaining some redressive action. His main resource for this role seems to have consisted simply of his personal qualities of persistence and "courage". He scorned red-tape and other (as he saw them) 'delaying tactics' of Management, and was able to over-awe even senior executives with "his huge magical frame" (Biney stood 6 ft. 3 ins. tall and was extremely muscular). He was in a sense a bully, but a highly idealistic one.

"Soon his fame spread far and near and aggrieved railway employees would mob him during the brief spell his shunting engine stood in steam. They would state their grievances to him in great detail and retire, highly optimistic that their petition was in capable hands. Or they would travel to his residence from the farthest railway station to present their case and seek advice." 1

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1. F. Wudu, op.cit., p.5.

Apparently, these petitioners included unskilled and clerical as well as the skilled workers.

On the basis of this approachability and success, and his "stirring speeches at mass meetings, in which he advocated the correction of injustices merely from an impelling desire to see such injustices righted", <sup>1</sup> Biney's stature was such as to enable him to intervene decisively in the strike of 1947. The skilled and unskilled workers had still not received the benefits promised them in 1941 and were feeling the sharp pinch of inflation. Nevertheless, the Executive proved slow and shy to press their case. By February 1947, we are informed, "a rift is developing between the labouring and clerical classes, the former accusing the latter of resting content because of the awards which they have gained under the recommendation of the Harragin Commission". <sup>2</sup> In October, the Executive was pressurised into threatening strike action, and, on the 22nd, 5,900 workers - the total skilled and unskilled labour force - went on strike.

After two days, the Provincial Council of Chiefs sent a delegation to Sekondi to request that the strikers return to work while negotiations were carried on. At a mass meeting, the Union President, A. K. de Veer, declared himself in favour of the Chiefs' suggestion. Biney stood up and expressed his contempt for such a back-down, attacking the Chiefs ("our little gods of times past, now become messenger-boys of the Colonial Government") <sup>3</sup> for attempting to interfere. On a virtually unanimous vote, the strike continued for thirteen more days. The official Executive was further embarrassed when, again largely at Biney's instigation, the rank-and-file rejected the first draft

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1. Ibid., p.6.

2. RAA, Burden to Korsah Committee, 20th February 1947.

3. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 10th June 1971.

communique produced after negotiations with a Government-appointed Commission, and they were compelled to return and fight for certain amendments.<sup>1</sup>

In spite of this demonstration of his substantive leadership of the rank-and-file, Biney was not elected to the Union Executive, until in 1949 the Enginemen broke away yet again, and Biney became President of the Railway Enginemen's Union. (In the same year, he was also elected Vice-President of the Gold Coast TUC). There were two main reasons for his failure to achieve executive status. The Executive was selected by delegates from the various branches at the annual Conference, and few of the disproportionately high number of clerical delegates admired Biney's personality or ideological tendencies. Some of the skilled worker representatives, too, were secretly not enamoured of Biney's somewhat demagogic behaviour, involving frequent improper excursions into their official territory of jurisdiction. Secondly, rank-and-file pressure for Biney's election as President was reduced by general recognition of his possession of skills more suitable to the role of 'leader in times of crisis' than the performance of continuous administrative functions.

Nevertheless, his reputation continued to grow with his leadership of demonstrations of discontent not only within the area of Management-Worker relations, but also in the wider field of Government-Community politics. An interesting example of this occurred in early 1949 during the funeral of an ex-railway worker, a Mr. Banka. Several hundred workers were participating in the customary procession from Location to Sekondi city centre. In the words of one of them:

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1. The Korsah Committee eventually awarded wage increases of some 50 per cent to Government manual workers. See Table 2.1.

"A white man came speeding along in his car with no intention of slowing down for the procession. Pobee jumped in front and stopped the car and beat on it, telling him to show due respect. Some of us joined in. Unknown to us he was a Chief of Police. He instructed his force to come and arrest the leaders in the procession. When we were brought to Court, we were fined £15 by the Magistrate, but Pobee Biney told us not to pay. We were not to pay the Government anything because we were in the right and we had the solidarity of the workers behind us. Realising this, the Government first reduced the fine, and later dropped it altogether. This was a great victory for Pobee." 1

During 1948-49, Biney organised several rallies in Sekondi to communicate his radical nationalism to a wider audience. Hundreds of railway workers would ride into Sekondi on a hi-jacked train, and disperse throughout the city urging people to come and attend the rally, thus expressing in practical form Biney's belief in the political vanguard role of the organised, enlightened workers. Biney's rhetorical skill is frequently described in similar terms to those of Nkrumah: "We always felt he was simply revealing our own thoughts and needs to us. It was a though he was able to penetrate our consciousness and extract out of it the feeling of solidarity." 2

The ideology he communicated might best be termed "African Populism". He attacked the evils of Colonialism on the grounds not only of economic exploitation but also of its destructive effect on the traditional culture and social relations, the sense of brotherhood of the Ghanaian people. The true "people" he defined as "the common people", as distinct from the elite of lawyers, civil servants, and other collaborators with the Colonial regime. He derided the latter's cultural

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1. Interview with J. K. Baaku, 21st July 1971.
  2. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 10th June 1971.

separatism, their "White African" dress and manners. He was therefore strongly opposed to the United Gold Coast Convention and its leadership of "lawyers who would not risk their wigs for the sake of the common man".<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, he was totally unsympathetic to the view, prevalent among many Railway Union and TUC officials in 1949-50, that staging a strike in support of "Positive Action"<sup>2</sup> would be to confuse trade unionism with party politics and to misrepresent those workers, mainly clerical staff, who favoured the U.G.C.C. rather than the C.P.P.

This did not mean that Biney wished to tie the Ghanaian labour movement to unconditional support of Nkrumah's Convention People's Party. He emphasised in his speeches the idea that the railway workers were fighting for a new, independent and more just society, not for the Convention People's Party as such. It is likely that he was already aware of the divergence between the skilled railway workers' aims (as he conceived them), and those of many leading members of the C.P.P. Accordingly, his notion of the vanguard vote of the organised, enlightened workers in leading the Ghanaian people to Independence involved the corollary that they should continue to act thereafter as defenders of the nationalist movement's aims, checking degenerative tendencies in the party-become-government. Admittedly, this implication became far more clear to the rank-and-file from Biney's speeches and behaviour after the "Positive Action" strike and the C.P.P.'s accession to a share of government power. In 1949-50, the issue of party commitment was not squarely faced. Nevertheless, it is the "conditional" nature

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1. Interview with Isaac Adjey, railway artisan, 14th July 1971.
  2. For several months in 1949-50, Nkrumah advocated a political strategy known as "Positive Action" in support of his demand for "Self-Government Now". This meant resort to boycotts, strikes and other forms of civil disobedience on the pattern of Ghandi's politics of non-violent protest.

of railway worker support for the C.P.P. which deserves emphasis even during this early period.

In retrospect, it might seem strange that Biney was at all prepared to back the C.P.P., and the melange of social forces it represented. There was talk in 1949 amongst the radical railway unionists of forming a separate "Labour Party" but this was rejected as being unrealistic.<sup>1</sup> Of course, the full extent of Nkrumah's willingness to compromise with the colonial authorities and the right-wing of his own party, could not have been apparent at this time. Nor could the weakness of the U.G.C.C. challenge have been fully anticipated. A further consideration might have inclined Biney to throw his weight behind Nkrumah. It is possible that Turkson Ocran, personal secretary to Nkrumah for a time, and a close ideological associate of Biney, was influential in persuading the latter of Nkrumah's sincere intention to back the radicals in the trade union movement. Ocran, we shall see, was himself to pay dearly for so over-optimistic an assessment.

In any case, the immediate problem for Biney and the radicals in 1948-49 was to secure control of the Railway Union and the TUC. Of crucial importance here was Biney's success in developing a close friendship and ideological accord with Frank Woode, himself a clerical unionist, and General Secretary of both organisations in 1947-49. The ascendancy which Biney's political line had achieved on the Railway Union Executive by April 1949 (illustrated in the following communique) was due in considerable measure to Woode's support and his influence with the clerical unionists:

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1. RUA, Railway Union Working Committee Minutes, 3rd February 1949; and Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 17th July 1971.



"This Union wants it to be resolved at the Conference that the Trade Union Congress must force Government to reduce inflation. If the Government fails, the working class will back any Government who accepts this on principle. If the government-to-be (self-government) indicates better living for the working classes, there should be no alternative but to back it.

A responsible Government officer recently said that Trade Unions must not go into politics. This in our opinion is a deliberate attempt to make Trade Unions in West Africa impotent. Instances can be quoted from the West Indies where labour and politics have shown a better way to the world.

We cannot stand out of politics. Our demand can serve as an avenue to lay pressure on the Government in our legitimate demand for self rule.

Your faithful Brother Secretary,

F. Woode, " 1

By 1949, the position of the political unionists had also been strengthened on the TUC Executive Council in consequence of the "Big Six" episode.<sup>2</sup> In response to the Accra riots of 28th-29th February 1948, the Colonial Government arrested six leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention. Frank Woode, General Secretary, convened an emergency session of the TUC Executive which resolved to call a General Strike unless the detainees were released within three days. In subsequent discussions with the Government, C. W. Techie-Menson, President of the TUC, and leader of the non-political unionists, accepted the Government's explanation for the arrests, and its

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Resolutions, 23rd April 1949.
  2. The "Big Six" were: Dr. J. B. Danquah, Messrs. Kwame Nkrumah, William Ofori-Attah, Obetsebi Lampsey, Ako Adjei, and Akufo-Addo.

assurances that the Six would be released on the arrival of a Commission of Enquiry from Britain. He agreed to call off the strike, and Woode and the other militants, though unconvinced felt bound to demonstrate solidarity. Shortly afterwards, however, they made such an issue of Techie-Menson's unrepresentative leadership that he was forced to resign from the Presidency.<sup>1</sup> This facilitated the election of Pobee Biney as Vice-President and Anthony Woode as General Secretary of the TUC in August of the same year.

Anthony Woode (no relation to Frank Woode), was just 23 years old at this time. He had risen to sudden prominence in the trade union movement through his highly successful leadership of the Oil Storage Workers of Takoradi, gaining important benefits for his membership through aggressive bargaining. He held radical nationalist views of similar complexion to Biney's, and the two became close friends. Woode was also a good friend of Turkson Ocran. These three met regularly in Sekondi during 1949 to discuss and co-ordinate plans for a general strike, with Ocran acting as intermediary between Nkrumah on the one hand, and Biney and Woode on the other.

In spite of the predominance of radical nationalist views in both Railway Union and TUC Executives in 1949-50, anti-political attitudes had not been totally overcome, and united support for an overtly political general strike could not be anticipated from either Executive. At the TUC level, the Mineworkers Union, most importantly, refused to be won over. Within the Railway Union, the President himself, J. C. Vandyck (who was also President of the TUC but delegated most of his duties to Biney), perhaps recalling his incarceration in 1941-42, was

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1. For further details, see E. Cowan, op.cit. p.25.

unprepared for such dangerous action as Biney was proposing, and resigned rather than involve himself in it.<sup>1</sup> When the time came, therefore, Biney and Woode concentrated their efforts on the railwayworkers and other workers in Sekondi-Takoradi, and called the strike without even consulting the other members of the Executive or gaining formal approval at a mass-meeting.

The excuse for a general strike (and it was really little more than that) came with the Government's dismissal of some 60 Meteorological Department workers for staging an illegal strike in October 1949. Anthony Woode forwarded a telegram to the Government on 13th November, protesting the dismissals, and threatening general strike action. It seems probable that this threat was conceived by most members of the TUC Executive as an indication of concern rather than a serious expression of intent. Biney and Woode had no intention of backing down, however, and, at a meeting with the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs on 6th January 1950, rather raised their demands to include "(a) the withdrawal of the government circular concerning the political activities of civil servants", and "(b) the immediate granting of Dominion status".<sup>2</sup> On 6th January Pobee Biney announced a General Strike to start at midnight and called out the railway workers. On 8th January, Nkrumah announced the commencement of his "Positive Action" campaign.

There is evidence to support the railway workers' contention that Nkrumah was reluctant to go ahead with "Positive Action" but found his hand forced by Biney and Woode. Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, Governor of the Gold Coast at the time, has written:

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1. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 17th July 1971.
  2. Cited in E. Cowan, op.cit., p.48.

"The party leaders had been officially informed and were well aware that they had a perfectly constitutional way of achieving power and gaining their objective, if their candidates at the forthcoming election were returned. I have good reason to believe that some at least of the party leaders would have preferred not to resort to "positive action" but to await the results of the general election, of the outcome of which they were fairly confident. But they found themselves enmeshed in the costs of their own propaganda. The tail wagged the dog...." 1

Reginald Saloway, the Colonial Secretary, has been even more explicit:

"Nkrumah publicly called off 'Positive Action' (and) tried hard to get the Trades Union Congress to call off the general strike, but the TUC no longer had any control over the wild men. (Moreover) Dr. Danquah taunted Nkrumah with having sold himself to the Colonial Secretary and thus infuriated the rank and file of the C.P.P. who forced Nkrumah to retract." 2

Railwayworker participation in the strike was virtually one hundred per cent solid and lasted until 20th January. Some intimidation was certainly used - Biney had groups of his most enthusiastic supporters stationed along all routes to the Railway work centres in Sekondi-Takoradi to dissuade would be strike-breakers, mostly clerical staff, from going to work. But the extent of spontaneous support for the strike was impressive. Workers in most parts of the country, on the other hand, participated for only a few days, and the mineworkers did not come out at all.

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1. Charles Arden-Clarke, "Eight Years of Transition in Ghana", in African Affairs, Vol.57, No.226, (Jan. 1958), p.32.
  2. R. Saloway, "The New Gold Coast", in International Affairs Vol.32, No. 4, (Oct. 1955), p.471.

### Ideology and Significance of the 'Positive Action' Strike.

The reasons for this difference have already been outlined. The Railwayworkers' concentration in Sekondi-Takoradi, the characteristics and especial sense of grievance of the skilled workers, their direct relationship to Government as employer, all made for naturally strong, militant, and, in a sense, inevitably political, trade unionism. In addition, Biney developed a large measure of personal control over the rank-and-file on the basis of his embodiment, in extreme and idealistic form, of the values of this militant union culture: and then asserted this control to stage the Positive Action Strike.

One further factor deserves brief mention here, though it will receive more detailed consideration in subsequent chapters. Biney emphasised that, in challenging the Government, the railway workers were not just asserting their particular interests: they were rather acting as the vanguard, or the 'spokesmen of the people'. This notion was readily accepted by the skilled workers, and the 'heroic' element in such a self-image helps explain their determined resistance in the face of Government threats of reprisals. It is worth noting the situational considerations which lent tenability and wide currency to such a conception. Unlike the mineworkers, relatively isolated in their rural locations, the railway workers lived of course fairly centrally in a large city, closely in touch with other discontented, disadvantaged groups (see Map 2). In a city owing its growth almost entirely to the Railway and Harbour installations, the railway and harbour workers were, in a sense, the economic centre of the community. With the exception of some of the clerical workers, they were also socially and culturally very much a part of the masses, or 'common people'.

In contrast to most of the 'common people', however, they possessed the organisation and strategic power to make a serious impact on government. It was easy to conclude that they had almost a communal duty to assert this power.

There was, therefore, an important idealistic dimension to railway workers militancy. This dimension is perhaps most accurately characterised as "populist" in the sense in which Peter Worsley uses the term.<sup>1</sup> That is to say, " 'Populism' is best conceived as a style of popular participation rather than a systematic ideology", but one involving "a high valuation of the virtues and culture of the uncorrupted, simple, common folk, and a converse distrust of the wealthy, over-educated .... and fundamentally corrupt urban elite."<sup>2</sup> The social structure is conceived dualistically in terms of an Elite-Mass division and opposition. Often, populism is a form or style of nationalism, in which the native elite are seen as the stooges of an external imperialist power.

Worsley's description of the typical structure of leader-follower relations in a populist movement is clearly applicable to the case of the railway workers and Nkrumah. The populist leader is generally a "charismatic" figure, and often characterised by a "strong man" image and by acceptance of violence as a legitimate means of effecting political change. On assumption of power, however, the leader is likely to be faced with the familiar problem, but in especially acute form, of "institutionalising" a new, and in some ways, inevitably disappointing order. Increasing separation of leadership from rank-and-file and attempts to defuse the movement and substitute control for

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1. Peter Worsley, "The Concept of Populism" in G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (eds.), Populism, its meaning and national characteristics, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1970), pp.212-50.
  2. Ibid., pp.243-44.

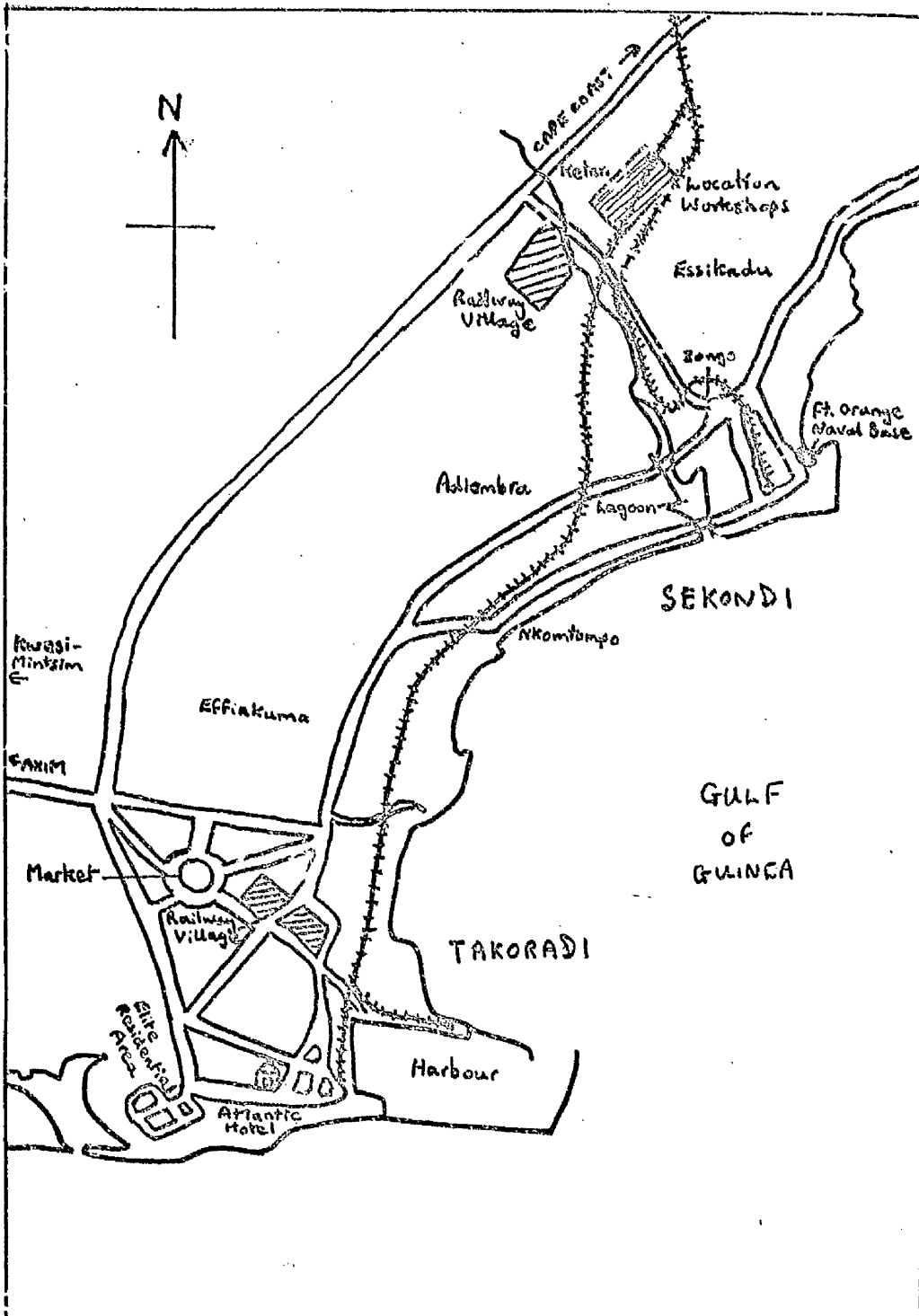
orderly development are likely to be seen as a "revisionist" betrayal. This is particularly the case in view of the vagueness and/or diversity of the movement's positive policy aims.

This provides important insights into the subsequent process of railway worker disillusionment with the Nkrumah regime. But, not to anticipate this process excessively, the important point here is that after the 1950 "Positive Action" strike, the railway workers naturally felt they had a right to expect much of the Nkrumah regime. This had, after all, cost them dearly. The Colonial Government declared a state of emergency and arrested a number of trade union leaders, including Biney and Woode, as well as Nkrumah and several other C.P.P. leaders. These were brought before the courts, convicted, and sentenced, Biney to six months' imprisonment, Nkrumah to one year on each of three separate counts. All Government employees participating in the strike were dismissed and later re-employed only on conditions which entailed their losing long-service increment and other benefits. Understandably, many workers lost interest in trade union participation for several years to come, the TUC collapsed, and most of its constituent unions became moribund.

On the other hand, the General Strike was successful in intensifying determination for political emancipation in the country as a whole, in stirring the Colonial Government to more progressive policies, and so in hastening the C.P.P.'s accession to power. During 1950, the Coussey Constitution was formulated, giving Ghanaians a measure of self-government, and arrangements were made for a general election to be held in February 1951. At this election, the C.P.P. was successful in winning 34 out of 38 seats in the Legislative Assembly, and Nkrumah was released from detention to become leader of Government Business.

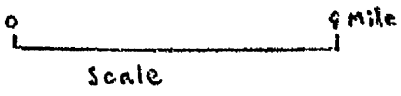
The beginnings of a new social order were therefore in sight, and the leaders and participants in the 'Positive Action' strike had high expectations of it. They expected, firstly, some recognition of their own contribution to the Nationalist cause, some reward for services rendered. Apart from individual rewards, this meant aiding the revival of the trade union movement and according it an important role in the political life of the country. While the railway workers expected a strong trade union movement to bring them benefits, and anticipated that their representatives would play a leading role in it, this was not desired out of purely selfish motivations. The aim of their nationalist participation had not been simply their own economic advancement, certainly not if this meant maintaining the existing socio-economic and political structure and simply stepping into the white man's shoes. The new order should be more egalitarian, more brotherly than that of the past: it should be government in the interests of the common man. The political role of the trade union movement should be directed to ensuring that such a new order was in fact institutionalised.





MAP 2: SEKONDI-TAKORADI

- Roads
- - - - - Railway



CHAPTER THREE.

THE RAILWAYWORKERS' RESPONSE TO C.P.P. SOCIALISM

In the 'Positive Action' Strike of January 1950 the Sekondi-Takoradi railway and harbour workers demonstrated their enthusiastic support for Nkrumah's nationalist campaign. In September 1961, they staged a seventeen-day strike against the Nkrumah Government's July Budget, a strike in which, according to St. Clair Drake (who was present at the time), "the Government saw its very existence implicitly challenged", and which "drastically altered the entire character of political activity in Ghana".<sup>1</sup> This latter strike action, while certainly motivated in part by economic grievances - most obviously, opposition to the Budget proposals for a Property Tax and a Compulsory Savings Scheme - was also undoubtedly informed by wider political motivations. It was not the action of an economically desperate working class. The most reliable statistics available suggest

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1. St. Clair Drake and L. A. Lacy, "Government versus the Unions: The Sekondi-Takoradi Strike, 1961", in G. Carter (ed.), Politics in Africa: 7 Cases, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World Inc., 1966), pp.67-118. Citations, p.115.

I am indebted to this excellent article for arousing my initial interest in Railway Union politics, and for the detailed account of the general economic and political background to the strike which it provides. It will be apparent to the reader, however, that my account differs from theirs in focus, conceptualisation, and interpretation. Whereas St. Clair Drake and Lacy see the 1961 strike, and Railway Unionism more generally, as an instance of "conventional trade union practice" informed by "an economist ideology" (p.116), my own research led me to emphasise the overtly political, 'populist', strain in railway worker ideology, and the close interrelationship of railway worker politics with the community structure and politics of Sekondi-Takoradi.

that the skilled and unskilled workers enjoyed substantially improved living standards by 1961 relative to a decade earlier. Yet the staging of an illegal strike in so determined a manner, in opposition moreover to measures which the Government had made clear it considered essential to the achievement of its major objectives, and in what was politically an extremely sensitive moment - with Nkrumah out of the country visiting the Eastern Communist bloc, and widespread popular unrest in Ghana at the Budget's austerity measures - these considerations suggest that, at the very least, the 1961 strike expressed a far-reaching disillusionment with the Nkrumah regime.

This opposition, it should be remembered, came from the former vanguard supporters of Nkrumah. If political allegiance in the Ghanaian nationalist movement entailed more than a purely immediate economic alliance, then the reasons for the railway workers' disillusionment merit extensive consideration. What, then, were the sources and nature of this disillusionment, and, in more positive terms, the aims, explicit or implicit, of the strikers?

As Ioan Davies has suggested, the 1961 strike was in part the reaction of an old established union - the Railway Union - against the takeover of the labour movement by C.P.P. bureaucrats with little or no supporting-base in the working rank-and-file.<sup>1</sup> The previous chapter described the leading role played by the Sekondi-Takoradi railway and harbour workers in the pre-Independence development of a Ghanaian trade union movement. Between 1950 and 1961, the railwayworkers' leaders,

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1. Ioan Davies, op.cit., p.109.

and the role they conceived the labour movement should play in an independent Ghana, were both displaced by the dominance of C.P.P. officials in a 'new structure' modelled on a very different conception of 'the proper role of labour'. In the second half of this chapter, it is intended to trace the development of this struggle between the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file leadership and the C.P.P. loyalists, and to show that the 1961 strike was primarily an episode - the 'showdown' in fact - in this conflict.

But it would be mistaken to confuse the opposition of the Sekondi-Takoradi railwayworkers to the 'new structure' with that of other 'old-established' unions such as the Mines-workers Union or the United African Company Employees Union. The latter's leaders were primarily concerned to defend the autonomy of their unions as essentially 'consumptionist', apolitical organisations. The railwayworkers of Sekondi-Takoradi rather adhered to a model which was openly political but 'oppositional-reformist', in contrast to the 'loyalist', control-oriented model of the C.P.P. unionists. This conception informed their conflict with the C.P.P. unionists in the TUC in 1950-61 - though not, of course, in a social vacuum, or for purely historical reasons. Certainly the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi had reason to expect more from Independence than most other social groups. But they were also especially prone to disillusionment with the increasingly oligarchical and autocratic nature of the C.P.P. regime for a number of structural reasons. The development of such tendencies within the TUC itself was, from this perspective, especially staunchly opposed but only a part of the matter. Obviously this was the politico-economic structure which most directly affected and involved the railwayworkers. But, in addition, it was Pobee Biney's and his followers' conception that the trade union movement should be especially concerned to check such degenerative tendencies in the political system as a whole. Accordingly, some of the strike leaders went so far

as to threaten to foribly disband Parliament. If this general notion of asserting the accountability of government was indeed the subjective significance of the 1961 strike action, then it is far easier to understand why the skilled railway and harbour workers, although formally protesting measures which would directly affect only themselves and the higher-paid workers, conceived themselves as acting "on behalf of the people". As we shall see, they did in fact receive the active and/or moral support of virtually all the inhabitants of Sekondi-Takoradi - unskilled workers who would not be directly affected by the Budget measures, the market women, and even many of the unemployed. Workers in other parts of the country, including the skilled railwayworkers of Accra and the 'up-country' branches participated, if at all, for only a day or two.

Before proceeding to an analysis of the struggle waged by the railway workers for control of the trade union movement in 1950-61, it is necessary, therefore, to consider those structural factors which created such intense and widespread local support for their efforts. Only then, is it possible to appreciate the full range of issues which this struggle came to involve. These are two main factors to be considered here : the nature of Sekondi-Takoradi as a community together with the position occupied by the railway workers within it : and, secondly, the development among the 'common people' of Sekondi-Takoradi in general of a sense of pronounced social distance from, and economic exploitation by, the Accra-based C.P.P. elite.

#### Sekondi-Takoradi: A Working-Class Community.

Sekondi-Takoradi was (and remains) a predominantly working-class city (i.e. populated largely by 'lower-paid' workers), in which most of the inhabitants were affected,

directly or indirectly, by the level of real wages for these workers and hence by the politics and performance of the TUC.

Unlike Accra (Ghana's administrative centre) and Kumasi (the trading centre), the city of Sekondi-Takoradi owes its growth almost entirely to industrial development, and more particularly to the location there of the Railway Workshops and the Harbour. The 1955 Household Budget Survey estimated that 90 per cent of earnings in Sekondi-Takoradi came from wage-employment, compared to 67 per cent for Accra and 22 per cent for Kumasi (see Table 3.2). In 1961, the skilled and unskilled workers employed in the Railway and Harbour installations constituted approximately one quarter of the city's total male labour force of 43,000. Another quarter were employed as skilled or unskilled manual workers by the City Council, the Government Departments (e.g. Public Works, Posts and Telecommunications) the Shipping Companies, or in one of the several medium-sized manufacturing industries located there.<sup>1</sup>

Taking into account also the junior clerical workers, this means that approximately two-thirds of the total male labour force were in the lower-paid worker category, earning less than N¢50 per month.<sup>2</sup> Approximately 12 per cent were unemployed.

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1. In 1971, there were about fifteen large or medium-sized firms in Sekondi-Takoradi, manufacturing cigarettes, cocoa-butter, paper products, minerals, furniture, household utensils, cement blocks, and boats.
  2. The term, "lower-paid workers", is used throughout this study to refer to those earning less than N¢50 per month as at 1971 - i.e. all unskilled workers, skilled workers (with the exception of their Foremen and a few of the most senior amongst them), and junior clerical workers. This categorisation clearly comprises nearly all those who, in Britain, would normally be termed simply 'workers' or 'the working class', but, in view of the more vague and ambiguous usage of these terms in Ghanaian discourse, it was considered necessary to be more explicit. It is worth noting, however, that virtually all the railway unionists interviewed in 1971 were agreed in identifying 'the workers' in accordance with this categorisation.

The proportion of middle-class or elite elements was very small, (see Table 3.1).

Table 3.1 Composition of the Sekondi-Takoradi adult male labour force, 1960 (percentages).

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Employed <sup>a</sup>	78
Professional, technical	4
Managerial, administrative	2
Clerical	14
Sales	6
Farmers, fishermen	7
Transport, communications	12
Craftsmen and production process workers	25
Labourers and longshoremen	21
Service and sport	9
Employers and self-employed <sup>b</sup>	20
N	42,691

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Source: 1960 Population Census of Ghana, Special Report A.

<sup>a</sup> Those who did any work for pay or profit during the month preceding the census.

<sup>b</sup> These are all included in the occupational categories above.

This occupational structure, with a much higher preponderance of lower-paid workers than in Accra or Kumasi, was reflected in the difference in average earnings between the three cities. In 1955, average earnings in Sekondi-Takoradi were £11.10 (or N¢28) per month, compared to £16.8 (or N¢39) for Accra and £17.18 (or N¢42) for Kumasi (see Table 3.2).

Sekondi-Takoradi was then a relatively poor urban community, dominated both numerically and in terms of general ethos, by lower-paid manual workers. Moreover, this labour force was relatively stable - a high proportion of workers were committed to urban wage-employment as a relatively permanent occupation rather than short-term migrants.

Table 3.2 Average Earnings and Expenditure in Ghana's Three Cities.

		Average Family Size	Average Earnings	Wages as % of Earnings	Average Monthly Expenditure
Sekondi-Takoradi	(1955)	3.98	£11.10	90	£12.9
Accra	(1953)	4.24	£16.8	67	£15.24
Kumasi	(1955)	4.15	£17.18	22	£14.2

Source: Gold Coast, Office of the Government Statistician, Sekondi-Takoradi Survey of Population and Household Budgets, 1955, Statistical and Economic Papers No.4.

According to Margaret Peil's survey, 69 per cent of Sekondi-Takoradi workers planned to stay in their jobs for at least 3 years, compared to 36 per cent for Accra, or 43 per cent for Kumasi: and almost as many in fact stayed for as long as 5 years.<sup>1</sup> Job stability amongst the skilled railway and harbour workers was even higher than this in 1971, with 73 per cent having been in their jobs for more than 5 years and 46 per cent for more than ten.<sup>2</sup> These factors made for the development in Sekondi-Takoradi of a strong sense of working-class identity and solidarity, stronger, most probably, than could be found in any other West African city. Even the casual workers, who in most countries and strike situations display little solidarity and are often cast as 'blacklegs', have in Sekondi-Takoradi generally been concerned to show solidarity with their 'brothers' in direct actions. Maxwell was a casual labourer in

1. Margaret Peil, The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), pp.101-3.
2. Questionnaire Survey conducted by the writer. For details, see Chapter Seven.



the Docks in 1961:

"Oh, yes, I joined in the strike and demonstrations. I even carried a placard and led my fellow-workers. After all, the railwayworkers are my brothers, and we are all here for the same reason, to earn a living wage, and we have to unite to tell the Government what it should be doing to help us." 1

More generally, the predominantly working-class composition and ethos of Sekondi-Takoradi tended to foster the strong development of 'proletarian' attitudes - anti-elitist, anti-corruption, and anti-authoritarian - which were likely to become prevalent among lower-paid workers generally (i.e. in other cities) as correlates of their situation in the national politico-economy, but whose growth and articulation would be inhibited in less congenial environments.

Yet this 'working-class' identity was often conceived, especially by the skilled railwayworkers, not in terms of "the working-class versus employers" but rather of "the common people versus the big men in Government". As one railway artisan described the background to the 1961 strike, "Us poor common people, we were being cheated by those big men in Accra, and anyone who tried to speak up for us was detained or hounded out of the Party". 2 The notion of acting as "the spokesmen of the common people" or "the eyes and ears of society" was no doubt in part conceived by the railwayworkers to strengthen their claim to represent a large body of opinion, and reflected their awareness of the minority and relatively privileged position of urban wage-earners in the larger national society. But, judging from the

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1. Interview with Maxwell Annobil, harbour-worker, 19th October 1971.

2. Interview with F. Awortwi, railway artisan, 29th August 1971.

support they received from other occupational groups in the 1961 strike, this was not mere rhetoric. In so predominantly a working-class community, the unemployed looked largely to their worker fathers and brothers for assistance, and were therefore directly dependent on the workers' financial capacity to perform this social welfare function. Similarly, the market women and the small businessmen relied very largely on the trade of the workers, and therefore had an indirect, but clearly perceived, interest in the lower-paid workers' financial prosperity and in the politics of the TUC.

This sense of common interest was not, however, simply a matter of other local groups recognising their dependence on the railway workers. The growing hostility of the railway workers to the C.P.P. elite was fuelled by resentment at abuses of power which hurt other sections of the 'masses' as much as themselves. And, since the railway artisans identified with Sekondi-Takoradi as a relatively permanent 'second home', they shared the general sense of disillusionment of the 'common people' of that city with the conduct of C.P.P. officials and the lack of benefits accruing to the city (and the Central and Western Regions more generally) from the attainment of Independence.

#### Communal Grievances and the Elite-Mass Gap.

In the relatively small and poor urban community of Sekondi-Takoradi, the corruption and high living of C.P.P. officials was both highly visible and particularly provocative to the ordinary resident. A. Y. Ankomah, a leading organiser of the 1961 strike, though earlier an enthusiastic supporter of Nkrumah and "his sugar-coated words", described the process of his own disillusionment in terms similar to those used by nearly all railway worker interviewees:

"We had union leaders imposed on us, men like H. W. Mensah (Regional TUC General Secretary) with no trade union background. We heard they were buying Borgward cars with our money. They tried to persuade us the TUC was doing a good thing by establishing these shops for the workers, but the leaders took things on credit and never paid, so the shops had to close down. And they went with other people's wives. Really, there was so much corruption and wife-stealing.

"Then there were the Brigade Officers coming home with cars loaded with foodstuffs, the Ghana women held big, big parties every Saturday, and Young Pioneers were being flown to Russia for courses and indoctrination. Then rumours about corruption in the City Council started coming out through some of the junior officers. But the worst people were the Farmers' Council leaders. They would come into Takoradi and throw their money around in the bars, boasting about how they had cheated our brothers and sisters in the rural areas. This was too much." 1

One of the areas in which C.P.P. corruption most directly hurt the interests of the railway workers was that of housing. Between 1950 and 1960, the population of Sekondi-Takoradi almost doubled, (rising from 44 thousand to over 75 thousand), thereby exacerbating a serious housing shortage which dated back to the early part of the century. In 1912, the then Railway General Manager wrote that,

"Seccondee is an upstart town, practically the creation of the railway, and an ever-expanding institution requires constant additions to the staff. Houses are now almost impossible for new men to find, rents are exorbitant, and incidentally the cost of living is very high ..... The men live all over the place in wretched conditions." 2

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1. Interview with A. Y. Ankomah, 15th August 1971.
  2. Quoted by R. B. Davison, "The Story of the Gold Coast Railway", West Africa, (1956), p.587.

Later, two railway villages were built, one at Ketan (on the outskirts of Sekondi) and the other near the centre of Takoradi, but these at no time provided accommodation for more than one third of the railway employees. Busia's Social Survey of 1950 gave a vivid picture of the overcrowding which still persisted there <sup>1</sup>, and the 1955 Survey revealed little improvement, with an average of 3.3 families and 11.8 persons occupying each house. In 1952, Takoradi landlords and tenants were complaining that a law forbidding tenants to live in kitchens would result in thousands of people being homeless. <sup>2</sup> Two years later, the Town Council, under the chairmanship of the popular I. K. Kumah (an ex-harbour worker and President of the Ghana Federation of Trade Unions), announced plans to build two housing estates, consisting of some 800 houses in all ("in the 'bourgeois' style" - i.e. two rooms and a hall), "to provide fitting accommodation for our workers and their families". <sup>3</sup> Soon after completion, however, these houses were taken over for allocation and administration by the National Housing Corporation which, as the 1966 Commission of Enquiry into its affairs clearly showed, proceeded to allocate them to local officials of the various C.P.P. wings and organisations, or those who could afford the bribes demanded by Corporation officials (which certainly did not include the lower-paid workers), or even in some cases to Accra-based M.P.s and their girl-friends. <sup>4</sup> In consequence the lower-paid workers

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1. K. A. Busia, Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, (Accra: Government Printer, 1950), pp.31-50.
  2. Ashanti Pioneer, 26th July 1952, p.6.
  3. Daily Graphic, 5th March 1954, p.3.
  4. Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Affairs of the National Housing Corporation, (Accra: Government Printer, 1967).

of Sekondi-Takoradi found the housing situation deteriorating rather than improved, and were forced either to pay exorbitant rates for small rooms, or else to band together with relatives or friends to build or rent a house to accommodate several families.

Closely related to such abuse of power was a steady diminution in the channels of mass communication with the Government, both central and local. Indeed, it was this factor, the people of Sekondi-Takoradi's lack of access to Government patronage or to channels for making their sense of deprivation known, rather than the extensiveness of bureaucratic irregularity itself, which might be held to account for their especial sensitivity to the evils of corruption. The most important issue for the railway workers in this respect was the connection perceived between the corruption of top officials and the growing disregard for democratic processes within the TUC. But the significance of this phenomenon was lent greater urgency and wider relevance by the operation of similar tendencies in other institutional areas.

The City Councillors, originally local people pushed forward as local representatives, became increasingly unapproachable and irresponsible to local needs. There was no change in the composition of the City Council between 1954 and 1960 with the exception of four new members out of a total of twenty-one in the 1959-59 elections. This certainly did not reflect satisfaction with the representation the electorate were receiving. There were several instances of councillors' being dragged out of their houses at night by the local 'young men' to "explain" what had happened to the money for facilities the Ward had promised. In fairness, the Council was not receiving the money it required for constructing much-needed roads and schools

because of mutual distrust between it and the Ministry of Local Government.<sup>1</sup> This fact, together with the Council's loss of much of its authority and financial resources to the District and Regional Commissioners, meant that there was no longer much point to the C.P.P. ward meetings. Whereas in the first half of the fifties, the fortnightly ward meetings had been genuine mass forums, held out of doors, with opportunity for the articulation of local needs and grievances in some hope of remedial action, by the late fifties they had come to consist of irregular, small, indoor meetings, largely conspiratorial in nature.<sup>2</sup>

Very few of the new industries established under C.P.P. rule were located in Sekondi-Takoradi. The people of that city felt, with some justification, that the Accra area benefitted disproportionately from Government-induced development, while the Central and Western Regions were neglected. The available statistics suggest that in fact, employment opportunities in the Eastern Region, (including Accra), rose by some 56 per cent between 1956 and 1963, compared to a mere 16 per cent in the Western and Central Regions combined (see Table 3.3). Naturally, this lack of significant economic development in Sekondi-Takoradi was blamed on the ineffectiveness, or unconcern, of the M.P.s and Commissioners for the area.

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1. GNA Sekondi, Acc 158/6, Ministry of Local Government Report for Quarter Ended 31st December 1956, according to which, "The Council has as much faith in the Ministry's promises as the Ministry has in the Council's accounting."
  2. Interviews with J. Flynn (Sekondi businessman), Atta Hussaini (Municipal Councillor for Ward 5, 1954-60), and T. N. Kankam (Municipal Councillor for Ward 7, 1954-60).

Table 3.3 Changes in Ghanaian Employment, by Region, 1956-63.

	1956 (thousands)	1963	Index of Change (1956 = 100)
All regions	267.4	374.1	140
Ashanti/Brang-Ahafo	53.6	75.1	140
Eastern (inc. Accra)	105.7	164.6	156
Northern/Upper	13.4	21.4	160
Volta	10.3	15.5	141
Western/Central	84.3	97.5	116

Source: Norman Uphoft, "The Expansion of Employment Associated with Growth of G.N.P.: A Projective Model and Its Implications for Ghana", Economic Bulletin of Ghana, Vol.2., No. 4., (1972), p.9.

The Regional and District Commissioners generally proved unapproachable and extremely unpopular<sup>1</sup>: "Go to see them? - They would not even speak to you unless you were a big man in the party. And anyhow, how could you approach them as they flashed past in their big cars? They did not have time to throw a pesewa to a beggar."<sup>2</sup> On the Parliamentary level, faith in the representative character of the Assembly was not strengthened by the expulsion of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers' outspoken heroes, Anthony Woode and Pobee Biney, nor by the subsequent appointment of two women with little local standing, support, or contact, as representatives for the Western Region.<sup>3</sup> These were not the kind of people to voice popular discontent

1. The Regional Commissioner for the Western Region was J. K. Arthur, whose main claim to high status in the Party was the part he had played in 'capturing' the Minesworkers and UAC Unions in 1950-58.
2. Interview with S. Smith, railway artisan, 7th August 1971.
3. These were Grace Ayensu, wife of the Vice-Chairman of Sekondi-Takoradi Council, J. W. Acquah; and Christina Wilmot, a telephonist in the Public Works Department.

with the Government at any risk to their own positions. Dis-satisfaction with the style and structure of Parliamentary politics was clearly expressed in the strike leaders' threat that, if Parliament did not give way to the demands of the people, they would disband that body by force.

This general issue of popular resentment at the widening socio-economic and communications gap between the C.P.P. elite and 'the common people' who had brought them to power was not, of course, articulated as a formal issue in union politics. But it was much discussed in the bars of Sekondi-Takoradi in the months leading up to the 1961 strike, especially by Pobee Biney, whose political demise after 1956 came to symbolise the failings of the regime for many of the railway and harbour workers.

#### The Politics of Trade Union Re-organisation, 1950-58.

The repercussions of the 'Positive Action' strike of January 1950 virtually destroyed the Gold Coast TUC and many of its constituent unions. Particularly affected were those unions which had participated in the strike under the radical leadership of Pobee Biney and Anthony Woode. The Minesworkers Union and the United African Company Employees Union, having remained aloof, were less seriously disturbed, and the Colonial Labour Department decided to encourage the resuscitation of the TUC around these moderate, apolitical unions, with affiliation to the I.C.F.T.U. (the Western liberal trade union centre). The new headquarters were to be based in Accra rather than in troublesome Sekondi. A new Constitution prohibited Congress from initiating general strike actions, and allowed the Labour Department supervisory powers over the use of Congress funds. In July 1950, J. N. Sam, the Minesworkers' President, became President of this resuscitated Gold Coast TUC, and Charles Techie-Menson, former President



and leader of the 'moderates' in 1945-48, now stood in as General Secretary.

At the same time, the Convention People's Party, under the direction of Komla Gbedemah during Kwame Nkrumah's detention, turned its attention to the Minesworkers Union for the purpose of 'capturing' it and ensuring its participation in "Positive Action No. 2". For, in 1950-51, Gbedemah and Nkrumah had little reason to think that the apparent failure of the 'Positive Action' strike would soon become a glorious victory for them. They blamed what they saw as the dismal failure of that strike on Biney and Woode's failure to bring out the Minesworkers, and, judging that a further, more solid bout of Positive Action was required, Gbedemah instigated a drive to capture the Gold Coast Mines' Employees Union.<sup>1</sup> In a series of elections, the old officers were driven out, and staunch C.P.P. men such as D. K. Foevie and J. K. Arthur took over control. These men lacked sufficient prestige with the rank-and-file, however, to contemplate staging a strike action immediately. Moreover, the shrewd generosity of the Chamber of Mines in its negotiations with these new leaders hindered their attempts to whip up militant feeling. In the event this proved unnecessary since, by September 1951, 'Positive Action No. 2' was cancelled. Nkrumah was out of prison and Leader of Government Business, having decided to co-operate with the Colonial Government and its schedule for Self-Government.

This co-operation came to extend to the Labour Department's re-organisation of the TUC into a more moderate, Accra-based labour movement. The C.P.P. leaders were now more interested in consolidating their newly acquired political power than

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1. Chamber of Mines Report, June 1952, (mimeo).

in continuing to develop a movement of opposition.

It was obvious to them that they could not immediately fulfill all their campaign promises, and during this tricky period of transition from nationalist agitation to executive responsibility, Nkrumah had no more desire than Governor Sir Charles Arden-Clarke to have to deal with serious industrial disturbances. Party loyalists should now direct their efforts to cooling down the unions. C.P.P. men were already in control of the Minesworkers' Union, and in 1952, A. Allotey Moffatt, a Kumasi railway unionist who was "closely linked to the Hon. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah"<sup>1</sup>, was elected General Secretary of both the Railway Union and the Gold Coast TUC. It was to this Gold Coast TUC also that such able and ambitious C.P.P. organisers as John K. Tettegah (subsequently TUC General Secretary, 1954-59, and 1960-62) and Joe-Fio N. Meyer (TUC President, 1956-58; Chairman of the Executive Board, 1958-59; and Secretary-General, 1959-60) directed their efforts - men with little initial supporting base in the rank-and-file of the labour movement, but close to Nkrumah, and possessed of very considerable political and organisational abilities.<sup>2</sup>

This sudden switch in official C.P.P. policy alienated the radical unionists and their followers, who had been pursuing a course of escalating opposition to the Colonial Government and now found themselves required to cool down and take a back-seat. Anthony Woode, for instance, had been continuing his efforts to stir up the Minesworkers, touring the Mines Townships in the summer of 1951 making inflammatory speeches. He attacked the leadership of the Gold Coast TUC and the G.C.M.E.U., in spite of the fact that C.P.P. men were already in control in the latter

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1. RUA, Executive Council Minutes, 10th March 1952.
  2. Tettegah's practical trade union experience consisted of acting as Secretary to the small G.B.Ollivant Employees Union in 1951-53. Meyer had even less practical experience or rank-and-file support when he entered the service of the Gold Coast TUC in 1953. Indeed, he took this step, in  
/continued overleaf

organisation. Woode still believed that, ultimately, it would be necessary to drive the British out and was therefore angered by Nkrumah's decision to co-operate. Pobee Biney, meanwhile, on his release from goal in August 1950, similarly felt that further 'Positive Action' was required to force the Government's hand, and organised the 'Ghana Calling Association', a group of ex-servicemen, unemployed, and other militants in Sekondi who apparently aimed to obtain explosives and initiate a terrorist campaign of property destruction.<sup>1</sup> By October, the Sekondi Police had succeeded in goaling several of its members and disbanding the Association. Very few railway workers, it would appear, however radical in their aims, were prepared for such guerilla-type revolutionary activity. Here, as on several subsequent occasions, the mass of railwayworkers perhaps proved more realistic in their political thinking, as well as more peaceable, than Biney himself.

During 1951, Biney assumed the seat in the Legislative Assembly with which the C.P.P. rewarded his nationalist contribution, and attempted to lobby his way back into the Gold Coast

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Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

his own words "only because my friend John Tettegah, whom I knew from the Accra C.P.P. meetings, asked me to help in the re-organisation. This was really a very difficult decision because I already had a good career in view in my company, but I agreed when Tettegah assured me that Nkrumah had promised his full financial and moral support for our efforts." Interview with Joe-fio N. Meyer, 9th October 1971.

1. Personal communication with Richard Rathbone. According to one of the few railway worker informants who could recall anything about the 'Ghana Calling Association'. "We knew it was just the akpoteshie talking: Pobee went crazy for a while when he came out of prison." Interview with F. Piadoo, 23rd June 1971. Those who took it seriously certainly numbered no more than twenty or thirty.

TUC. The reconstituted Congress rejected his approaches on the grounds that he was no longer employed in the Railways or a member of any constituent union. Nevertheless, he and Anthony Woode insisted on standing as candidates for President and General Secretary in the 1952 Congress elections, but were defeated by Larbi Odam and A. A. Moffatt, the former a moderate apolitical unionist and the latter a reliable C.P.P. loyalist.

It is difficult to judge whether Biney and Woode's candidature in this election was serious, or simply intended to impress on the rank-and-file of the Railway Union and other workers in the Western Region that the resuscitated Gold Coast TUC was the work of imperialist intrigue. Certainly, this was the interpretation placed on the elections, with Biney and Woode's encouragement, by many of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers, who continued to stand aloof from their official unions and to adhere instead to the leadership of the Gold Coast Unemployment Association, sometimes also known as the 'Dismissed Workers' Assembly'.<sup>1</sup> This Association had originally been formed to campaign for the re-engagement of those workers dismissed after the Positive Action Strike. Having achieved this objective, its leaders, Turkson Ocran and I. K. Kumah, (an ex-harbour worker and later Chairman of the Sekondi-Takoradi City Council), decided to expand the aims of the organisation to those of opposing the resuscitated 'collaborationist' TUC and developing an alternative radical trade union centre. In July 1951, its title was changed to that of the Ghana Federation Trade Union Congress, with Kumah as President and Ocran as General Secretary.

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1. The total dues-paying membership of the Railway Union in March 1952 was 2,050, less than a third of its membership in December 1949. RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 25th March 1952.

Anthony Woode and Pobee Biney, too, though not officials, were known to be closely linked with it. The G.F.T.U.C. policy programme consisted primarily of pressurising for radical redistribution in the existing wage structure, and switching the international and ideological affiliation of the Ghana trade union movement from the I.C.F.T.U. (the Western liberal centre) to the W.F.T.U. (the Communist centre).

The majority of the skilled railway workers had refused to rejoin, or participate in, their own official union after the election in August 1950 of A. T. Foley and F.K. Balfour as President and General Secretary respectively. Foley & Balfour were both moderate clerical unionists who denied personal involvement in Positive Action and were concerned to send "an assurance of co-operation and loyalty to the Colonial Secretary, Accra".<sup>1</sup> They further proposed to affiliate the Union to the resuscitated Gold Coast TUC. At a mass meeting on 15th August 1950, the "Technical Men, Takoradi branch" resolved "that we are unanimously not in favour of the new officers. The old officers should function."<sup>2</sup> Two weeks later, the Takoradi Branch Secretary informed the General Secretary that, "The situation appears to confirm the desire expressed at certain quarters to split the union into two sections: Technical and Clerical".<sup>3</sup> In the event, no formal division occurred, but the majority of "Technical men" - the skilled and unskilled manual workers - took membership of the Ghana Federation Trade Union Congress on an individual basis or lent it their moral support.

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1. RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 5th August 1950.
  2. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 19th August 1950.
  3. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 1st September 1950.

At a meeting in Sekondi in October 1951, Nkrumah accused the G.F.T.U.C. of "dividing the workers" and apparently gained the agreement of the Executive to its dissolution.<sup>1</sup> At a mass meeting two days later, however,

"Hundreds of workers decided to oppose the dissolution of the Ghana TUC - 'We do not want any imperialist tactics - Nkrumah should come and tell us what good thing he wants to do for the workers' - The members decided to maintain the Congress and to await what would come out of the proposed conference of all trade unions."<sup>2</sup>

Encouraged by this demonstration of rank-and-file support, the G.F.T.U.C. leaders decided to stand their ground and fight the party bureaucrats for control of the labour movement. On October 27th, they announced,

"The Ghana TUC has asked the Government to review all laws inimical to the interests of the workers in the country. The Congress would not be affiliated to any political party. This new Congress considers the existing Gold Coast TUC as lifeless because its officers are always under the influence of employers",<sup>3</sup>

Turkson Ocran was able to use his personal influence with Nkrumah - he was Nkrumah's Personal Secretary in 1951-54 - to impress upon them the need to accommodate the Left-wing unionists if large numbers of the Western Region rank-and-file were not to be alienated from the official labour movement. In mid-November, Nkrumah publicly agreed with the Ghana TUC that the Gold Coast TUC was inefficient and suggested they form "one strong TUC which will be independent of Government interference".<sup>4</sup>

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1. Daily Graphic, 22nd October 1951, p.1.
  2. Daily Graphic, 24th October 1951, p.1.
  3. Daily Graphic, 27th October 1951, p.8.
  4. Daily Graphic, 17th November 1951, p.1.

Nevertheless, the rivalry between the two TUC's continued throughout 1952. This was against the wishes, it must be said, of Nkrumah who was probably thinking in terms of C.P.P. influence rather than formal control over the unions at this stage. He was accordingly prepared to accommodate the energies of the Left-wingers if only they would be more realistic as to immediate requirements and possibilities. This union rivalry was also against the wishes of growing numbers of the Railway Union rank-and-file, whose confidence in Nkrumah and his political strategy was revived (somewhat) by the publication in April 1952 of the Lidbury-Gbedemah Commission Report recommending a large wage increase for the lower-paid.<sup>1</sup> Many were also concerned to concentrate for the moment on Union re-unification and re-organisation. In short, there appears to have been considerable confusion amongst the skilled worker rank-and-file at this stage over whether to remain outside the official Railway Union and adhere to the old Left-wing leaders or whether to rejoin the Union and at least displace the existent inefficient clerical leadership:

"I would say most of the men in my shop (one of the Location Workshops) were refusing to pay Union dues though we attended the meetings sometimes to see what they were proposing to do for us. The way we saw it, Pobee Biney had brought us a lot of progress, and the Unemployed Association people had tried to make sure we would not /cont..

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1. The Lidbury-Gbedemah Commission awarded an increase of 38% to unskilled labourers, 25% to skilled workers, and progressively smaller proportionate increases to higher-paid government employees. This was obviously well received by many of the lower-paid workers. But, since this was intended to be the permanent post-War settlement, Biney and Woode, (who sat on the Commission), were dissatisfied with both the size of the increase for the lower-paid, which barely covered the rise in the cost of living since 1950, and with the failure to make more radically egalitarian changes in the overall wages structure.

".. suffer for our part in it, so they were the people to be our union leaders just as Nkrumah was now the Prime Minister. And anyway they did not know anything about our problems or how to tell the Management what should be done." 1

The feeling that someone who "knew about our problems" should be elected to run the Railway Union, even if this were not Pobee Biney or one of the G.F.T.U.C. leaders, was sufficiently strong to induce many of the manual workers to rejoin the Union and participate in the 1952 elections. John Eshun, an artisan and an early organiser of the Union, was elected President on the platform of "centralising all efforts on the betterment of the manual staff which forms the greater bulk of the Union". 2 One of the resolutions passed at the Delegates Conference was to the effect that there should be an increase in the representation of the Associations (as distinct from the Branches), and thereby in the number of 'technical' unionists (as distinct from the Branches), and thereby in the number of 'technical' unionists (as distinct from 'clerical'), on the Working Committee. 3 The

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1. Interview with Isaac Adjei, railway artisan, 14th July 1971.
  2. RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 25th March 1951.
  3. Formerly, each of the eight Union Branches had two representatives on the Working Committee, while each of the ten Departmental Associations, (e.g. Electrical, Marine, Clerical), had one only. Since the 'up-country' branches together with the Clerical and Stores Associations, generally elected clerical staff as their representatives, this meant that 'clerical unionists' normally outnumbered 'technical unionists' on the Working Committee. The reform of 1952 provided for two delegates from each Association, most of which were based in Sekondi-Takoradi and generally elected technical men as their representatives.



new General Secretary, A. A. Moffatt, was an experienced branch and regional trades council organiser from Kumasi, who had been imprisoned for his part in the 'Big Six' protest of 1948, and was expected to be a 'forceful' leader. The primary issue in this election, therefore, was seen at the rank-and-file level as that of technical versus clerical Unionists, and of the lack of dynamism of the outgoing 'clerical' leadership.

There was considerable dismay later in the year, however, at A. A. Moffatt's acceptance of the General Secretaryship of the Gold Coast TUC, especially since this involved him standing against the candidature of Pobee Biney and Anthony Woode. Biney and Woode attempted to interpret their defeat to the Railway Union rank-and-file as a work of "imperialist intrigue" on the part of Nkrumah in collaboration with the Colonial Government, and thereby to force the issue of Left-Wing versus C.P.P. Moderates back into the forefront of Railway Union politics. This strategy met with only limited success, since it would seem that at this stage Biney and Woode were outpacing majority rank-and-file opinion. Many of the railwayworkers were inclined to place more faith than they in the sincerity and good intentions of men such as Moffatt and Tettegah, and in Nkrumah's assurance of Government non-interference in trade union affairs. This division of opinion together with considerable confusion as to the real motivations and intentions of the leading actors was, we shall see, to persist at the rank-and-file level of the Railway Union between 1952 and 1958, with first one view - i.e. confidence in the C.P.P. and its favoured union leaders - and then the other - i.e. identification with Biney's criticisms of the subservience of the C.P.P. unionists - gaining the ascendance. Ultimately, Biney's view was to win out, but in 1952 the issue was not so clear, and tended to cross-cut that of Railway Union and Labour Movement re-unification.

In attempting, therefore, to force the issue of C.P.P. Left-Wing versus Centre at both TUC and Parliamentary levels in 1952-53, Biney and Woode were guilty of marked political ineptitude. After the rejection of his candidature for General Secretary of the Gold Coast TUC in August 1952, Anthony Woode accepted the Presidency of the Ghana Federation TUC in direct defiance of Nkrumah's expressed wish that he should rather work informally for a merger of the two bodies. And both he and Biney, having failed to secure such far-reaching socio-economic reforms as they had hoped for through their membership of the Gbedemah Commission, mounted increasingly extreme and personal criticism of the Party's loss of idealism and momentum from their seats in the Legislative Assembly. As Biney himself put it, he became "rapidly unamenable to the strange discipline and policies of this party".<sup>1</sup> While there was no doubt considerable justification for this view of the Party's rapid degeneration, it was in the interests of neither Woode nor Biney, given the continuing loyalty to the C.P.P. of most of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers, (on whose support their prominence depended), to force an open split. Yet their criticisms became so extreme as to ensure they were not renominated by the Party in 1953 for seats in the subsequent Legislative Assembly. Partly in consequence of this split, neither retained sufficient respectability even with their own ideological associates to gain any position of influence in the new Gold Coast TUC which was eventually forged out of an amalgamation of the old Gold Coast and Ghana TUC's in July 1953.

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1. F. Wudu, op.cit., p.3.

The composition of the new Executive was as follows:

President	-	F. E. Techie Menson
Vice President	-	I. K. Kumah
General Secretary	-	E. C. Turkson Ocran
Asst. Gen. Sec.	-	John K. Tettegah
Treasurer	-	J. C. Rudolph

At the first Conference, a resolution disaffiliating the Gold Coast TUC from the I.C.F.T.U. was moved by John Tettegah and carried by the majority. The new TUC was to be neutral between the I.C.F.T.U. and W.F.T.U. It was also to remain strictly independent of the Government:

"The Trade Union Movement of this country shall always be free to formulate and advocate its own policies. In the future, as in the past, we shall continue to urge on the Government those policies which from our experience we believe to be in the interests of the country and we shall retain our right to disagree and publicly to oppose the Government where we think it necessary to do so." 1

Nevertheless, the Railway Union rank-and-file remained suspicious of Tettegah and the other ex-Gold Coast TUC leaders:

"He spoke what the workers were feeling in those early days, how the workers were being cheated by the colonialists and they should enjoy the fruits of their labour. At that time we thought the TUC was going to be independent. But we began to have our suspicions over the Ocran business. Tettegah was getting too ambitious." 2

In October 1953, the TUC Presidence announced that the popular Turkson Ocran had been relieved of his duties as General Secretary of the TUC for being a Communist and a channel of W.F.T.U.

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1. "Gold Coast TUC Policy Statement", 20th July 1954, (mimeo).
  2. Interview with A. Y. Ankomah, 23rd August 1971.

funds into the Ghanaian labour movement. This accusation may possibly have had some basis to it. (The W.F.T.U. has at times been generous in its aid to Ghana, not least to the Nkrumah-Tettegah inspiration, the All-African Trade Union Federation (AATUF).<sup>1</sup>) But the main reason for Ocran's downfall (and that of several other alleged Communists) appears to have been Nkrumah's desire to stage a Left-wing purge so as to increase his respectability and reliability in the eyes of the British. The British Government had recently suspended the constitution of British Guiana on the grounds that its nationalist leader, Cheddi Jagan, was following a Communist line. Nkrumah wished to ensure himself against the possibility of similar charges. This was, of course, a strategy commonly adopted by nationalist leaders in the 'collaborationist' phase of the movement. Houphouet-Boigny broke with the Communists in the Ivory Coast, for example, and Azikiwe with the Zikists in Nigeria, in similar circumstances and for essentially the same reasons.

Turkson Ocran was also in Nkrumah's disfavour at this time for his over-sympathetic attitude towards strikers, and, more particularly, his handling of the September 1953 strike at the African Manganese Company in Awaso. On visiting the mine, Ocran did little to restrain the workers or their more militant speakers and, as a result of the continuation of the strike, several hundred workers were dismissed. Such incidents were extremely embarrassing to Nkrumah, who was thereby placed in a difficult position between the new Colonial Government on the one hand and Ghanaian working opinion on the other. There was a danger that further incidents of this kind would play into the hands of the Left-wing critics of the regime. Hence his readiness to clamp down on Ocran and the extremists.

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1. For evidence of close financial links between AATUF and the Soviet trade union centre, see Benjamin Bentum, Trade Unions in Chains, (Accra: TUC Publicity Department, 1967).

In February 1954, the Gold Coast TUC reaffiliated to the ICFTU with John Tettegah as its representative on the Executive Board; and, soon afterwards, Tettegah was appointed full-time General Secretary to the Congress, the headquarters of which were accordingly transferred from Sekondi to Tettegah's town of residence, Accra.<sup>1</sup> Pobee Biney was successful in interpreting these developments to the Railway Union rank-and-file, as a manoeuvre to assert party control over the trade union movement. The railway workers were virtually unanimous in supporting Biney's plan to obstruct such a development. A. A. Moffatt was pressurised to resign from the General Secretaryship of the Railway Union, and at the May 1954 Delegates Conference, the Takoradi representatives, Bukari Moshie and I. E. Inkumsah, nominated Pobee Biney for full-time President of the Union.<sup>2</sup> This motion was defeated at the time on the grounds of Biney's non-employment in the Railways, and the lack of finances for a full-time appointment. One month later, however, in response to further rank-and-file pressure, John Eshun resigned from the Presidency and Biney was elected in his place.

From his base in the Railway Union, Biney then set about forming an alliance with those various and varied elements in the labour movement who were opposed to the leadership of the Accra-based C.P.P. loyalists. The minesworkers' leaders, like the railwayworkers, resented the dominance, and distrusted the intentions, of unionists with little or no mass base. But, unlike the railway workers, they appear to have been narrowly 'consumptionist' in orientation, displaying little interest in developing any kind of political role for the labour movement.

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1. The 1953 TUC Constitution stated that the headquarters should be located in the town of residence of the TUC General Secretary.
  2. RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 12th April 1954.

The United Africa Company Union, composed largely of clerical staff, whose members appear to have been strongly influenced by the Colonial Labour Department model of apolitical company unionism, was concerned to defend its autonomy against TUC plans for its incorporation in a more centralised structure. Some of its leaders appear also to have maintained close ties with the old United Gold Coast Convention politicians who were now prominent in the leadership of the N.L.M. These unionists were labelled as 'reactionaries' by the C.P.P., and perhaps not without a little justification. Yet such a term was hardly applicable to the railway workers or the various other Sekondi-Takoradi unionists (most importantly, the dockworkers), who, alienated from the C.P.P. by the downfall of Woode and Ocran, now lent their support to Biney.

This somewhat disparate alliance worked out a complex voting strategy and attempted to overthrow the established leadership of the Gold Coast TUC at the April 1955 Conference. Having failed miserably - Tettegah got wind of their intentions and was easily able to 'whip' the votes of delegates from the newly established unions, who were in effect his 'clients'<sup>1</sup> - six unions broke away to form a rival Congress of Free Trade Unions based at Sekondi. These were the Public Works Department, Hospital Workers', Maritime and Dockworkers, R. T. Briscoe, Sekondi-Takoradi Municipal Council, and Railway Employees Unions.<sup>2</sup> Contrary to some accounts, the C.F.T.U. did not align itself with the major opposition party during 1954-56, the Ashanti-based National Liberation Movement.<sup>3</sup> From one point of view, this antipathy might be explained in terms of the very different communal interests which the N.L.M. and the C.F.T.U. represented.

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1. Interview with Joe-fio N. Meyer, 15th November 1971.

2. Daily Graphic, 17th October 1955, p.12.

3. For example, Ioan Davies, op.cit., p.109.

But there was also perhaps some truth to the railway workers' own explanation and that they were sufficiently clear as to their reformist aims to avoid involvement in oppositional party politics, particularly when this opposition party consisted of the elitist and tribalistic N.L.M.<sup>1</sup> They were concerned at this stage to press for reform of the C.P.P. and the TUC, (and of the relations between the two organisations), along the lines of a loose informal alliance providing for free expression of rank-and-file opinion and greater accountability of the leadership. Recognising the need to work within the TUC to this end, one year after their protest disaffiliation the Railwayworkers re-affiliated "in order to consolidate the forces of Trade Unionism in the emerging independent Gold Coast."<sup>2</sup>

However, Biney continued his personal campaign against (as he saw it) 'C.P.P. degeneration' on the parliamentary front, standing as an Independent candidate for the Sekondi constituency in the 1956 General Elections. He clearly anticipated the full support of the railwayworkers, especially the skilled workers, for his campaign. But here again, as in 1952, he miscalculated the strength of their personal allegiance to him, or, more accurately perhaps, the sophistication and realism of their political thinking. As one railway worker recalled,

"All the workers here (at Location) knew that the Election was very important for C.P.P. Self-Government, and as we were still strongly C.P.P., we couldn't vote for him (i.e. Biney). We could see his reasons, and appreciated the truth in them, but it was the wrong time to contest the issue. Still, he remained very popular with us and we wanted him to remain our President, but then the C.P.P. became very annoyed with him and some of the union leaders started attacking him, charging him with being

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1. Interviews with Kofi Imbeah, 12th June 1971; and A. Y. Ankomah, 23rd August, 1971. For details of the N.L.M., its programme and sources of support, see Dennis Austin, op.cit., pp.253-81.
  2. RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 5th May 1956.

".. a drunkard and not attending to his duties. Most of us did not believe this, (that he was not attending to his duties), but some did, and Pobee felt betrayed by us. He insisted on resigning. It was a very sad day for us." 1

Biney's failure to win the 1956 election for the Sekondi constituency, and his subsequent resignation from the Railway Union Presidency, marked the end of his formal political career. Yet his ideological and stylistic stance of persistent (if drunken) opposition to autocratic and elitist tendencies in the C.P.P. regime continued to exert a powerful influence on Railway Union politics. Biney epitomised that process of disillusionment which was to culminate in the 1961 strike. This influence operated on several levels and by various channels. He maintained 'in person' communication with many of the railwayworkers in the houses and bars of Sekondi, leading the criticism of C.P.P. policies and elite behaviour in these informal (and often inebriated) political discussion groups. Moreover, the influence of Biney naturally increased as his interpretation of the direction of development of the C.P.P. proved ever more accurate. If in 1952 and 1956 his own views on C.P.P. degeneracy had outpaced those of the majority of the railwayworkers, by 1958-61 Biney's rejection by the party seemed to symbolise the failings of the regime: on the one hand, Pobey Biney, still outspoken, still in touch with the 'common people', still dressed in a simple traditional cloth and pair of sandals; on the other, the wealthy, party-subservient, incommunicative TUC bureaucrats. Biney, everyone knew, was a drunkard; but he was a popular drunk, a frequenter of the low bars of Essikadu and Katan, unlike the elite souses in their plush hotels. And, though it might appear to a more cynical outsider that Biney's political and

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1. Interview with Albert Johnson, Railway Union clerk (1954-69), 5th October 1971.



financial demise was decreed rather than chosen, he nevertheless appeared to many of the railwayworkers as "a consistent spokesman for the suffering masses, for the aims of our Independence revolution - he was the only Ghanaian who had the courage to stand up to Nkrumah, who could not be won over with bribes." <sup>1</sup>

A third, less direct, channel of Biney's influence was through the continuing prominence of his followers and apprentices in Railway Union politics in 1956-61. For this was, relatively speaking, a highly stable labour force in which there was no great expansion in size over the period 1950-61. The annual labour turnover rate among the skilled workers was less than 10 per cent. Even by 1970, 17 per cent of the Location skilled workers could claim to have participated in the 1950 Positive Action strike. <sup>2</sup> Equally important, a high degree of stability characterised the Union middle-level leadership between 1955-56 and 1961. These branch and association officials who sat on the Working Committee, exerted a powerful influence on rank-and-file interpretation of events, and, as the 1961 strike was to illustrate, possessed a far greater degree of control over rank-and-file behaviour than did the top level leadership. These Sekondi-Takoradi middle-level leaders were likely to be forceful, opinionated personalities in the Biney mould. That was why they had been elected. Moreover, Biney had directly influenced the thinking of many of them during his own Railway Union career. Almost all of the middle-level leaders who staged the 1961 strike - i.e. V. K. Quist, W. N. Grant, A. Y. Ankomah, J. K. Baaku, K. G. Quartey, S. Winful, T. Hagan, K. Imbeah, and T. Bentil - had become union officials during his Presidency and through his encouragement. Many still speak of the heroic status

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1. Interview with J. Apprey, railway artisan, 23rd August 1971.
  2. RAA, Railway Administration Staff List (1970). This gives details of the dates of original employment of all 'permanent' staff, i.e. including the skilled and semi-skilled, but not the unskilled workers.

he possessed in their eyes, and of the dominant influence he exerted on their understanding of trade union principles and methods:

"Biney taught me all I know about trade unionism. I lived only a few doors from him in Essikadu, and we would often sit talking. He told me I had the right qualities for a union leader - boldness and being straightforward - and he persuaded me to stand for election in my Association. To my astonishment I was elected and he instructed me how to go about my duties, how I should always speak truthfully and stand up for what I believe in. I can truly say, he was a great humanitarian. Trade unionism and humanitarianism, they are the same thing." 1

This is not to say that all Biney's 'apprentices' followed his example strictly, or maintained his distinction between left-wing reformism and party politics under the pressure of increasing C.P.P. autocracy - though most were concerned to do so. But it is hardly to over-estimate his personal influence to suggest that, in 1956-61, Biney's movement of reformist opposition to the C.P.P.-TUC was carried on by others in his absence.

Immediately after Biney's resignation, J. K. Bohann, Vice-President under Biney and a staunch C.P.P. loyalist, took over as President, but at the May 1957 Delegates Conference, I. E. Inkumsah was elected in his place. Inkumsah was a long-time friend and supporter of Biney's, apparently possessed of a similarly forceful character, and it was expected that he would maintain the Union's stance of opposition to the C.P.P.-TUC leaders and their plans for greater centralisation and party control of the labour movement.

By 1957-58, it should be observed, the railwayworkers' chances of successful resistance by constitutional means had

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1. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 22nd August 1971.

significantly diminished, and their policy alternatives were correspondingly restricted. By 1957, Ghana had 95 registered unions with 58,000 members, compared to 56 unions with a total membership of some 38,000 in December 1949, (see Table 1.1). The majority of the new unions had been established on the initiative of the TUC leadership, (John Tettegah, Joe-fio N. Meyer, and others), and were officered by political clients of Tettegah and the C.P.P.-TUC elite. In many cases, membership figures were purely nominal, and rank-and-file interest and participation in union affairs virtually non-existent. In fairness, some of these new union leaders worked to very considerable purpose and effect. For previously unorganised workers in the employ of private concerns such as the Lebanese Restaurants and Bakeries - termed, with some justification, 'Sweated Industries' by the TUC - the initiative shown by C.P.P. activists in organising them and negotiating improved conditions of service earned warm appreciation.<sup>1</sup> The vast majority of Ghanaian unions in 1957 were, in any case, committed in advance to support any programme presented by the TUC leadership. And although the Railway and Minesworkers' Unions still represented a large proportion, possibly a majority, of the 'active' unionised workers, this strength was not reflected in voting terms in the TUC General Council of Delegates.<sup>2</sup>

Confronted with this situation, the railwayworkers had three possible alternatives. They could abandon their stances

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1. For the TUC's organising achievements during this period, see E. Cowan, op.cit., pp.70-91.
  2. Representation of National Unions in the Supreme Congress was proportional as follows:
 

Up to 500 members	- 1 delegate	5,000 to 10,000	- 4 deleg-
500 to 1,000	- 2 delegates	10,000 to 20,000	- 6 "ates.
1,000 to 5,000	- 3 delegates	Over 20,000	- 8 "

of overt opposition to the TUC leadership and attempt to work within the proposed "new structure" to make, as it were, the best of a bad job; they could retreat to an 'isolationist' stance of non-affiliation to the TUC, thereby evading the controls and demands of the "new structure", but giving up their struggle to reform the national labour movement; or they could turn to mobilising the 'active' rank-and-file of the movement in direct and open opposition to the "new structure". Collectively, the workers of Sekondi-Takoradi could bring the country's transport and communication system to a halt. For less narrowly practical reasons, also, the notion of a communal Sekondi-Takoradi protest-action possessed great relevance and appeal. However, the successful staging of such a protest would require the occurrence of a general and deeply felt issue.

The "New Structure of 1958".

Since its establishment in 1954, the Gold Coast TUC leadership of Tettegah and Meyer had been canvassing the idea of a highly centralised trade union movement with increased finances and authority at the top of the structure. Their reasoning had in principle much to recommend it.

"The fault of the incapacity of the TUC is due to its weak structure and the unfortunate registration of a multiplicity of Unions numbering over 80, some with membership of just over 50, and cannot therefore have any hope of providing any service to the membership except protecting them from dismissals and victimisations." 1

By 1957, the TUC Secretariat had succeeded in organising five centralised National Unions (in addition to the Railway and

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1. "Report of the Committee on Trade Union Organisation to 11th Annual Congress of the Gold Coast TUC, September 1954." Cited in J. K. Tettegah, A New Chapter for Ghana Labour, (Accra: TUC Publicity Department, 1958), p.13.

Minesworkers Unions) and almost doubling union membership, but severe problems remained.

"Despite all our efforts there are (sic) still too great multiplicity of Trade Unions in a small country like Ghana with a population of only 5 million. We must now positively consider the feasibility of merging the various registered Trade Unions into the Trades Union Congress so that Congress could become a negotiating body. Departments can be created and a centralised Executive to direct our affairs throughout Ghana... We must turn to something like the General Federation of Jewish Labour in Israel (Histadrut). This is a new nation and we must build trade union machinery that can hasten the building of socialism and raise the living standards of the working people." 1

Tettegah's recommendations for a 'new structure', based closely on the Histadrut model, were adopted at the 1958 Congress, and a new Labour Movement proclaimed. The exact form of the Constitution was supposed to be worked out after a Special Committee had listened to suggestions or objections from the various Unions. These objections came primarily from the Minesworkers', Railwaymen's and U.A.C. Unions. The U.A.C. and Railway Enginemen's Unions objected mainly to plans to incorporate them in larger national unions. The Minesworkers' Union and the main Railway Union were rather concerned as to the degree of centralisation - financial and jurisdictional - envisaged for the TUC, which would effectively deprive them of negotiating functions and powers they had already shown themselves able to perform efficiently. Even more important, in the view of the railway unionists, was the question of party affiliation. Behind such objections lay a deep distrust of the sincerity (as workers'

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1. Resolution adopted by 13th Annual Congress of Gold Coast TUC, October 1956. Cited in J. K. Tettegah, op.cit., p.14.

representatives) and financial probity of the TUC elite whose position would be the more firmly entrenched by such measures. None of these objections was met in the new Constitution established by the 1958 Industrial Relations Act - indeed, they were not deemed significant enough to merit a formal reply. As far as the railway workers were concerned, there was little empirical justification for Ioan Davies' assertion that, "The 1958 Industrial Relations Act was the result of four years of hard negotiation with the Ghana unions."<sup>1</sup>

Under the Act, a Trades Union Congress was established with twenty-four constituent national unions (reduced in 1961 to sixteen, and in 1965 to ten). All negotiations - for registration, failure of collective bargaining procedures, introduction of the 'union shop' and the 'check-off' - were to be conducted through the Ghana TUC, which was thereby responsible for the direct conduct of all major trade union affairs. To carry out these duties, a large permanent secretariat was to be established at the headquarters in Accra, and nine of these executive secretaries, appointed by the Executive Board, were to sit, together with representatives from each Union, on the Supreme Congress, thus greatly strengthening the hand of the TUC bureaucrats. While officials were in theory to be elected, a Cabinet Minister made it quite clear, that all senior posts were to be occupied by C.P.P. loyalists - "It is an ideological heresy for Party members to elect a non-Party worker as a leader of their organisation - the C.P.P. and the TUC are one".<sup>2</sup> In practice, the railwayworkers soon discovered, the freedom of election was further restricted by the presence of senior TUC and C.P.P. officials at the Delegates Conference, (where Executive members

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1. Ioan Davies, op.cit., p.175.

2. Kojo Botsio, Secretary of Central Committee of C.P.P., to Committee on Workers' Organisation, 11th January 1959. Cited in E. Cowan, op.cit., p.105.

were elected by 'open' voting), in order to ensure the appointment of a particular official candidate as General Secretary. Later (in 1961), Union membership cards were replaced by Party cards.

This extensive central organisation, including special education and publicity departments, was to be financed by the establishment of union shops and a check-off system according to which virtually all wage-earners in Ghana were compelled to become dues-paying members of the TUC (giving a total official membership of some 500,000 in 1962). 45 per cent of membership dues (2/- per month) were to go directly to the Ghana TUC, (with 40 per cent going to the National Union, and 15 per cent to the local branch).<sup>1</sup> The railway unionists pointed out that the requirement they should pay 5 per cent of their dues to a central TUC strike solidarity fund seemed a little unnecessary in view of the fact that they, together with other public sector employees, were to be prohibited from going on strike. But again their objections were ignored.<sup>2</sup> Strikes in the private sector were to be legal only after the exhaustion of an elaborate (and practically inexhaustible) negotiating machinery. A later Government document explained this policy toward strikes and wage claims:

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1. J. K. Tettegah, op.cit., p.28. The TUC's 45 per cent share was to be allocated as follows: 25 per cent to General Administration and Regional Organisation, 5 per cent to Strike Solidarity Fund, 10 per cent to Social Welfare and Insurance, 5 per cent to Business Enterprises. In practice, the TUC was not adequately financed by members' dues and received various government subsidies. For details, see The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Affairs of the Ghana TUC, (Accra: Government Printer, 1967).
  2. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 20th June 1958.

"In a socialist Ghana, the distribution of the national income can no longer be the chance outcome of a chaotic struggle between antagonistic classes. Rather it should be based on scientific decisions regarding the utilisation of increases in the nation's wealth in such a way as to advance the welfare of the worker and the growth of the economy and to maintain an adequate level of employment within a framework of economic stability." 1

For workers in private industries, and especially those formerly ineffectively organised, this 'new structure' had something to recommend it. Prior to the 1958 Act, many private employers had refused to recognise workers' representatives or meet them for negotiation. They were now compelled to recognise unions and negotiate industrial agreements with professional TUC officials. After several years of operation of the new structure, one independent observer concluded that,

"In the industrial relations field the Ghana TUC has acted with a considerable degree of responsibility: its relations with the Ghana Employers' Confederation have developed well, and together these two organisations have agreed on important advances in the scope of collective bargaining and joint consultation." 2

The practical benefits of these new arrangements were not inconsiderable. A legal minimum wage was introduced in 1959, and its enforcement in the private sector, though far from universal, was doubtless more extensive than would otherwise have been the case. In the period 1960-66, moreover, TUC officials succeeded in negotiating substantial wage increases for many private sector employees which at least mollified the

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1. Seven Year Development Plan, (1963-70), (Accra: Office of the Planning Commission, 1964), p.171.
  2. B. C. Roberts, "Labour in the Tropical Territories of the Commonwealth, (Ph.D. thesis, London School of Economics, 1964), p.145. For details of collective bargaining agreements negotiated by the Ghana TUC in 1958-61, see In the Cause of Ghana Workers, (Accra: TUC Publicity Department, 1962).



effects of rapid inflation on real living standards.<sup>1</sup>

For previously organised Government employees such as the railwayworkers, however, the advantages of the 'new structure' were far less clear. They lost the right to strike absolutely, and, with this, a great deal of their bargaining strength. They enjoyed no arrangement for regular negotiation with their employer - the Government - and therefore depended on TUC initiative for bringing attention to their grievances. The TUC leadership argued that through its participation in the top Government and Party decision-making bodies - (Tettegah was to have a seat in the Cabinet as Ambassador Plenipotentiary) - it could safeguard the workers' real interests bound up as these were with the interest of the nation as a whole. The various questions of housing, education, inflation, and unemployment could be tackled far more effectively through TUC influence on Government policy-making than by strike actions for higher wages. Anyway, the workers should be less concerned with immediate standard of living increases than with working "consciously for the development and strengthening of the new socialist sector of the national economy", and acting as an ideologically-conscious vanguard "to create a state based upon the socialist pattern of society adapted to suit Ghanaian conditions".<sup>2</sup>

In abstract, the railwayworkers' rejection of this 'progressive' argument might well appear 'reactionary'; but such an interpretation would assume the existence of a sincere and credible national leadership. The railway workers viewed the TUC's 'socialist' argument as little more than a confidence

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1. See The Report of the (Mills-Odoi) Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana (1967), (Accra: Government Printer, 1967), p.31.
  2. J. K. Tettegah, Towards Nkrumaism: The Role and Tasks of the Trade Unions, (Accra: TUC Publicity Department, 1962), p.14.

trick, and, in retrospect, it appears that they were not entirely mistaken. Their distrust derived in part from their past experience that government generally, including the Nkrumah regime, had to be forcibly pressurised into considering its employees' demands for improved conditions of service. TUC officials, who were also C.P.P. 'apparatchiks' would, it was thought, be less than enthusiastic to jeopardize their positions by pressing the Government too strongly. Recent experience provided confirmation for the view that the maintenance of the strike weapon (at least as a threat) was essential to the protection of workers' interests. During the summer of 1955, there had been mounting pressure from lower-paid workers for Government to increase its minimum wage.<sup>1</sup> The Lidbury-Gbedemah award of 1952-53 had already been eroded by inflation. Several powerful groups of workers, including the railway workers, threatened strike action, but the TUC leadership refused to voice support for their demands. Eventually, Nkrumah announced the appointment of the Waugh Commission on the day immediately following the minesworkers' commencement of strike action. Neither they nor the railway workers were likely to be convinced by TUC President Techie-Menson's defensive assertion that "the Prime Minister's statement is the outcome of the efforts of the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress as a whole, and not of a single or individual union."<sup>2</sup>

The introduction of so great a degree of centralisation and party control as the 'new structure' proposed could only, it was felt, result in an even more pronounced and corrupt subservience of the leadership. No matter how good its original

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1. Department of Labour Report, 1955-56, p.8.
  2. Gold Coast, Legislative Assembly Debates, Issue No. 3, (Nov. 1955), column 661.

intentions, this would inevitably make a mockery of that leadership's claim to represent the workers, and indeed of 'socialism', as that ideal was understood by the railwaymen. It would be mistaken to think that the railway unionists' concern was either purely economic or narrowly self-interested. The principle of democracy, both economic and political, was at stake. With the erosion of that principle in so many institutional areas in 1957-61, the trade union movement represented, as it were, the last line of defence. W. N. Grant, a leading organiser of the 1961 strike, was quite clear about this:

"Tettegah tried persuading us about the advantages of his consolidation, and we had to agree with this, but we disagreed about party control. The thing was we realised Nkrumah was becoming a dictator. He was already trying to bribe workers' leaders to co-operate in muzzling the workers. Everybody had been put into a frenzy of fear. You couldn't speak your mind. So it was all political really. But we had to be careful not to be too obviously political." 1

Herein lay an acute dilemma for the railway workers' leaders. It was obvious to Grant and some of his fellow-unionists that their objections to the C.P.P.-TUC were so fundamental, and the logic of autocratic politics so inexorable, as to necessitate challenging the very existence of the Nkrumah regime if it was to be resisted at all. Yet an alliance to this purpose with the opposition United Party - a party whose leadership included precisely those elite elements of the old U.G.C.C. they had so vigorously opposed in 1948-50 - would be not only distasteful and highly dangerous, but ruinously divisive of railway worker unity.

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1. Interview with W. N. Grant, 20th October 1971.

The Railwayworkers' Response - The Joint Council of Railway Unions and the 1961 Strike.

As we have seen, I. E. Inkumsah became President of the Railway Union in May 1957 on the platform of his determination to oppose the TUC leadership's plans for extreme centralisation and party affiliation. At the TUC Conference in Cape Coast on 25th - 26th January 1958, Inkumsah led the criticism of the proposed new structure, supported most prominently by representatives of the Minesworkers' and Public Works Department Unions. Afterwards, he reiterated to the Working Committee his view that there were "too many flaws in it to be acceptable".<sup>1</sup> At the end of February, he gave his full support to the staging of a demonstration against the new structure. But on 15th June, Inkumsah and his fellow Executive officers attended an informal TUC meeting in Accra and on his return commenced arguing the case for a greater degree of co-operation with the TUC leadership and its plans. At a Location mass-meeting, he declared,

"that since it was to be a Government Bill, it will come whether you like it or not. He said the opportunity was there for discussing the clauses and make representation to Government before the matter reached Parliament, and he really felt that if they could not make good use of the chance, then whether or not they like it, its tentacles would embrace the workers."<sup>2</sup>

This met with hooting and catcalls from the Location workers: "We thought those TUC boys must have bribed him. Or else his cousin (A. E. Inkumsah, the Minister of the Interior) had persuaded him to betray us".<sup>3</sup>

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1. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 13th February 1958.
  2. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 24th July 1958.
  3. Interview with A. B. Essuman, railway artisan and Location Branch Secretary (1962-70), 14th October 1971.

This judgement may have been unfair. Certainly the new structure offered an indirect bribe to the Presidents and General Secretaries of national unions in the form of vastly increased salaries of £840 and £750 per annum respectively. But it is arguable that Inkumsah also had a firmer grasp than the rank-and-file of political realities. His reconsideration of the position did not, he stressed, lead him to support the new structure unconditionally but merely to hold the opinion "that it was better to be in there and have our views expressed, and by the strength of our arguments to win them over to our viewpoint."<sup>1</sup> His fellow Executive Officers, with the important exception of V. K. Quist, agreed with him. That Inkumsah was not "selling out" to the TUC was suggested by the attitude taken towards him by the TUC leadership which, as he pointed out, "was at the same time branding him as being reactionary and working against them in the interest of a political clique" (presumably, the ex-C.F.T.U. leaders). This distrust persisted right through to September 1961 when Inkumsah was detained in spite of his official stance of opposition to the strike; and on his release from detention, the TUC leadership prohibited his re-instatement as President of the Union.

Still, the majority of the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file and their branch and association leaders would not agree to any compromise, and at the July Working Committee Meeting, the Location branch submitted a resolution "disavowing the leadership of Comrade Inkumsah".<sup>2</sup> They listed five charges, of which the last and most important was that "he has committed this union to accept the Histradrut structure prepared by Mr. John Tettegah"<sup>3</sup> - (the use of 'Mr' rather than 'Comrade'

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1. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 14th August 1958.
  2. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 24th July 1958.
  3. Ibid.

here was clearly pointed). The Executive officers and 'up-country' (i.e. non-Sekondi-Takoradi) delegates sided with Inkumsah, in conformity with an oft-recurring pattern in Railway Union politics, and carried the resolution that "there was no substance in the charges proferred against the President - and that the President should remain in office." <sup>1</sup> But the Location representatives insisted that their stand was irrevocable and that "although Comrade Inkumsah has the personality for leadership and is bold, yet since the Location masses do not appreciate his services they wish that he should resign or they secede." <sup>2</sup> At the end of September, having once more failed to win over a majority of Working Committee members, the Location branch of the Union did in fact secede, and, together with the Electrical and Traffic Associations (based at Takoradi), the Marine Association, which had broken away earlier in the year, and the Enginemens' Union, which was maintaining its opposition to incorporation in the central Railway Union, they formed a Joint Council of Railway Unions.

From the perspective of the structure of power and communications in the Railway Union, it is significant that the secession was limited to these groups. It did not include any of the 'up-country' workers, with the exception of those in the Traffic Association, nor all even of the Takoradi workers. The 'up-country' workers and their representatives were (and indeed remain) relatively insulated from those several factors making for especial militancy among the Sekondi-Takoradi workers. More particularly, the ease with which they have been controlled by the official Union leadership derives from their relative isolation from the centre of

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

Union activity, (all negotiations being carried on between Association leaders and Departmental heads based in Sekondi-Takoradi). In consequence, they tend to lack close familiarity with Union affairs, and generally follow the official line as communicated to them by branch representatives. These are in turn easily cultivated by the Executive officers on their tours of the line.<sup>1</sup> A different and more complex explanation is required in the case of the decision of many of the Takoradi workers not to join the secession. Highly 'active', well-informed, and independent-minded in their trade union participation, they could not so readily be controlled by union officials, whether 'local' or 'national'. But in confused situations, where a difficult decision between conflicting aims and principles had to be made, long-serving or particularly esteemed 'local' leaders were often able to exert a subtle but decisive influence over rank-and-file behaviour through the respect accorded their opinions.

So, in 1958, although the Sekondi-Takoradi workers had been united in their opposition to the new structure, many were confused, when it came to the difficult question of secession, as to whether such a transgression of the basic principle and motto of the Union, ("United We Stand, Divided We Fall"), could be justified. In such a situation, the rank-and-file tended to follow the line of their Association leaders, partly on account of patronage ties in the sense of gratitude for past services rendered, but primarily because the opinions and sincerity of their local leaders could, it was felt, be most trusted. As one ex-Association leader put it, with obvious sincerity, "The thing about the railwayworkers, especially here

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1. Such 'cultivation' of up-country officials often takes the form of promising to arrange their transfer to Sekondi-Takoradi in return for 'loyal' service.

in Sekondi-Takoradi, is that you really have to persuade them with good arguments. You must never take their support for granted. But of course it helps a great deal to persuade them if they know you personally and have reason to respect you." <sup>1</sup> Whereas the Association and Branch leaders at Sekondi Location were united in their determination to secede, and A. Y. Ankomah (Electrical Association Secretary), W. N. Grant and A. Y. Bello (Chairman and Secretary of the Traffic Association) persuaded their members to follow, no significant inroads were made among those Takoradi workers whose Association leaders refused to support the secession. This refusal appears to have derived very largely from their long-standing friendship with Union President Inkumsah, who had been the Takoradi Branch Secretary for several years, though, as the secessionists claimed, lack of courage may also have had something to do with it.

The subsequent history of the Joint Council of Railway Unions was lucidly summarised in a Bulletin issued to the rank-and-file membership in July, 1959:

"At the 3rd Annual Conference of the Federation of Government Industrial Trade Unions held in Kumasi, we were invited to attend and discuss the new TUC structure. After a very lengthy and thorough research on the constitution of the structure we were able to extract 13 articles from it to which we objected and forwarded to the Secretary of the TUC for amendments - but he did nothing about it.

"Some time later, we received copies of the Industrial Relations Bill from the Minister of Labour, requesting us to study and submit our objections. We all welcomed this idea but the

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1. Interview with A. Y. A. Bello, Secretary of the Traffic Association (1956-61) and later Accra Branch Secretary, 5th November, 1971.



"..time given us was so limited..... we were forced to sit one whole day to construe the whole Bill: this done, we further submitted 11 articles in the Bill which we found was straining the freedom of Trade Unionism, to the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives for necessary amendments to be made in the Bill. He did not even reply to our letter sent to him, but all that we would hear was that the Bill had been passed into law by the Parliament.

"Later, the Prime Minister met us again to discuss some naughty points in the structure and the Bill. We did not however reach any vital conclusions - the next thing we heard was the inauguration of the new TUC.

"The four Unions in the Railway decided to stay out and operate as it was and in accordance with a section in the same Industrial Relations Act which states: 'Unions not affiliated to the TUC can meet their employers, provided the latter has no objection, but will have no legal bargaining power.'

".... But according to the General Manager, he has received a letter from the Government stating that it is now the Government policy to stop meeting all unions that are not affiliated to the TUC.

"We have sent a letter to the Minister of Labour to confirm whether this policy is correct. We are patiently waiting for a reply.

"I am asked by your leaders to thank you for your unflinching support you have given our march towards freedom of Trade Unionism." 1

The following month the secessionists received a reply from Nkrumah in person:

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1. RUA, Misc./32, Joint Council of Railway Unions Bulletin, No. 1.

"You must not think that I have forgotten the part you played in the struggle for Independence and the support you have given to me personally. Everything I am doing in connection with labour is meant to be in your interests. I know your problems, your difficulties and what goes on in the Labour Movement and I know how to help you solve them." 1

After a brief discourse on the advantages of the new structure, the Prime Minister continued,

"Representations have been made to me that the TUC is extravagant in the use of its funds. I propose to take up this matter with the TUC and I want to assure all workers that I shall see to it that the funds are properly used and that the welfare services which have been promised will materialise.

"I now give my ruling: From now on I and my Government recognise only two national unions in the Railway establishment - the Railway and Harbour Workers' Union and the Railway Engine-men's Union." 2

Shortly afterwards, the Government passed an Amendment to the Industrial Relations Act decreeing that no unions were permitted to exist outside the twenty-four constituent unions of the TUC.

Between then and the end of the year, the splinter groups formally re-amalgamated with the official Union, but the seriousness and bitterness of the 1958-59 division had been such as to prevent any real, lasting reunion, and the conflict between national and local (Sekondi-Takoradi) leadership continued with scarce a respite. In October 1959, the National Executive officers were re-elected without change,

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1. RUA, Misc./32, Prime Minister to J.C.R.U. General Secretary.
  2. Ibid.

having refused to allow the splinter unions' members to vote; and in January 1960, the ex-splinter union leaders were re-elected to their positions in the Branches and Associations. The latter resumed their attack on the top-level leadership by proposing a resolution that only the Associations, and not the Branches, should be represented on the National Executive Council (which would have assured them of majority control there), and that National officers should forfeit the right to vote on major issues since they were "officially classified as Government back-benchers".<sup>1</sup> This was, not surprisingly, over-ruled. The National Officers countered by tabling an amendment to the Union Constitution, recommended by the TUC leadership, according to which,

"Any member who endeavours to create dissension among the members; or who works against the interest and harmony of the Union or of any Branch Union or Departmental Association; or who circulates false rumours or makes slanderous charges or remarks about another member which he shall be unable to prove, shall upon conviction thereof be punished by expulsion from the Union."<sup>2</sup>

This too failed to gain majority support - (it was considered not to be conducive to the proper and peaceful working of the Union) - though the President's disciplinary and executive powers were vastly increased in the new model Constitution adopted in February 1960, and the malcontents had to tread more cautiously for a while.<sup>3</sup>

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1. RUA, Executive Council Minutes, 3rd March 1960.
  2. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 2nd May 1960.
  3. In this new 'model' Constitution, the President of the Union gained the right to appoint all 'ad hoc' committees, to fill all temporary vacancies at the level of National Officers with his own nominees, and "to suspend individual members or offices of the Branch Unions or Departmental Associations where, in his judgement, their activities are in violation of the declared policies of the National Union." RUA, Executive Council Minutes, 8th February 1960.

Below the surface of relative quiescence in the Railway Union in 1960-61, however, opposition to the TUC and the regime it served was growing amongst the rank-and-file, fuelled by further examples of the detachment and insensitivity of top-level officials. President Nkrumah's presentation of a N£250,000 Hall of Labour to the TUC was perceived as a bribe to obligate TUC officials to restrain workers' wage demands, and as a symbol of their corruption and social distance from the working masses. The pseudo-Marxist ideology used by visiting TUC officials, and by the speakers at TUC seminars, was not merely ineffectively communicated to the rank-and-file and their middle-level representatives. Rather, this "Soviet-ism nonsense", as Pobee Biney termed it, was itself a positive irritant to unionists who valued, above all, the qualities of 'straightforwardness' and 'plain-talking'.<sup>1</sup> As one branch official recalled,

"I must be frank, we never understood what they were telling us, we were just following them blindly. The ideas seemed foreign to us, and although the speakers were obviously very brilliant, a lot did not know the workers' real situation. They would tell us, 'The workers of Ghana will never have any difficulty getting milk and margarine', when there was a shortage in the market at the same time. If we had tried to talk that way to the masses - well, a few did and the workers just hooted with laughter over it. Especially the 'isms'. Everything was with 'isms'." <sup>2</sup>

In so far as the TUC ideologists' attacks on "bourgeois opportunists and self-seekers" were understood,

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1. When questioned in July-August 1971 as to the most important qualities of a good trade unionist, 93 per cent of railway worker interviewees immediately responded, "He should be straightforward", or "plain-talking". Questionnaire Survey conducted by the writer.
  2. Interview with A. B. Essuman, 18th July 1971.

they could only serve to highlight the hypocrisy of those making them. A student of the Ideology of the Nkrumah regime concluded from his interview with C.P.P.-TUC leaders: "For many, socialism was not even a perspective within which to bring about modernisation, it was merely a means to rationalise the acquisition of power. Most tended to see socialism in a favourable light in terms of the expansion of their own departments."<sup>1</sup> The Sekondi-Takoradi railwayworkers were not slow to perceive this reality and to contrast the socialism of Tettegah and Meyer with that of Pobee Biney.

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1. J. D. Holm, "Ideology and Socio-Political Development in Nkrumah's Ghana", (Ph.D. thesis, Chicago University, 1966), p.311.

CHAPTER FOURTHE SEKONDI-TAKORADI STRIKE OF 1961.

The previous chapter traced the development in 1950-61 of an increasingly bitter political and ideological conflict between, on the one hand, the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers and their local, middle-level leadership, and, on the other, the C.P.P.-TUC elite, (the national officials of the Union sometimes seen as being allied with the latter). The strike of September 1961 was essentially a further stage - the decisive encounter - in this struggle. In response to the July 'austerity' budget, the middle-level leaders seized on the issues of Compulsory Savings and the Property Tax to publicly test the responsiveness of the top-level leadership to rank-and-file opinion. Implicit in this conflict, it has been suggested, was a wider protest against general characteristics of the Nkrumah regime, its corruption, autocracy, and economic elitism. Such tendencies, however, were generally apparent throughout the towns and cities of Ghana. One is therefore led to ask why they met with so exceptionally hostile and determined a reaction from the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi.

This is not, incidentally, to suggest that other Ghanaian workers were not also disturbed by the growth of such tendencies in the C.P.P. regime. It would seem that many workers in Accra and Kumasi were sympathetic to the railway workers' stance but lacked the courage or organisational solidarity to lend them support. Moreover, in as far as the Sekondi-Takoradi workers were simply in advance of working opinion in other parts of the country, it is perhaps readily understandable that disillusionment should first set in amongst precisely those who, in the early days, had been the most militant and radical supporters of the nationalist movement.

Nevertheless, additional factors were clearly involved. Among the most important of these was the ideological influence of Pobeë Biney and his followers. Yet the influence of Biney's views must be related to other, structural factors making for the growth and continuing vitality of a 'populist' political culture among the railway workers. One such factor was the singularly democratic structure and highly 'participant' ethic of internal Railway Union politics. It is a commonplace of 'socialisation' theory that democratic values are likely to be held especially strongly by those accustomed to regular participation in effectively democratic secondary organisations. In this respect, the railway workers' experience of union participation probably exerted a significant influence on their attitudes to the political system as a whole. There were even clearer reasons for their especial sensitivity to corruption in the C.P.P. regime. ('Genuine' hostility to corruption does, of course, require fuller explanation than is sometimes assumed by western commentators.) Executive and supervisory staff in the Railway Administration, as in the Civil Service generally, were often in a position to benefit from corruption (and patronage) through their control of public access to government services and facilities. This was not, however, the case with the skilled and unskilled railway workers, who enjoyed no such control or contact with the public (in their function as employees). Patronage ties of a very loose kind were often important in their initially securing employment in the Railways, but of marginal significance for gaining promotion or protection against dismissal, since the Union was fairly effective in checking favouritism and discrimination on the part of the Administration. They did, on the other hand, stand to lose a great deal, at least indirectly, from elite corruption - in the National

Housing Corporation, for example; in the Railway Administration itself, where the corruption of senior executives was (and still is) often blamed for the Railway's unprofitability, and the workers' consequent difficulty in justifying wage demands; and, most importantly, in the trade union movement where the rank-and-file suffered from having their leaders bought off by the Government.

These factors, then, considered together with the railway workers' economic frustration, tended to generate highly critical attitudes towards governmental autocracy and corruption. Of course, similar attitudes might be expected to characterise other Ghanaian manual workers to the degree that the same considerations also hold for them. From this perspective, the railway workers' especial predisposition to democratic, populist values might be attributed to the singular historical development and activism of their union culture, and also to the congeniality of Sekondi-Takoradi's predominant 'working-class' ethos.

Yet it would be misleading to portray the 1961 strike as simply a manifestation of (relatively) highly developed class-consciousness. Implicit in the strike and the 'populist' consciousness of its participants was a fairly strong communalistic element. The despised elite were, in the main, the 'big men' in, or from, Accra. The corruption of official institutions emanated, and was directed from there, to the exploitation of the people of Sekondi-Takoradi. Accra alone, it appeared, had benefitted from elite wealth and patronage, with its fine roadsteads and plush hotels. Sekondi-Takoradi had been consistently refused development grants (with the single exception of that for a new market-centre), and seemed to lack any representatives sufficiently influential with the Nkrumah Government to secure fair treatment for the city. Now (i.e. in 1961), the



Government was building a new harbour at Tema - 15 miles from Accra - to the inevitable disadvantage of Sekondi-Takoradi. Resentment at such relative deprivation sometimes found expression in openly regionalistic sentiments: "We Westerners especially, the Government doesn't mind us, yet we have all these industries, bauxite and gold and things, and we work much harder than all those office-workers in Accra, drawing their fat salaries. If they don't look out, it will be another Biafra."<sup>1</sup> The open expression of such sentiments is atypical, and even frowned upon in Railway Union culture, which is itself markedly free from tribalism, and generally disapproving of communalistic movements in national politics. Nevertheless, the Accra/Sekondi-Takoradi dimension certainly served to intensify the railway workers' sense of social distance between the 'big men' and the 'common people', as well as to create widespread local support for the 1961 strike. Minister Tawia Adamafio's denunciation of the strikers as "Western Rats" was indicative of some well-grounded government feeling in this regard. As has generally been the case in the post-Independence politics of African states, an explosive situation resulted from the coincidence of class-type and communal lines of conflict.

#### The 1961 Budget.

For the Nkrumah Government, an austerity budget was imperative in 1961 if it was not to abandon its development objectives.<sup>2</sup> The Second Development Plan (1959-64) aimed at an ambitious programme of industrialisation, farm mechanization,

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1. Interview with J. Dadson, railway artisan, 19th September 1971.
  2. For fuller details of the budget, and the general economic background, see St. Clair Drake and L. A. Lacy, op.cit., on which this brief account is based.

and agricultural diversification designed to break the nation's excessive economic dependence upon cocoa, which it was estimated would require a total expenditure of N£980 million over a five-year period. Almost half of the required revenue was expected to come from the export tax on cocoa (about 40 per cent of the Government's annual revenue was secured from this tax up to 1959) and from loans from the Cocoa Marketing Board - a public corporation which had its own invested reserves built up by the monopoly it held on buying the entire cocoa crop each year at a fixed price and selling it on the world market at a highly variable price.

In 1960, a sudden and drastic fall in the price for cocoa on the world market threatened to wreck these development plans. The Government's loan from the Cocoa Marketing Board was N£9 million less than had been anticipated because the Board had to pay out this sum to farmers who had been guaranteed a fixed price, while the world price had tumbled below that figure. Ghana's bumper crop of 1961, it became clear, would yield several million less than had a smaller crop the previous year - world production was at an all-time high and, in 1961, the world market price reached its lowest point in thirteen years. If a serious slowing down in the pace of development was to be prevented without resort to dependence on foreign loans and the further exhaustion of national reserves (which had already fallen from N£235 million in 1955 to about N£120 million in 1961), then it was clearly necessary to increase the proportion of revenue from other sources.

With the agreement of the Ghana Farmers' Council, cocoa farmers were to be asked to contribute 16 per cent of the price owed them by the C.M.B. to the national coffers and also to accept a government bond, maturing in ten years, to cover

10 per cent of the total sum owed them for their crop. The urban populace were to contribute their share to the development effort through various measures introduced in the July Budget: a Property Tax on above-average sized houses (i.e. two rooms and a hall); a new Purchase Tax on durable consumer goods, such as cars and refrigerators, and increased import duties on a wide range of commodities; and a Compulsory Savings Scheme suggested by the Cambridge economist, Nicholas Kaldor. Under this scheme, all persons earning over N£336 a year would have to accept 5 per cent of their wages or salaries in National Investment Bonds drawing 4 per cent interest and redeemable after 10 years. This figure was set so as to exempt the lowest-paid category of unskilled workers. Hardest hit would be the skilled workers, economically situated just above the exemption ceiling of N£336 per annum, and therefore least able to afford the Compulsory Savings exactions. However, as Kaldor saw it, "the advantage of the scheme as against straight-forward taxation is that people are merely asked to postpone their consumption and not to forego it altogether."<sup>1</sup> This overlooked the fact that the increasingly unaccountable character of the C.P.P. regime, together with the highly undiplomatic suggestion made by some C.P.P. leaders that patriots should be prepared to make their contribution without expectation of repayment, completely undermined confidence in the Scheme's working according to plan. It was certainly generally regarded not as an investment but as a form, ('devious', perhaps, rather than 'straight forward') of direct taxation.

Nevertheless, relative to the sacrifices being demanded of the cocoa farmers, and to the skilled workers' own

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1. Nicholas Kaldor, "Taxation for Economic Development", in the Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.1, No.1, (March 1963), p.22.

rise in prosperity in 1957-61, the level of exaction imposed was not so high as to inevitably, or by itself, provoke such stern resistance as was in fact encountered. The Government had some reason to anticipate its being accepted as reasonable. The Minister of Finance presenting the Budget to Parliament on July 7th, declared that,

"Any increase in burdens imposed by this budget will be small in comparison with the increase in incomes and living standards which the people of this country have enjoyed since Independence - as Osagyefo (Nkrumah) said in his speech, the increase in the total wage and salary payments since 1957 has been 49 per cent. Last year we granted a general wage increase of approximately 22 per cent." 1

Such figures say little, of course, about real wage levels, which, for the skilled and unskilled workers, appear to have risen by approximately 14 per cent in 1957-61. Over the whole period of the '50's these workers had enjoyed a rise of some 45 per cent in real incomes, (see Table 4.1).

This at least enabled skilled workers to meet the cost of basic necessities, but hardly provided a life of (even relative) luxury. The Sekondi-Takoradi Household Budget Survey of 1955 suggested that skilled workers and others, earning around £11 (or N¢27) per month, often experienced difficulty in living within their incomes, even though the average expenditure pattern included little in the way of luxury items, (see Table 3.2).<sup>2</sup> If this was the picture in 1955, then by

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1. Ghana, Parliamentary Debates: Official Report, Vol.24, (7th July 1961), column 133.
  2. The average expenditure pattern in Sekondi-Takoradi was as follows: Food - 57%, (Local Foods - 52.3%); Clothing - 14.8%; Drink and Tobacco - 5.1%; Fuel and Light - 6.0%; Services - 4.9%; Rent and Rates - 6.0%; Durable Goods - 2.5%; Miscellaneous - 3.0%. Sekondi-Takoradi Survey of Population and Household Budgets (1955), (Gold Coast: Office of the Government Statistician, Statistical and Economic Papers, No.4).

1961 the skilled workers should have been able to make ends meet fairly comfortably, though with little to spare or save. They were, of course, bound to be unenthusiastic about giving up most of what little economic progress they had achieved since Independence. And, with food prices rising by over 40 per cent in the summer months, it is perhaps understandable that they should have been complaining of "an already precarious financial situation: it is hard to make ends meet."<sup>1</sup> They were, however, accustomed to this regular seasonal rise in food prices which therefore presented little cause for disquiet in itself (though the rise in 1961 was rather greater than in earlier years). It would seem reasonable to conclude that, while the Compulsory Savings Scheme was likely to impose some financial strain on skilled workers, this was hardly so great as to be unacceptable if the Government and its development plans retained any degree of popular confidence or enthusiasm. The commencement of the 1961 strike, though rationalised by its leaders in terms of opposition to the budget measures, in fact signified a far deeper disillusionment with the C.P.P. regime.

#### The Commencement of the Strike.

The budget measures were announced on the 15th of July. On the 20th July, the railway workers' middle-level leaders manoeuvred the National Executive into supporting a resolution that:

"As that aspect of the Budget proposals dwelling on the National Development Bonds strikes at the very root of the income of the workers, we the members of the Working Committee acting on behalf of the National Executive of Railway and Harbour Workers hereby resolve that in view of the extreme hardship that the deductions are likely to throw on the workers at the end of this month

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1. Ashanti Pioneer, 5th September 1961, p.8.

".. and thereafter, the Government, through the TUC of Ghana, be approached to call for suspension of these deductions until such time that the workers' viewpoint of the whole Budget proposals has been heard". 1

Table 4.1 : Fluctuations on the Real Wage Level of Unskilled Workers, 1950-61.

Date	Daily Wage Rate	Money-Wage Index	Cost of Living Index	Real Wage Index
Dec 1950	3/3	217	285	76
Dec 1951	3/3	217	333	65
Apr 1952	4/6	300	326	92
Dec 1952	4/6	300	324	93
Dec 1953	4/6	300	324	93
Dec 1954	4/6	300	324	93
Dec 1955	4/6	300	344	87
Apr 1956	5/2	344	351	98
Dec 1957	5/2	344	351	98
Dec 1958	5/6	367	354	104
Oct 1959	5/6	367	364	101
Dec 1960	6/6	433	367	118
Dec 1961	6/6	433	390	111

Source: Kodwo Ewusi, The Distribution of Monetary Incomes in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, 1971), p.43.

It was most unlikely, the opposition leaders realised, that the TUC would support, or even reply to, this demand, but it at least maintained the appearance of following official procedures, and gave the TUC leadership an opportunity to redeem itself. When the TUC failed to reply, the Presidential Commission was approached directly, but by the end of August, "Members were dissatisfied with the attitude of the Presidential Commission for not replying to the letter aforementioned and they feared the masses would inevitably take a serious view of the

1. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 20th July 1961.

situation at a Mass Rally tomorrow".<sup>1</sup> The middle-level leaders had made their point and resolutions were adopted by the Sekondi, Takoradi, and Kumasi branches calling for secession from the TUC since "the TUC has definitely failed to express the true feelings of the working class."<sup>2</sup> Inkumah and the other top-level leaders now stood revealed as 'ghost' leaders, having lost all control over the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file. They could only go along with the forthcoming strike action, or else retire from the scene and make disapproving sounds from afar in order to avoid being held accountable. The opposition leaders "pointed out that the absence of the National Officers at the Rally of 29th August was conspicuous and urged them to be present at the next one".<sup>3</sup> None were, and the Union Chairman, J. Appiah, capitulated entirely by handing in his resignation. On September 3rd, the strike leaders took over the Union offices - now deserted by the National Officers - to send out messages to the branches "to let go the anchor" - Pobee Biney's code-phrase for strike action. During the following seventeen days of strike activity, the National Officers made it clear to the Press that "the Railway Union as such has not officially declared a strike" and "did strongly appeal to the workers to work to enable immediate negotiations to be carried out"<sup>4</sup> - but to no effect.

John Tettegah recognised that the strike was centrally concerned with the new structure and its leadership, and not simply Compulsory Savings. In the second week of the strike, he attempted to restore some measure of confidence in the TUC by appealing that "all outstanding grievances be forwarded to

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1. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, 31st August 1961.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Daily Graphic, 8th September 1961, p.1.

TUC headquarters without delay in order to seek avenues of redress and prompt actions".<sup>1</sup> The railwayworkers certainly had a plethora of job-related grievances going back many years - their conditions of service had been brought up to date, and the Africanisation programme implemented, only in a piecemeal fashion which gave rise to scores of inconsistencies and injustices and left them disadvantaged (for example) relative to workers in the new corporations. Such grievances were an important factor in generating allegiance to forceful local leadership which "really understood their situation and problems", and conversely alienation from the Accra-based TUC officials. But Tettegah underestimated the depth of this alienation if he seriously thought that such a gesture could restore the railway workers' confidence in the TUC. In any case, the railway workers' expression of opposition to the TUC elite had become part of a wider political struggle, attracting the active or moral involvement of other social groups: "The support we received from all the people here (i.e. in Sekondi-Takoradi) was so tremendous, we realised we could not back down even if we had wanted to. People felt it was a burning issue to the community."<sup>2</sup>

#### Subjective Significance of the Strike: Class-consciousness and Communalism.

The sources of conflict between the railway workers and the C.P.P.-TUC elite have already been delineated in the preceding chapter. Attention was also drawn there, in very general terms, to the way in which the economic welfare of other sections of the populace - the unskilled workers, the

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1. RUA, Working Committee Minutes, Tettegah to Railway Union General Secretary, 12th September 1961.
  2. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, railway unionist, 4th June 1971.



unemployed, and the market-women - was directly or indirectly dependent upon that of the class of skilled workers. The unskilled workers were, of course, most directly involved in the railway artisans' conflict with the TUC elite. One of the central issues in this political struggle was that of reform of the wage and salary structure inherited from the colonial period. The C.P.P., though apparently committed to such reform in 1949-51, had failed to carry it through. The Lidbury-Gbedemah Report of 1951-52 had made only half-hearted reforms in this direction, and it was on this issue primarily that Pobee Biney and Anthony Woode had found cause to criticise the party and its leadership. Many of the unskilled railway workers also felt, (and still do feel), very strongly about this:

"It all depends on cheating. There are so many people being paid fat salaries without working. I didn't go to school but I know my work. If an educated man comes along to sit in an office and he's given so much more pay than myself, I have to challenge the Government and find out what is happening." 1

The skilled railway workers' association with a militant reformist stance helps to account for the fact that, in 1961, they received the solid support of the unskilled workers, even though these would not be directly affected by the Compulsory Savings exactions.

Many of the unemployed of Sekondi-Takoradi also joined in the strikers' demonstrations. Some of these were, of course, sons or other relatives of the skilled workers on whom they depended for food and accommodation. They were therefore particularly concerned to unite with the strikers in attacking the

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1. Interview with Moses Braimah, Secretary of Permanent Waymen's Association, 3rd October 1971.

proposed Property Tax. The preceding chapter described how a serious shortage of housing for the lower-paid in Sekondi-Takoradi had been exacerbated by corruption and party favouritism in the National Housing Corporation. In consequence, most workers had either to pay exorbitant rates for privately-rented accommodation, or else to band together with relatives or friends and struggle to save enough to build a house for several families. In either case, they generally felt obliged to provide accommodation for unemployed relatives, which added to the strain on their incomes and the overcrowded state of their living conditions. It was small wonder then that the 1961 strikers demanded that the Property Tax "be amended to suit the ordinary worker"<sup>1</sup>, since they feared that it would be passed on to those renting accommodation and would inhibit private building where more was needed. It also seemed grossly unfair to impose a tax on 'family houses' in which workers provided free accommodation for the unemployed. As one railway worker put it,

"The Government had done nothing to solve our housing problems at all, rather they had cheated us to please their girlfriends. And then, when we struggled to build our own houses, they tried to tax us again, forgetting we were already overburdened with relatives who could not find work."<sup>2</sup>

The Property Tax issue illustrates how, in Sekondi-Takoradi in 1961, grievances which might superficially appear to have been particular to the so-called 'labour aristocracy' of skilled workers, together with the higher-paid wage-earners, took on the character and significance of a 'mass' communal protest against the C.P.P. elite. In part, this reflected the

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1. Interview with T. B. Ward, railway unionist, 6th June 1971.

2. Ibid.

dependence of other groups on the economic welfare and political assertiveness of the skilled railway and harbour workers. But it was also indicative of the high degree of identification which these workers had developed with the communal interests of Sekondi-Takoradi. The skilled railway workers saw themselves, and were generally seen, less as a 'labour aristocracy' than as the protectors and leaders of a working-class community.

The reasons for the development of a sense of communal deprivation amongst the people of Sekondi-Takoradi have already been treated in some detail. It is worth drawing attention here, however, to the particular grievances of the Sekondi-Takoradi market-women, since they were amongst the most ardent, and certainly the most valuable, supporters of the railway workers during the course of the strike, encouraging them to hold out, and raising morale, by supplying them with free food. Victims of C.P.P. oligopoly in the market-trade, they closely identified with the railway workers' struggle against similar centralising tendencies in the TUC. Alice Koomson, the leading organiser of the market-women, explained why they had become so disillusioned with C.P.P. rule:

"In the early days, all the market-women were crazy for C.P.P. and joined the Women's Organisation, but once the Women's officials had gained control of the distribution of foodstuffs in the market - they used this monopoly to make them a packet. Essie Eluah, the leader of the market-women here (she was actually Vice-President of the Sekondi-Takoradi Ghana Women), she organised it. She gradually moved from selling foodstuffs to cloth and other things. Then she got a pass-book for G.N.T.C. (the Ghana National Trading Corporation), the largest wholesalers here in Ghana, so that she could obtain goods on credit, and later recommended her closest friends for pass-books. We found that some of our sisters were moving to bigger things while the rest of us were crippled.

"So during the summer of 1961 I travelled round even to Kojokrom (a village some five miles out of Sekondi) to tell the other market-women I was prepared to stand and fight against this. I told them, 'I have only two children and nothing to lose so I will organise it.' When the strike came, they were all ready to help the railway workers. We spent all the money we had saved on giving them free cassava, and then, as we were running out, Kwesi-Lamptey brought us some more from Danquah and those people (the leaders of the opposition United Party)." 1

It is clear, then, that the motivation of those involved in the 1961 strike went far deeper than that of opposition to the budget measures. Even the Compulsory Savings Scheme issue was of as much symbolic as material significance in the sense that, "We knew they were trying to fool us, they would not pay us back, and we didn't trust them to spend it properly. You couldn't believe what they said any more." 2

The central issue was initially conceived by the railway workers as that of working masses versus the TUC elite. But the subjective significance of the strike rapidly became even wider in that it concerned, implicitly at least, the structure and performance of Government as a whole, not merely the TUC. This issue united virtually the whole Sekondi-Takoradi community in support of the strike.

"By midweek practically every activity in the port was closed down. Municipal bus drivers had joined the strike, as had the city employees who collected the sewage daily. Market women dispensed free food to the strikers at municipal bus garages and other strategic points. Red head-bands and arm bands were in evidence everywhere; they were symbols worn in former days by Fanti tribal fighting men to mean, "We are ready for War". Ships were pulled away from

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1. Interview with Alice Koomson, 15th August 1971.
  2. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 4th June 1971.

".. the docks and anchored in the roadstead for fear of sabotage. There was an air of excitement and pride throughout the city over the fact that they, the people of Sekondi-Takoradi, had brought business to a standstill, had stopped train service to all of Ghana, and were displaying solidarity in the fight against the budget. Morale was high. The railwayworkers were heroes... W. N. Grant a prominent strike leader, told the crowd that if parliament did not give way to the demands of the people, they would disband that body by force." 1

### The United Party Involvement.

The Government took an extremely serious view of the strike and, two days after its commencement, declared a state of emergency in the city. This was partly because such strike actions were now illegal under the 1958 Industrial Relations Act, and also because the measures which the railway workers were (formally) protesting were considered essential to the achievement of the Government's major objectives. In an Evening News editorial earlier in the year, for example, the Government had warned that,

"Those who have not the heart for the sacrifices which the Party and Nation will call forth will be swept by the wayside by the wind of change... Ghana's economic Independence can be achieved only if the party is able to mobilise the masses in town and countryside to tighten their belts, so that a greater proportion of our national income is diverted to financing the construction of the means of production - machines for making machines." 2

But the Government's disquiet also derived from suspicions that the sinister hand of the United Party opposition was at work behind the strike.

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1. St.Clair Drake and L. A. Lacy, op.cit., p.93.

2. Evening News, 1st May 1961, p.4.

The United Party had been inaugurated on 3rd November 1957 at a rally in Accra presided over by Dr. Kofi Busia.<sup>1</sup> Its executive was drawn from its component groups - the National Liberation Movement, the Northern People's Party, the Moslem Association Party, the Togoland Congress, the Anlo Youth Organisation, and the Ga Shifimo Kpee. Executive members included Dr. J. B. Danquah, Obetsebi Lamptey, Ashie Nikeo, J. Kwesi Lamptey, Joe Appiah, M. K. Apaloo, Attoh Okine, and K. Y. Attoh, in addition to Dr. Busia. In short, the United Party consisted of an alliance of the major communalistic movements in Ghanaian society under the leadership of intellectuals who had consistently opposed the C.P.P. since U.G.C.C. days, or, as in the case of Kwesi-Lamptey and Ashie Nikeo, had broken with the C.P.P. in 1951-53. At its inauguration in 1957, it could claim the support of 32 members of Parliament. However, after a series of election defeats, the defection of a number of northern M.P.'s, and the 'preventive detention' in 1958 of some thirty-eight party members, including the executive members Attoh Okine and K. Y. Attoh, the United Party was, by 1960, a much weakened parliamentary and electoral force.<sup>2</sup> Its only hope of displacing the C.P.P. regime, or even preserving its own existence (and keeping its leaders out of prison), appeared to lie in the use of violent measures. This might,

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1. For fuller details of the United Party, see Dennis Autin, op.cit., pp.384-94.
  2. Of the 32 opposition members at Independence, 3 were being held in detention, 1 in exile, and 12 had crossed to the government side by 1960. It is difficult to assess the true extent of the U.P.'s electoral support since malpractices in the conduct of the 1960 plebiscite appear to have been widespread. See Dennis Austin, op.cit., pp.393-93.

of course, take the form of a coup d'etat, or an assassination attempt, such as Apaloo and Amponsah were alleged to have planned in December 1958. It seems probable, however, that there was little basis to this latter charge and that, in general, the U.P. leaders were less prepared for the direct use of violence than the C.P.P. liked to suggest. A more appealing strategy lay in the incitement of civil disturbances by fuelling, or playing on, the intense and growing popular hostility to the C.P.P. regime which existed in many parts of the country. In any case, the leaders of any movement of opposition to the C.P.P. were likely to be drawn into flirtation with the United Party, at least in the sense of seeking its financial support.

This undoubtedly occurred in the case of the Sekondi-Takoradi strike. Danquah and other United Party leaders met with a group of railway unionists in August and sought to convince them that the budget measures were not only harsh and unfair but signalled an impending economic crisis.<sup>1</sup> It is also clear from the testimony of Alice Koomson that she and her husband, A. Y. Ankomah, the railway unionist, had developed close links with Kwesi Lamptey, the United Party's leading representative in Sekondi-Takoradi, and arranged for him to channel money to the market-women to aid the workers' strike effort. Ankomah and his wife were, on their own admission, firmly committed by 1961 "to spoil the Government".<sup>2</sup> Yet it is far from clear that the mass of strikers knew anything of this United Party involvement, and quite manifestly untrue that the United Party actually incited the strike (as a subsequent Government White Paper claimed), or was capable of doing so. On the contrary, it is clear from a consideration of

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1. Interview with A. B. Essuman, railway unionist, 14th August 1971.

2. Interview with A. Y. Ankomah and Alice Koomson, 15th August 1971.

the background to the strike that the United Party's role was marginal, much as its leaders may have attempted to capitalise on an existing conflict between the railway workers and the C.P.P. Indeed, the most notable characteristics of the railway workers' hostility to the C.P.P. was their consistent refusal to translate this into support for the United Party. As late as the plebiscite of 1960, while Danquah and the United Party succeeded in winning 35 per cent of the vote in Accra, their electoral support was virtually non-existent in Sekondi-Takoradi.<sup>1</sup> This antipathy to the United Party cannot be adequately explained in terms of identification with different, opposing communal interests since, by 1960-61, the U.P. was far more (though also less) than an Ashanti-based movement. The reason was rather that, although the railway workers' conflict with the C.P.P. was fuelled by a certain communalistic sentiment, this was, for the most part, consciously conceived in class, or mass versus elite, terms. Railway worker ideology was even nationalistic in the sense that overtly tribal or regional movements were regarded as regressive. The United Party still tended to be seen as an opportunistic extension of the old U.G.C.C. and the class of "lawyers who would not risk their wigs for the sake of the common people".<sup>2</sup> In addition, since the central issue in the railway workers' campaign against the TUC elite had been that of party control, many were genuinely concerned, for the sake of consistency, to resist too close an alliance with, or manipulation by, the opposition party.

Consequently, those railway unionists who had been led by their disillusionment with the C.P.P. regime to develop ties with the United Party - A. Y. Ankomah, V. K. Quist,

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1. Dennis Austin, op.cit., p.393.
  2. Phrase attributed to Pobee Biney. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 4th June 1971.



W. N. Grant, and K. G. Quartey - were extremely concerned to keep this association secret. The majority of railway workers and their middle-level leaders conceived the strike as a non-partisan reformist protest, and appear either to have been unaware of the United Party involvement, or, when they learned of it, highly disapproving. At the beginning of the third week of the strike, when President Nkrumah gave assurances of future reforms, and ordered the release of all persons arrested in connection with the strike, a split developed between the intransigents - Ankomah, Quist, Grant and Quartey - who wanted to hold out in the hope of precipitating an army coup, and the 'reformists' who felt that, with the President's conciliatory response, the main objectives of the strike had been attained as successfully as could be expected.<sup>1</sup> The reformists were in a majority amongst the middle-level leaders - A. Y. Bello, K. Imbeah, J. K. Baaku, T. B. Ward, T. S. Bentil, T. Hagan, S. Onyina, G. Essiel, and J. Ashielfie were all reformists rather than U.P. supporters - but had difficulty in convincing the rank-and-file that their proposal for a return-to-work did not amount to a back-down. Lacking clear majority support, they were unwilling to undermine the solidarity which had been maintained so impressively until then. By the middle of the week, however, virtually all the rank-and-file had come round to supporting a return-to-work for two main reasons. Firstly, the President's warning, on Wednesday of that week, that the strike had taken on an insurrectionary character, and that maximum force would be used if necessary to restore the Railway and Harbour to normal operation on Friday, intimidated the railway workers into returning on that day. But, in addition,

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1. Interviews with Kofi Imbeah, 12th June 1971; and J. K. Baaku, 7th October 1971.

the spread of rumours that some of the strike leaders had indeed accepted money from the United Party to continue the strike action undermined the intransigents' support amongst the rank-and-file, who felt they were now being used against their will by the U.P. Hence the aims of the strike became more clearly defined - to awaken the C.P.P. to popular discontent at its increasingly corrupt, autocratic, and elitist character, but without dabbling in subversive party politics.

### Reprisals and Achievements.

Soon after the men had returned to work, their leaders and a number of market women were arrested. On 3rd October, Danquah, Joe Appiah, and Victor Owusu were detained, together with some fifty members of the United Party opposition. The Government's White Paper on the strike insisted that it was planned from the start as a United Party plot to topple the regime, and paid little attention to the genuine grievances of the strikers.<sup>1</sup>

Yet Nkrumah's actions in the month following the return-to-work clearly indicated that he privately recognised the central importance of anti-elite feeling in the strike's causation. In consequence, it was not only the strike leaders and the United Party opposition but many members of the C.P.P. 'old guard' who were to suffer from its occurrence. Admittedly, the President's awareness that all was not well with the Party's image pre-dated the strike. In April 1961, when preparing for the necessity of an austerity budget, and considering the probable obstacles to its popular acceptability, Nkrumah decided to deliver a 'Dawn Broadcast to the Nation'. In this, he criticised the self-interestedness of some members of the party

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1. Statement by the Government on the Recent Conspiracy, (Accra: Government Printing Office, Dec.1961).

"who by virtue of their functions and positions are tending to form a separate new ruling class of self-seekers and careerists".<sup>1</sup> This was "working to alienate the support of the masses and to bring the National Assembly into isolation".<sup>2</sup> He went on to announce measures to curtail the allowances and perquisites of government officials and to compel them to declare their assets and sever their ties with private business.<sup>3</sup> Such a 'clean-up', he insisted, was being demanded by those who were being asked to sacrifice for development goals.

The Sekondi-Takoradi workers were generally unimpressed with the effectiveness of these measures, however, and the September strike brought home to the President the persisting loss of popular confidence in the sincerity of the regime. In an attempt to remedy this, he purged the party of a number of its leading figures on the grounds that they had abused their position by amassing too great a fortune. On September 29th, one week after the strikers had returned to work, the Evening News announced:

"OSAGYEFO'S IMPLEMENTATION of 'DAWN BROADCAST'.

Six Ministers to Resign. " 4

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1. Evening News, 8th April 1961, p.1.
  2. Ibid.
  3. The limits that Nkrumah tried to impose on his followers' accumulation of wealth were in themselves an indication of the fortunes already amassed. It was ruled from the President's office that party members should not own:
    - (a) more than two houses of a combined value of £20,000;
    - (b) more than two motor cars;
    - (c) plots of land (other than those covered by (a) above) with the present total value greater than £500.
 Dennis Austin, op.cit., p.405.
  4. Evening News, 29th September 1961, p.1.

These included such prominent and long-time party leaders as Komla Gbedemah, Kojo Botsio, and Krobo Edusei, popularly renowned for the episode of his wife's purchase of a gold bed. A number of other leading officials, including A. E. Inkumsah (Minister of the Interior), E. K. Bensah (Minister of Works), and J. E. Hagan (Commissioner for the Central Region), were asked to surrender property in excess of the limits laid down earlier in the year. To this degree at least, the 1961 strike was successful, and its significance appreciated in governing circles.

The 'intransigents' among the railway unionists were nevertheless to be proved correct in their belief that such reforms as materialised would be of short-lived effectiveness, and that the major result of any protest action which stopped short of 'spoiling the Government' would be an intensification of repressive measures. The new men who rose to replace the 'old guard' of the C.P.P., if marginally less corrupt than their predecessors, possessed an even more 'regimented' conception of 'popular mobilisation'. The main modification in the structure and operation of the TUC after 1961 was the introduction of additional measures to inhibit the occurrence of rank-and-file rebellions. Essentially, the conclusion of the 1961 strike signified the final defeat of the railway workers' attempt to reform the TUC, at least for as long as the C.P.P. regime remained in power.

CHAPTER FIVETHE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INDEPENDENT AND DEMOCRATIC TRADE UNION  
MOVEMENT

The Sekondi-Takoradi workers' hostility to the TUC, as expressed in the 1961 strike, derived in part, it has been argued, from particular historical and structural factors. Several other groups of workers expressed their support by striking for a day or two, and tacit sympathy for the protesters was possibly quite widespread, but, generally speaking, the TUC was firmly in control in the rest of the country. The final attempt of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers to reform the structure and orientation of the trade union movement appeared to have failed.

Yet, in 1966-71, the Ghana TUC was remodelled along very much the lines advocated by the railway unionists. There were important similarities between Pobee Biney's conception of the ideal role and structure of the labour movement and that of Benjamin Bentum, Secretary-General of the TUC during the whole of this latter period. To be sure, Bentum was a more moderate and cautious leader than Biney, and his policy more closely geared to the practical requisites of both economic development and institutional survival. But, for Bentum, as for Biney, the labour movement should be an independent political force, in the vanguard of the struggle for social justice and the defence of democracy. For Bentum too, if rather less clearly than for Biney, the unions should perform the role of populist spokesmen, looking to, and responsible for, a larger constituency than the unionised workers alone.

Certainly, the majority of the railway and harbour workers perceived such a similarity and regarded Bentum's TUC

as an approximation to the ideal for which they had consistently fought. This was especially the case in 1970-71, as Bentum became even more radical in his criticisms of Government and the socio-economic 'status quo'. A substantial minority splinter-group in the ranks of the railway workers clearly took a different view, since they seceded from the TUC and established a separate union and a rival trade union centre. An analysis of the sources and significance of this division will be presented in a subsequent chapter. For the moment, however, the important point to recognise is that the lack of consensus amongst the railwayworkers in 1970-71 did not imply any lack of enthusiasm for Bentum's TUC on the part of the majority who were members of the 'official' or 'mother' union. With the relatively minor exception of this splinter railway union, moreover, the labour movement was solid in its support for the 'new model' of trade unionism developed under Bentum's leadership. One of the most significant developments in Ghanaian politics during this period was the attainment of a high degree of working-class unity in support of that independent, reformist model of trade unionism which the railway workers had consistently advocated

There is, at present, an almost total lack of published accounts of this development, and it is therefore necessary to provide a fairly detailed account here. Consequently, the focus of attention in this and the succeeding chapter shifts away temporarily from the railway workers themselves toward the TUC and the Ghanaian unions in general. In Chapter Seven, the focus returns to internal Railway Union politics, and the role played therein by divergent rank-and-file attitudes to the TUC leadership of Benjamin Bentum.

Bentum summarised the orientation of his 'new model' as one of "independent and democratic, but responsible trade

unionism".<sup>1</sup> The TUC was to be independent of Government, and strictly non-partisan with respect to party politics. It was to be relatively decentralised in structure and committed primarily to representing the interests and grievances of the union rank-and-file, (rather than simply to controlling or restraining them). It was also to be "responsible", in the sense of acknowledging the damaging effects of strike actions on the fragile national economy, and seeking to educate the rank-and-file in this reality. Strikes were to be officially condemned except where they were the workers' last resort in the face of Management's or Government's refusal to negotiate or implement agreements. Nevertheless, while maintaining impartiality with respect to party politics, the TUC was to lay claim to a major voice in national decision-making, pressing for egalitarian reform of the national wage and salary structure, and articulating policy alternatives on virtually the entire range of governmental issues. The basis for this claim was partly the idea that workers could only be expected to forego strike action if they had other means of securing the effective representation of their interests. And, in practice, the TUC leadership tended to adapt its policy on strikes according to Government's sensitivity to the lower-paid workers' situation and its responsiveness to the demands of the TUC. But there was also a strain of populist ideology in the Biney tradition informing the TUC's drive to political self-assertion. This became increasingly pronounced during the Progress Party regime of Dr. Busia (October 1969 - January 1972). The workers were to see themselves, as the "watchdogs" or "the eyes and ears of society".<sup>2</sup> The creation of a real democracy in Ghana

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1. "Report of the First Biennial Congress of the TUC of Ghana", 5th - 7th June 1966, (TUC, mimeo), p.3.

2. This phrase was frequently used by speakers at Sekondi-Takoradi District Council of Labour meetings which the writer attended in June-August, 1971, and by workers in interviews conducted during the same period.

depended on their fulfilling, and being allowed to perform, this role. It was tacitly assumed that Government tended to be elitist, authoritarian, and favouritistic, and that the 'official' parliamentary opposition provided no direct or effective representation for the 'common people'. The unions were the only genuine mass organisations, and, in consequence, the TUC felt justified in aspiring to perform the checking, counter-balancing role of a kind of official, but radical, opposition.

This was, in a sense, a spontaneous development, reflecting a general reaction against the C.P.P. experience of party control; the impulse to political self-assertion of a relatively well-educated and informed 'artisan' class, geographically and structurally close to the national political centre; and also the radicalising effects of a steady widening of the elite-mass gap in Ghanaian society during the 1960's, involving a strong downward pressure on the socio-economic position of the skilled workers which forced them more clearly than ever before down toward the ranks of the urban poor.<sup>1</sup> Yet the actual process of political development was more complex than such generalisations suggest. One must take cognizance, firstly, of the institutional and political pre-requisites for the democratisation of the trade union movement, and here not only the importance of the ousting of the C.P.P. regime in February 1966 but also the initiative and diplomatic skill of Benjamin Bentum in effecting such a major reform of the TUC's structure and role in the face of governmental opposition. Secondly, although the development of the policy and ideology of the Ghana TUC in 1966-71 was, viewed in retrospect, consistent, there was an important shift of emphasis, and change of tone, in this ideology between the National Liberation Council

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1. See Chapter 8, pp.303-5.



regime (Feb. 1966 - Oct. 1969) and the Progress Party Government (Oct. 1969 - Jan. 1972). Under the NLC, the TUC generally appeared willing to settle for relatively minor 'incremental' gains and official acknowledgement of its claim to a major advisory role in governmental decision-making. When this moderate, 'responsible' strategy proved ineffective under the P.P. regime, however, it sought to lead popular criticism of the 'status quo' and to attract the support of a wider urban mass constituency for a radical political programme.

This did, it should be stressed, represent a shift of emphasis, not a sudden or complete change in policy. Bentum was concerned both to restrain the tendency to resort to illegal strike actions and to voice his criticism of conservative economic policies under each of these regimes. Moreover, it was a shift of emphasis which, while motivated in part by growing personal antipathy to the Progress Party leaders, was also a consistent response to the growing socio-economic elitism and authoritarianism of that regime. Nevertheless, the move from moderate reformist criticism to overt political confrontation was clearly a major step, and one that threw many workers and their leaders into a state of confusion which vitiated the solidarity of active support for the TUC. In September 1971, the workers of Sekondi-Takoradi again found themselves virtually alone in responding to the call for a General Strike.

The confused and varying nature of this reaction illustrated a fundamental ambivalence in the orientation of the Ghanaian labour movement. This orientation cannot properly be described either as elitist 'bread-and-butter' unionism in accommodation with the 'status quo', or as ideologically radical, revolutionary unionism. It was rather a liberal reformist orientation, relatively radical in the Ghanaian political context, but aiming at establishing itself on a regular institutional footing. The ambivalence within it derived partly from the

familiar conflict between ideal aims and the requisites of institutional continuity, or, for the individual worker, the basic need to keep a job in a situation of growing unemployment. To some degree, it also reflected the existence of factors making for identity, as well as conflict of interest, between government and unionised workers. In other words, government and labour were very much opposed over the issue of social justice, but few groups of workers were prepared for an open confrontation when this meant putting their means of livelihood at risk. It was also possible to rationalise political passivity, in some cases quite sincerely, in terms of recognition of the damaging effects of strike action on economic reconstruction. This community of interest with government could be widely perceived, of course, only on the assumption that lower-paid workers did have some considerable stake in the existing social order. Correspondingly, the ambivalence of the labour movement's ideological orientation derived, ultimately, from the intermediate position of skilled workers - rightly described by local unionists as "the backbone of the Ghanaian trade union movement" - between the urban poor on the one hand, and the middle class proper on the other.

#### The C.P.P. regime and the Unions: 1961-66.

Between September 1961 and the coup d'etat of February 1966 disillusionment with the C.P.P. regime spread to virtually all groups of workers throughout Ghana. This was indicated by the large demonstrations of labour support for the soldiers' intervention in Accra, Kumasi, and Sekondi-Takoradi, during the week following the coup.<sup>1</sup> It is possible, but unlikely, that these were stage-managed or unrepresentative of the feelings of other workers. In any case, there were more

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1. Ghanaian Times, 27th February 1966, p.1.

reliable indicators: the fact that the new regime felt it necessary to remove from office only certain TUC officials and the General Secretaries of the national unions, it being confidently assumed that support for the displaced regime extended no further; the intensity and uniformity of pressure from both union rank-and-file and their leaders for a "democratic and independent" trade union movement; and their determined unity thereafter in defence of this democratic and independent structure against any attempt to force or forge a party political alliance. The experience of 1961-66 had instilled in Ghanaian workers a profound and lasting revulsion against any suggestion of governmental or party political interference in trade union affairs.

Two main factors accounted for the spread of anti-C.P.P. feeling even to those workers who owed their union organisation to the initiative of C.P.P. unionists, and who, in September 1961, had generally sided with the C.P.P.-TUC leadership. Firstly, the rapid price inflation of 1962-66, combined with the Government's refusal to raise the minimum wage, had a severely depressant effect on the real wage levels of lower-paid workers. The TUC did not appear especially concerned to protest this deterioration in its members' living standards. The Real Minimum Wage Index for these years shows a decline of some 42 per cent between 1961 and 1966, from 111 to 64, (see Table 5.1). This figure overstates the actual decline by some 4 per cent in the case of public sector employees, since in 1965 the Government acceded to TUC demands to pay their daily-rated employees for 27 instead of 26 days per month. It is reasonable to assume an equal decline in the average real incomes of skilled workers in the public services. The fall in real incomes of most private sector employees was considerably less severe, owing to incremental benefits gained

through the negotiations of collective agreements with their employers. According to the calculations of the Mills-Odoi Commission, average real wage levels in the private sector declined by some 20 per cent between 1960 and 1965, compared to 40 per cent in the case of the public sector.<sup>1</sup> It is only fair to recognise here the contribution of TUC officials who, within the limits imposed on their freedom of action by acceptance of the Government's development strategy, worked hard to achieve what they could on behalf of Ghana's lower-paid workers, utilising the compulsory collective bargaining machinery established by the 1958 Industrial Relations Act.

Table 5.1 : Fluctuations in the Real Value of the Minimum Wage, 1960-68.

Year	Minimum Wage (pesewas)	Index of Minimum Wage	Accra Retail Price Index	Index of Real Minimum Wage
1960	65 (6/6d.)	433	367	118
1961	65	433	390	111
1962	65	433	426	102
1963	65	433	446	97
1964	65	433	502	86
1965	65	433	643	67
1966	65	433	672	64
1967	70	467	623	75
1968	75	500	685	73

Source: Kodwo Ewusi, The Distribution of Monetary Incomes in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social, and Economic Research, 1971), p.43.

To be fully objective, one should also take into account the implicit wage benefits conferred on lower-paid workers by such policies as the abolition of school and hospital fees, and

1. Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana (1967), (Accra: Government Printer, 1967), p.29. Hereafter cited as the Mills-Odoi Report.

by the C.P.P. regime's continuing commitment to expansion of the level of employment even in the face of the crippling budgetary situation of 1962-66. The TUC leaders were among the foremost advocates of these measures, and one might wish to point out in retrospect that succeeding regimes withdrew some of these concessions to the idea of a welfare state society. Ghana's workers could hardly be expected to appreciate this at the time, however. Both public and private sector employees suffered a serious decline in living standards during these years, and resentment at this impoverishment clearly informed their growing hostility to the TUC leadership. This was exacerbated by the high living of TUC leaders and by suspicion that TUC dues were being misappropriated - suspicions which post-coup revelations abundantly confirmed.<sup>1</sup> It does not seem necessary to elaborate this point further.

What does require emphasis is rank-and-file antipathy to the growing authoritarianism of the TUC leadership and its increasing resort to police-state techniques of control. This extended to the use of party spies and the deliberate incultation of an atmosphere of fear at the local level so as to inhibit any open expression of criticism of the TUC or the Government. This strategy was resented partly because of the obstacles it raised to pressure for wage improvement. But it produced a sense of humiliation which went far deeper than this, and an attachment to liberal values relatively independent of considerations of economic interest.

An important factor in the adoption of such authoritarian techniques of control was the removal of Tettegah in 1962 from the TUC to the All African Trade Union Federation.

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1. Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the Funds of the Ghana TUC, (Accra: Government Printer, 1968).

This meant that the TUC lost its one prominent leader who combined organisational expertise and rhetorical ability with a substantial rank-and-file political following (especially in Accra). Magnus-George (TUC Secretary-General, 1962-64), and Kwaw Ampah (TUC Secretary-General, 1966-66) attempted to compensate for their own lack of any such following with a form of ideological emanation which, as Tettegah himself realised, was wholly inappropriate for Ghana's workers, being far too "academic" and Soviet-based, and with the adoption of a "regimentation" strategy.<sup>1</sup> Kwaw Ampah, (a member of Nkrumah's tribe, the Nzima, and a former district commissioner) was perhaps less "regimental" in his style of leadership than had been Magnus-George. But there was little perceptible difference in spite of the introduction of an Amendment to the Industrial Relations Act in May 1965 which, Ampah claimed, aimed at "the complete removal of all control exercised over workers' organisations by the Government or other bodies".<sup>2</sup> He suggested that the reason for this Amendment was that, "The Party feels sufficiently convinced that the working people of this country would not misuse their freedom of action to disrupt the speedy implementation of the nation's industrialisation programme."<sup>3</sup> But a rather different rationale was proved by the Minister of Labour in his speech to the National Assembly. The Amendment was intended

"to enable Ghana to conform to the code of international labour standards adopted by the International Labour Organisation - It is my well considered view that the success of the organisation of the All-African Trade Union Federation

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1. Interview with Joe-fio N. Meyer, 15th November 1971. Also see Benjamin Bentum, Trade Unions in Chains, (Accra: TUC, 1967), pp.9-16.
  2. Editorial, The Worker, 5th July 1965.
  3. Ibid.

".. is dependent largely on the prestige of the Ghana TUC. This means the Ghana TUC has to do everything possible to attract as much following and support throughout Africa, and its organisational machinery built up as a model to be followed by other trades union movements in Africa. The Ghana TUC must therefore be free from criticisms internationally, and the draft Bill is aimed at achieving this." 1

The alterations embodied in the Bill were the minimum necessary to serve this purpose. The TUC technically became more independent through removal of the provisions for State control of TUC activities and finance embodied in the 1958 Act. But all the provisions of the existing law were retained with respect to compulsory arbitration, the illegality of strikes in the public sector, and TUC authority over the national unions. Indeed, the centralisation of the structure of the trade union movement was carried even further by a reduction in the number of national unions from sixteen to ten. And given the party's continuing control over the appointment of TUC officials, the supposed independence of the labour movement remained purely technical.

There was considerable variation in the extent to which police-state techniques of control were, or could be, effectively implemented in the various unions and branches. This depended largely on the degree of corporate resistance encountered. In the majority of unions, officials could resist the pressure to report on fellow-officials only at their own peril. A Branch Secretary of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union confessed:

"Oh, there was a great deal of bitterness, but we were too afraid to oppose the party line. After some of our officials were dismissed from their jobs and one was detained, we realised that certain people were acting as spies. But  
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1. Ghana, Parliamentary Debates: Official Report, Vol.39 Col.189, (25th May 1965).

".. later it was not so much that they had special spies, we all became spies. Even I was prepared to be a stooge, I must admit it. What else could one do to look after oneself?" 1

In the Sekondi-Takoradi branches of the Railway Union, in contrast, TUC leaders found it impossible to control the rank-and-file's middle-level representatives by such techniques and were therefore driven to abolish the Working Committee. Later, in 1965, the holding of mass-meetings was prohibited.<sup>2</sup> An example of Railway Union resistance to outside control was recounted by Joe-fio N. Meyer, Chairman of the TUC Executive Board at the time of the incident (1962):

"I went down to Sekondi with the Minister (of Labour) to talk to the railway workers - we wanted to explain our development plans to them and to warn them against agitators on the Union Executive - and we told the 'announcer' to beat gong-gong to assemble them together. But he claimed to have misplaced it, and we couldn't persuade him to re-discover it until he was sure that the Executive knew about our being there." 3

More generally, as one railway unionist remarked, "You wouldn't find anyone willing to spy for the Government here. The sense of solidarity is far too strong. And anyway they wouldn't last long."<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, the general atmosphere of repression which prevailed during this period, together with the prohibition on mass-meetings, presented formidable obstacles to any attempt at concerted opposition. Subsequent claims that, when the Army intervened to displace Nkrumah, preparations were already in train for an unofficial strike must be treated with a certain scepticism.

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1. Interview with John Abakah, Secretary of the C.F.A.O. branch of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, 3rd September 1971.
  2. See Chapter Seven, pp.260-1.
  3. Interview with Joe-fio N. Meyer, 15th November 1971.
  4. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 17th July 1971.



It is important to stress the depth of feeling in the unions against C.P.P. authoritarianism because of its influence on worker attitudes to the NLC and Progress Party regimes. Generally speaking, Ghanaian workers were favourably disposed to these regimes, in spite of their obvious elitist character, because, (or in as far as), they were relatively liberal regimes, willing to tolerate a certain measure of trade union democracy and independence. As workers frequently remarked even in the summer of 1971 (when Government-Union relations were extremely strained), "At least one can speak one's mind." It is worth pointing out that there was, potentially at least, a negative aspect to this belief in "free, independent trade unionism", a lack of any more positive sense of unity and purpose. In reacting against the compulsory controls of the C.P.P. regime, there was a tendency amongst some unionists to regress to a fragmented "bread-and-butter" style of trade unionism, displaying little appreciation of the advantages or pre-requisites of labour movement unity. In spite of their many failings, the C.P.P. unionists made a valid point when they emphasised the need for trade unions to act as a united political force exerting a significant influence on governmental decision-making in order effectively to advance the interests of labour. After the coup d'etat of February 1966, some unionists proved disinclined to recognise this, or to accept the fact that, if the TUC was to attain a measure of influence with government, it had to be able to exert some considerable degree of control over the activities of its constituent unions. For their part, the National Liberation Council and Progress Party regimes equally failed to recognise the need to make concessions to the programme of the TUC if its leadership was to enhance its prestige with, and capacity to control, the union rank-and-file. The fact that the Ghanaian labour movement gradually developed a broader sense of unity in 1966-71, and a positive conception of its role, at once more responsible and more radical than

that of "bread-and-butter" unionism, was due in large measure to the leadership of Benjamin Bentum, (TUC Secretary-General, February 1966-September 1971).

Benjamin Bentum's political background and orientation.

In three main respects, Bentum's leadership was crucial to the development of the Ghanaian trade union movement in 1966-71. In the first place, it was on his initiative rather than the Government's that the structure of the TUC was decentralised and made more democratic. In appointing him as Secretary-General, the National Liberation Council expected him to maintain a relatively centralised, control-oriented TUC rather than one geared to the expression of rank-and-file aspirations. Yet he chose to court the regime's disfavour and to introduce democratic reforms, partly in response to rank-and-file pressure but also in accordance with his personal predilections and beliefs. Secondly, to effect this shift in the orientation and structure of power of the trade union movement without provoking a Government clamp-down required very considerable political and diplomatic skills on Bentum's part. Thirdly, while the 'new model' developed under Bentum's leadership was in a real sense democratic, he personally remained very much the leading formulator and spokesman of TUC policy and ideology, possessed of something of the valued 'strong man' image. The particular ideological formulation he gave to the nation of "free and independent" trade unionism was a creative achievement and a major unifying force. That one can realistically talk of the emergence of a sense of national working-class identity in Ghana during these years - a remarkable achievement considering the situational factors militating against any such development - was due in large part to Bentum's personality and his convincing articulation of

labour's rights and responsibilities. As the Progress Party Minister of Labour, Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah, was to lament: "You ask a worker which union he belongs to, and nine times out of ten he replies simply, 'Bentum's TUC'." <sup>1</sup>

Since Bentum's role in the events of 1966-71 was so crucial, it is worth taking a brief look at his personal background and political career prior to the military coup of February 1966. <sup>2</sup> He was born on the 29th April, 1931, at Elmina in the Central Province of Ghana, the son of a clergyman of the Methodist Church Mission. Educated at the Catholic Mission School at Berekum, and later the Methodist School in Agona-Swedru, his hopes of attending secondary school were dashed by the death of his parents in a car crash, but he continued his studies at his uncle's home and managed to gain several 'O' level G.C.E. passes. On this basis, he was awarded a scholarship to take an Agricultural Science course at the Agricultural Training Centre in Kumasi and later at the Kumasi College of Science and Technology.

From there he went to the West African Cocoa Research Institute at Tafo where he formed the first trade union for agricultural workers within a year of his arrival in 1950. With the registration of the union in 1952 and Bentum's success in gaining several improvements in wages and working conditions, the membership steadily increased from some 50 to more than a thousand members (out of a total work force of approximately two thousand) by 1959. In that year, the West African Cocoa Research Institute Workers' Union was merged into the Agricultural Workers' Union of Ghana, and Bentum was elected the National Organiser of the new body. Within two years, the A.W.U. had a paid-up membership of almost 50,000 agricultural

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1. Interview with Minister of Labour, Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah 11th November 1971.
  2. Personal details provided by Benjamin Bentum in private correspondence, 14th August 1973.

wage-earners, and in 1962 Bentum was elected the Union's General Secretary, a post which he occupied until becoming Chairman of the Executive Board of the TUC in 1964.

As Chairman of the Executive Board he rapidly came into conflict with Ampah and other TUC leaders over the issue of the extent of party control over the TUC. He objected to the manner in which major decisions concerning the running of the TUC were taken by the Central Committee of the Party, of which Ampah alone of TUC leaders was a member, and then simply handed down to the TUC Executive Board. He argued for the inclusion of more far-reaching reforms in the 1965 Amendment to the Industrial Relations Act than Ampah and the party were prepared to consider. In February 1965, this conflict came into the open, and Ampah secured his dismissal from the Chairmanship by authority of the Central Committee of the C.P.P.

For six months he was unemployed and devoted most of his time to travelling around the country with the Director of State Farms, acting as an unofficial assistant to the latter. President Nkrumah was informed of Bentum's continuing display of dedication to his country's development and was duly impressed. In September 1965, he created a Ministry of Forestry to which he appointed Bentum as the first Minister, much to the surprise, no doubt, of the latter's ex-colleagues in the TUC. It is possible, however, that Nkrumah made a serious error of judgement with this appointment, mistakenly identifying Bentum's dedication to his country with loyalty to himself. It is commonly believed that Bentum worked from inside the C.P.P. regime to promote the 1966 coup d'etat, and although the truth of this allegation must be open to doubt, it was certainly significant that he was the only C.P.P. Minister to be retained

in senior office by the N.L.C. regime. <sup>1</sup>

In any case, it is apparent that Bentum was one of the few C.P.P. leaders sufficiently sensitive to the excessive centralisation and party subservience of the TUC to take a stand on the issue. He apparently felt that, in spite of the organisational achievements of the C.P.P.-TUC, the grievances of lower-paid workers were not receiving adequate representation or consideration in 1962-65. It is not the intention here to portray Bentum as a staunchly dedicated labour leader of unwavering principles. The course of his career under the C.P.P. regime, and, even more clearly, his conduct of the leadership of the TUC under the N.L.C. and Progress Party regimes, rather suggest a highly skilful and pragmatic politician, an extremely agile survivor, reacting with fine sensitivity and judgement to pressures from both above and below. But the Ghanaian trade union movement needed skilful, compromising leadership of this kind if it was to hold together as an independent movement in the political and economic circumstances of 1966-71. And it would mean committing an all-too-common error to equate a well-developed sense of political pragmatism with a lack of any sense of principle or social purpose. Within the limits imposed on his freedom of action, Bentum's TUC leadership can be seen as consistently directed toward the development of the labour movement as a self-conscious force for greater social justice in Ghana. Ambitious and calculating politician that he was, Bentum was also a sincere liberal-democrat. It would perhaps be wrong to dismiss as mere rhetoric his choice of a quotation from Abraham Lincoln to conclude his statement on the recommendations of the Mills-Odoi Commission.

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1. After the 1966 coup, of course, many ex-C.P.P. officials claimed, frequently without any justification, to have been secretly working against the regime from within; but there is some fairly convincing evidence to suggest that this was true of Bentum. For instance, according to an interview which Richard Pratt held with Police-Inspector Harlley, a  
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"In as much as most good things are produced by labour, it follows that all things ought to belong to those whose labour has produced them. But it has happened in all ages of the world that some have laboured and others, without labour, have enjoyed a larger proportion of their fruits. This is wrong and should not continue. To secure for each labourer the whole produce of his labour as nearly as possible is a worthy object of any good Government." 1

With the progressive deterioration in the financial situation of Ghana's lower-paid workers in 1966-71, Bentum was to become an ever more insistent advocate of a radical redistribution of national wealth.

#### Bentum's TUC and the N.L.C. Regime

Bentum was appointed Secretary-General of the Ghana TUC within forty-eight hours of the military coup d'etat of 24th February 1966, and he immediately led a demonstration of workers in Accra in support of the intervention by the Army and the Police.<sup>2</sup> He alone of the ex.C.P.P. Ministers was retained in senior office by the National Liberation Council, and several

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Footnote 1 cont. from previous page.

.. leading instigator of the coup, "Mr. Harlley had briefed Bentum on the 1966 coup some time in advance... and had advised him to gather support in the unions". R. Pratt, "Political Opposition in Ghana, 1966-72", (M.A. thesis, S.O.A.S., 1973), p.16.

1. "Statement issued by the Executive Board of the TUC on 'The Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana' ", Annexure 1, Report of the (Mensah) Committee on Review of Salaries and Pensions in the Public Services of Ghana (1969), (Accra: Government Printer, 1969), p.66. Hereafter cited as Mensah Report. Quotation attributed to Abraham Lincoln in his First Annual Message to Congress, 3rd December 1861.
2. Ghanaian Times, 27th February 1966, p.1.

groups of workers, including most prominently the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers, protested against his appointment and requested that a new, more trustworthy Secretary-General be elected. But a Railway Union delegation was assured by NLC leaders that they had every reason to believe Bentum would prove a capable and dependable leader of the TUC.<sup>1</sup>

From the point of view of the NLC leaders, Bentum's (initial) dependence on their favour for his political survival was one of the attractions of his appointment as Secretary-General. Ideologically and politically they were committed to a liberalisation of the nation's political structures, yet it was crucially important that such liberalisation did not go so far as to jeopardise their administrative control. Their ousting of Nkrumah had been rationalised in terms of liberating the nation from tyranny, and an upsurge of popular pressure for the restoration of civil freedoms was naturally to be expected. They were happy and prepared to accede to this pressure up to a point. Mostly educated in British police and military training schools, the NLC leaders were liberals of a somewhat 'Whiggish' variety. Conscious of their own inadequacies and inexperience as policy formulators and administrators, they were prepared to rule very largely according to the advice of various committees and commissions. These consisted in the main of civil service experts in various fields and representatives of the country's major pressure groups.<sup>2</sup>

As far as the trade union movement was concerned, 'liberalisation' meant that there would be little overt interference in the affairs of the TUC, that the legal provisions against strike actions, although formally retained, would be

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1. RUA, Railway Union Working Committee Minutes, 4th March 1966.
  2. For a fuller description of the character and style of government of the N.L.C. regime, see Robert Pinkney, Ghana under Military Rule, 1966-69, (London: Methuen, 1972).

less severely administered, and that the Secretary-General of the TUC would be accepted as the Government's leading adviser on industrial relations. But to the surprise of many who, like the Editor of the Ghanaian Times, called on the NLC leaders to "give the TUC a fresh charter"<sup>1</sup>, the NLC leaders proved unwilling to dismantle the centralised control structure inherited from the C.P.P. regime. They clearly did not envisage securing voluntary industrial peace by meeting the demand of unionised workers for substantial wage increases. There were a number of considerations involved here. In the first place, the immediate need was obviously for a period of economic retrenchment rather than of additional government expenditure. In the second place, what development funds did become available were to be directed toward rural development. Thirdly, they were in no sense social radicals, and did not feel committed to any major reform of the national wage and salary structure. The requisites of economic reconstruction and political stability clearly argued, then, for strict limits to union democratisation, and, with a reliable acolyte in charge, the inherited TUC structure and anti-strike provisions suited their requirements perfectly.

They did not entirely suit Bentum however, and the NLC leaders had seriously underestimated his determination and ability to pursue an independent course. After weeding out C.P.P. militants in the TUC Secretariat (and retaining other officials he thought reliable in order to utilise their expertise), he arranged for the election of new General Secretaries for the national unions and set about introducing democratic reforms in the structure of the TUC. His objective was lucidly expressed in the programme he presented for adoption to the June 1966 Congress:

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1. Ghanaian Times, 8th March 1966, p.6.



"The first task which the trade union movement in Ghana should tackle is to transform itself into an organisation that has meaning for the workers, and responsibly advances their interests in the social and economic spheres. The only form of organisation that can do this with any measure of success is one which draws its authority and its power from the workers themselves, and is responsive to their aims and aspirations. In order to properly translate the workers' wishes into action, the movement should be self-reliant, and should in particular stay away from party politics, as the past has abundantly shown, and yet be free to determine its own policy, which may, but does not necessarily, run parallel to a particular political demand. Thus the trade union movement should always promote political democracy and defend it against threats from any quarter.....

(2) It shall be necessary to press without delay for the overhaul of the restrictive labour legislation imposed by the previous regime. The TUC shall therefore, as soon as possible, make proposals to the Government on how it wishes to have the Industrial Relations Act changed to be in keeping with the new-found spirit of liberty and to allow the trade unions a role in society which reflects their new potential.

(3) The Trade Unions shall pledge their co-operation to Government and employers in all genuine efforts to improve and stabilise industrial relations. Any agreements in this field that trade unions may enter into should contain adequate provision for the settling of industrial disputes through conciliation and arbitration where collective negotiations break down, but should not interfere - and the same goes for any legislation - with the right of the workers in the last resort to withhold their labour by concerted action.

(4) The trade unions should do whatever is in their power to stimulate economic development and workers' productivity; help in creating employment opportunities; encourage the establishment and expansion of co-operatives, promote efficiency at the workplace, always provided that the workers will also adequately benefit from progress in these fields.

The trade unions shall support unreservedly all forms of economic planning aimed at viable economic units and an increase in the people's standard of living. But it wishes as closely as possible to participate in such planning preferably through representation on the competent statutory bodies: in any case it expects to be consulted by local and central government on all matters affecting the economic and social interests of its membership." 1

Further items in this programme included: the establishment of efficient machinery for reviewing the minimum wage; pressing for an increase in provision for workers' housing and for the widest range of social provisions by the State; ensuring that "workers should not be asked to make financial sacrifice beyond a reasonable level" <sup>2</sup>; advising the Government on how to solve the unemployment problem; "defending the rights of trade unions against encroachment by political parties or other forces" <sup>3</sup>; disaffiliation from the All-African Trade Union Federation (affiliation with other international trade union centres was to be considered, but did not in fact materialise); and organisational reforms to ensure the maintenance of maximum contact between leadership and rank-and-file.

In October the TUC Executive introduced changes in the TUC constitution which lent some substance to the rhetoric of democratisation. Authority for conducting collective bargaining and settling industrial disputes were returned from the TUC Executive to the national unions. The right of the TUC to intervene in disputes was restricted to instances where an impasse had clearly been reached, or where TUC intervention

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1. "Report of the First Biennial Congress of the TUC of Ghana", 5th - 7th June 1966, (TUC, mimeo), pp.3-4.
  2. Ibid., item (10).
  3. Ibid., item (13).

was formally requested by the Union concerned.<sup>1</sup> This provision was consistently observed thereafter by the TUC leadership, and this should be borne in mind when considering Government accusations that Bentum was slow to intervene in industrial disputes out of political motivations. A further provision declared that, "A vote of non-confidence by a two-thirds majority of delegates shall be required to demand the resignation of the Secretary-General."<sup>2</sup> This was an important innovation since there had been no such provision for democratic accountability of the Secretary-General in the C.P.P.-TUC Constitution. Early in 1967, it was announced that free elections would be held for the post of Secretary-General at a special Delegates Conference to be held in the summer.

Bentum was attempting, then, to establish himself as the elected leader of a genuinely independent and democratic TUC, and the NLC leaders naturally looked on this move with considerable suspicion and disfavour. At the 1967 Congress, held in Tamale, John Alex Hamma's candidature for the Secretary-Generalship received the backing of several NLC leaders. The final voting, however, provided eloquent proof of Bentum's success in winning over to his support even those unionists who had originally protested his appointment. Bentum received 88 votes, Hamma 13.<sup>3</sup> That the NLC refrained from taking more forceful action to remove or discipline Bentum was due to several considerations. Police Inspector Harlley, the NLC

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1. TUC Executive Board Resolutions, Article VI, 2, 7th October 1966, published in Ghana Workers' Bulletin, Vol.1. No. 4, (October 1966).
  2. Ibid., Article XII, 2 (b).
  3. Ghana Workers' Bulletin, Vol.1. No. 9, (August 1967), p.3.

leader with the closest personal association with Bentum, was convinced of his continuing dependability. Those who were less certain had no wish for a confrontation with labour, partly because they did not feel their position to be sufficiently stable, partly because they were concerned to maintain a liberal image abroad (especially in Britain). Moreover, Bentum did appear to be genuinely committed to restraining workers from abusing their new-found freedom through unnecessary illegal strike actions, and to keeping his criticisms of the regime within the bounds of the non-subversive. They were therefore prepared to tolerate him.

In fact, Bentum maintained a censorious attitude to illegal strikes for as long as there seemed some chance of gaining concessions to the demand for increased social justice, or, as he put it, "a bridging of the wages gap between the lower and higher income groups."<sup>1</sup> Early in 1967, the Mills-Odoi Commission was appointed to make recommendations on the structure and remuneration of the public services, and, although its Report proved extremely disappointing to the lower-paid workers, Bentum was appointed to the Mensah Commission to consider this Report and formulate a government incomes policy for the future. Until the beginning of 1969 Bentum retained some hope of gaining special concessions for the lower income group, (i.e. the skilled and unskilled manual workers) and during this period he went along with the Government in condemning strikes, and concurred with the imposition of fines on the leaders of illegal strikes. In response to the Railway Permanent Waymen's strike of September 1968, one of the most serious the NLC regime had to deal with, he took an extremely tough line. He expressed his support for the Government's arrest of the ringleaders, announced a new disciplinary code

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1. "Statement issued by the Ghana TUC on the 'Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana' ", Annexure 1, Mensah Report, p.64.

to be operated against unofficial strike leaders, and warned the National Executive of the Railway Union that unless they took steps "to dismiss the undesirables (from the Union) I will be compelled to recommend to the Executive Board of the TUC to review your affiliation with the Congress." <sup>1</sup> He went on to remind Ghana's workers, in terms of which the Government no doubt wholeheartedly approved, that "much of the salvation of the large unemployed population and the economic progress of the country lies on the shoulders and efforts of those who are now working to increase productivity and help to improve and expand industry.. The working people have the responsibility to ensure that there is industrial and political stability." He concluded, rather sadly, "I do not want to be a Secretary-General who only breaks strikes." <sup>2</sup>

Bentum's attempt to reduce the incidence of strikes by persuasion (and, occasionally, threats) rather than actual repression could, however, hardly be said to have succeeded by the end of 1968. In the two and a half year period preceding the 1966 coup d'etat, the Ministry of Labour recorded a total of 22 strikes, involving some 10,000 workers, and a loss of 68,000 man-days, (see Table 5.2). This was probably an inaccurate, understated figure but not so inaccurate as to invalidate the reality of the contrast with the immediate post-coup period. In April 1966 - December 1968, there were 108 strikes, involving 66,138 men and a total loss of 166,005 man-days. The N.L.C.'s reaction was to become increasingly impatient with strike participants, and to resort to lock-outs and dismissal of striking workers.

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1. Speech reported in the Ghanaian Times, 19th September 1968, p.1.
  2. Ibid.

This policy provoked a public protest from Bentum, who increasingly took the position that strikes could only properly be condemned if Government recognised the deplorable financial situation of the lower income group and took effective measures to "bridge the gap".<sup>1</sup> There appeared to be little hope of this by the beginning of 1969. The Mensah Commission had approved the recommendation of the Mills-Odoi Commission for an across-the-board increase of 5 per cent in wages, the only special concession to the lower-paid workers being the introduction of incremental scales for the daily-rated which would give them, on average, an effective increase of 7-8 per cent per annum over the following three years. This barely compensated the lower-paid for the impact of inflation on their real incomes since the 1966 coup, and did nothing to redress the impoverishment they had suffered in the first half of the decade, (see Table 5.1). Moreover the Mensah Commission was now advocating a Government wages policy which would restrict the wage growth rate to a maximum of 5 per cent per year, again without distinguishing between the lower and higher income groups.<sup>2</sup>

Angered at the insensitivity of these proposals, Bentum tendered his resignation from the Incomes Commission in March 1969, and published a scathing critique of Government policy. This first referred back to the TUC's criticisms of the Mills-Odoi Commission Report in May 1968:

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1. For instance, in an article in the Pioneer on 16th July 1969, Bentum argued that three main factors were responsible for the high incidence of strikes in Ghana: "(a) Management and Government's lack of understanding of industrial relations and of the value of the work done by the TUC... (b) There will be no industrial peace without a bridging of the wages gap... (c) The high cost of food."
  2. Mensah Report, p.28.

Table 5.2 : Recorded Labour Strikes, Workers Involved, and Man-Days Lost in Ghana, 1944 to 1971.

Year	No. of Strikes	Workers Involved	Man-Days Lost
1944-45	2	700	n.d.
1945-46	3	7,750	n.d.
1946-47	7	946	n.d.
1947-48	37	48,865	n.d. - (inc.37 day strike
1948-49	27	7,650	n.d. by minesworkers)
1949-50	54	38,557	123,311 - (not including Positive Action general strike)
1950-51	19	5,482	11,017
1951-52	39	15,404	38,185
1952-53	83	32,548	129,676
1953-54	65	25,529	125,927
1954-55	35	7,263	29,107
1955-56	23	1,039	13,191
	+ 2	29,216	2,479,224 - (Minesworkers' strikes)
1956-57	45	11,858	33,005
1957-58	64	18,964	41,020
1958-59	49	8,875	21,673
1959-60	50	10,101	12,788
1960-61	26	4,404	6,459 - (Excludes 1 day commercial workers strike)
1961-62	10	3,240	6,482 - (Excludes Sek.- Tak. strike)
1962-63	7	820	1,390 (Understated)
1963-64	9	3,033	1,477 (Understated)
1965-3/66	13	6,802	66,508
3/66-6/66	17	5,685	4,208 - (C.P.P. ousted by N.L.C. 2/66)
7/66-7/67	26	11,228	15,854
7/67 - 7/68	52	40,441	113,104
7/68-12/68	13	8,784	32,839
1969	51	28,369	148,404 - (Busia regime 9/69)
1970	55	21,376	123,000
1/71-7/71	46	25,159	49,115

Sources: all data are as recorded by the Department of Labour, which, after 1961 during the Nkrumah regime, excluded reports on certain (illegal) strikes. The data are to be found in: J. I. Roper, Labour Problems in West Africa (London, Penguin, 1958), for years 1944-50; Reports of the Labour Department, annual reports, 1950-51 to 1967-68; and Ghana, Parliamentary Debates, Vol.8, no.29, column 1604, for 1969-71.

"We do not accept the conservative and biased economic arguments advanced by the Commission in arriving at its conclusions... The Commission has not recommended a living wage for the lowest paid workers, and at the same time has been most generous in its treatment of the more highly-paid employees... By its report the Commission recognises that 88 per cent of the total employed labour force was earning less than N¢50.00 per month. By the use of the Government's own figures (on minimal nutritional requirements) this means that 88% of the total employed labour force cannot afford a balanced diet even if they spend their entire income on food alone... They have been asked to wait even though the main cause of low productivity in Ghana is poor management.... We strongly wish to state that we expect the man at the top to bear more of the national burden and not the labourer who is already carrying too much.

"In our original submission to the Commission and in our comments on the 5% general increase to civil servants we emphasised the already existing anomalous pay ratio between the lowest and highest paid employees of the public service which was 1:22. This is the most unfortunate heritage of colonialism. It is surprising that even though the report speaks primarily about the small increases granted to the lower level of public servants, the effect of the total recommendations is to increase the ratio from 1:22 to 1:39." 1

To this Bentum now added the further charge that a rigid incomes policy restricting wage increases to 5 per cent per year could not possibly be acceptable unless it also covered all members of Ghana's socio-economic elite, such as

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1. "Statement issued by the Ghana TUC on the 'Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana' ", Annexure 1, Mensah Report, p.65.



lawyers, judges and doctors:

"The NLC or any civilian government should consider whether it is social justice for the ordinary worker to be controlled in the sharing of the national cake whereas the 'big-shots' and other sections of the society are not similarly controlled." 1

This growing friction between the TUC and the NLC regime was further aggravated in the summer of 1969 by two strike incidents. In the first, a strike of minesworkers at Obuasi, police opened fire on a crowd of demonstrators, killing several people. 2 In the second, a strike of dockworkers at Tema, all 2,000 strikers were dismissed from their jobs. Bentum demanded an official enquiry into the first incident, and led a delegation to the International Labour Organisation to protest the second. It was clearly only the prospect of a change of government in the near future - general elections for a return to civilian rule were scheduled for September 1969 - that prevented the development of a more serious confrontation between the TUC and the NLC regime at this time.

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1. Article in the Pioneer, 5th April 1969, p.7.
  2. For details, see the Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Obuasi Disturbances (1969), (Accra: Government Printer, 1970).

CHAPTER SIXBENTUM'S TUC AND THE PROGRESS PARTY GOVERNMENT

As leader of the TUC under the Progress Party Government, Bentum pursued essentially the same line that he had taken in relation to the N.L.C. If there was any discernible difference in policy prior to the summer of 1971, this consisted in the more frequent, public expression of the TUC's views, especially with respect to wage reforms, and the development of the regional and district councils of the TUC as highly active forums for the discussion of national affairs by local unionists. All this could, and probably should, be seen as simply part of the attempt to make a reality of political democracy in Ghana, the TUC being conceived as having a major role to play in this experiment. Initially, relations with the new Government appeared to be cordial. Yet, during the course of 1971, they became strained to a point where an open confrontation seemed unavoidable, and, at the beginning of September, Bentum announced his support for workers' demonstrations in protest against the Government's policies.

There can be little doubt that Bentum's criticisms of the Government, and his general conduct of the TUC leadership, enjoyed the enthusiastic support of an overwhelming majority of the rank-and-file. But the planning of the September 1971 strike was poorly co-ordinated, and Bentum's announcement of its commencement found many union leaders surprised and unprepared. Consequently, only a minority of union branches came out on the first day of the strike, and when 500 government workers in Accra were instantly dismissed for stopping work, others were effectively dissuaded from taking the risk of active participation. Only the Sekondi-Takoradi workers felt strong enough

to maintain a stand against the Government, and 8,000 workers in that city stayed out for a week until there was clearly no hope that others would join them.

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of the sources of this confrontation, it is worth remarking on the close similarities, and also certain differences, between the Sekondi-Takoradi strikes of 1961 and 1971. In both instances, the respective regimes faced what were perhaps the most serious (civilian) challenges they were to experience from any quarter; and this from a group of workers who had been amongst the most enthusiastic and politically influential supporters of these regimes at the beginning of their periods in office. The 1971 strike proved to be not so protracted a challenge as that of 1961, but it might well have been had not poor planning and internal divisions amongst the railwayworkers undermined the strikers' morale. In any case, its implications were equally serious. Indeed, perhaps more clearly than that of 1961, it heralded the imminent downfall of the regime. Just four months later, in January 1972, with the economic situation deteriorating even further, and the disillusionment of many farmers added to that of the workers, the army intervened to displace the Progress Party government.

In each case, the objectives of strike action were very similar, to protest the imposition of additional taxation which seemed unfair in view of the excessive wealth and high living of the politico-administrative elite, and which lacked credibility as a genuine developmental measure. For some at least, the aim was consciously conceived as protesting the development of gross socio-economic inequalities in Ghanaian society, and the authoritarian style of government to which each regime increasingly had to resort partly in consequence

of popular unrest at these inequalities. In more positive terms, the strikers asserted the claim of the trade union movement to a regular and major voice in national decision-making in order to check elitist and authoritarian tendencies in government. The majority of strikers and their leaders were concerned to distinguish these objectives from 'mere party politics' or 'subversive motivations', not only for the benefit of Government but also out of the desire to act consistently with their purpose - i.e. to assert and demonstrate the legitimacy and political viability of a certain type of trade union movement (democratic-reformist), and thereby to establish it on a permanent footing (or defend it, once established).

In 1971, as in 1961, Government characterised the strikers as a relatively privileged labour elite pursuing selfish interests to the detriment of the real poor, the unemployed and the rural populace. There was perhaps some validity to this accusation in the sense that the additional taxation which the strikers protested was, theoretically, to be used for the benefit of these groups. And the skilled workers who led the strike were, of course, better off than the unemployed and some, though certainly not all, of the rural populace. Yet, essentially, this was a calculated attempt to displace a major source of social conflict on to a minor one, to emphasise the relatively slight differentiation within the ranks of the poor, while ignoring the primary and immense gap between the masses and the elite. There was greater validity to the workers' claim to be acting as the "spokesmen of the people", since, with the suppression or buying off of opposition parties, the unions and/or strike action represented the only means of institutional expression of popular discontent. It was difficult to assess the extent or group-location of public sympathy for the 1971 strikers with any precision. But, in addition to the impressionistic evidence of interviews, it was significant that during the last quarter of the year there was much talk amongst

aspirant politicians in the Central and Western Regions of forming a Labour Party, with Bentum in its leadership, aiming to attract the support of the unionised workers and the urban poor more generally. This was at least indicative of the judgement of men with their fingers on the pulse of public opinion that sympathy for the aims and stance of Bentum's TUC had been widespread.

The fact that such ideas were most prevalent in the Central and Western Regions of Ghana was, again significant. In 1971, as in 1961, there was a communal dimension to the anti-Government feeling of Sekondi-Takoradi workers. The Progress Party regime was perceived as favoritistic to Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo. Workers from the Central and Western regions, as were the majority in Sekondi-Takoradi, were the less willing to sacrifice for rural development since they doubted that their home-areas would receive an equal share of such development. Workers in Kumasi, in contrast, had good reason to perceive very real benefits for themselves and their relatives in the budget proposals. 1970-71 witnessed the disintegration of the Akan (Ashanti-Fanti) alliance which Dr. Busia had cultivated during 1969, and the re-emergence of that Ashanti-Coastal Town conflict, dating back several centuries, which had informed the struggle between the C.P.P. and the opposition (i.e. the Congress Party, and later the National Liberation Movement) during the 1950's.

It would, nevertheless, constitute a misplacement of emphasis to attribute more than marginal significance to this communal dimension in the September 1971 confrontation. The major issues were the general, national ones of the elitism of the Progress Party regime, and of the legitimacy of the role which Bentum had attempted to develop for the TUC. On this

occasion, unlike 1961, (or certainly more clearly than then), the Sekondi-Takoradi strikers were ideologically at one with the TUC and with the vast majority of workers throughout the country. It is this unity and sense of solidarity of Ghanaian workers during 1971 which deserves emphasis. One could almost speak of the emergence of a sense of national working-class identity at this time. Certainly, the Government-TUC confrontation in September, though unsought and undesired, served to strengthen rather than undermine rank-and-file confidence in the legitimacy of Bentum's "independent and democratic" style of trade union movement.

#### The 1969 Election and the victory of the Progress Party.

With a General Election scheduled for September, the issue of the labour movement's stand in relation to party politics was again raised at the June 1969 Congress of the TUC. The suggestion was made that the TUC might form or sponsor a labour party, possibly in alliance with the Labour Party of Frank Wudu (formerly Frank Woode, General Secretary of the Railway Union in 1947-49), but this proposal received little support from the leadership or the assembled delegates, and the policy of strict neutrality in party politics was re-affirmed.<sup>1</sup>

While there are no means of determining the voting pattern of unionised workers in the 1969 Elections with any precision, interviews conducted in 1971 suggested that the large majority of rank-and-file members and union officials in Sekondi-Takoradi had voted for the victorious Progress Party, led by Dr. Kofi Busia.<sup>2</sup> It would seem likely that a similar pattern

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1. West Africa, 7th June 1969.
  2. Out of 90 workers interviewed, 44 per cent claimed to have voted for the Progress Party, 20 per cent for one of the other parties, and 36 per cent not to have voted in the elections. It is possible that a number of those who claimed not to have voted were simply reluctant to reveal their party affiliation.

occurred throughout the country, except possibly in towns in the Volta Region, and in Accra, where the Progress Party won only 3 out of 8 seats. In the country as a whole, the Progress Party won 105 out of 140 seats in the new Legislative Assembly, with 29 going to the National Alliance of Liberals, led by Mr. Komla Gbedemah. The Progress Party also carried all the Regions, in most cases with an overwhelming majority of seats, with the sole exception of the Volta Region, where the Ewe people voted NAL candidates into almost every seat.

Mr. Gbedemah was himself an Ewe, as were most of the prominent figures in his party. The final results therefore give the impression of a fairly straight tribal contest between the Ewe people on the one hand, and an 'Akan' alliance of Ashantis, Fantis, Akwapim, and other Akan cultural groups, on the other. Yet, in many parts of the country, and especially in the southern coastal towns, the issues in the election were far more complex than this suggests, and the seats more closely contested.

The National Alliance of Liberals attracted the support not only of the Ewe people but also of many ex-C.P.P. enthusiasts and of others who, although disillusioned with the Nkrumah regime during the 1960's, had looked favourably on the C.P.P. in its earlier days. Komla Gbedemah had been one of Nkrumah's most senior lieutenants up until 1961, and was credited with much of the organisational work that had gone into developing the Convention People's Party into so powerful a force in the 1950's. From the more particular point of view of 'labour' appeal, Gbedemah could claim personal association with the 1952 Wages and Salary Commission which, disappointing as it was to Biney and the radicals, did more than any other commission, before or since, for Ghana's lower-paid workers. In his election

campaign speeches in August-September 1969 he proclaimed his sympathy for the programme of Bentum's TUC, promising that efforts would be made "to bridge the gap between the rural farmer and the city industrialist, and between the children of the senior civil servant in Accra and those of the small blacksmith in Mamprusi." <sup>1</sup> The Progress Party, in contrast, made no such commitment to egalitarian reforms.

An important question-mark hung over the character of Mr. Gbedemah, however. In 1961, he had fled into exile under the threat of imminent detention. According to his own account, this was because he was attempting to right the abuses and check the excesses of the Nkrumah regime from within, but, according to President Nkrumah, because he was guilty of embezzlement on a huge scale while Minister of Finance. He was, therefore, free of association with the authoritarianism and economic failures of the C.P.P. regime in 1961-66, but a figure of some controversy as to whether his disassociation was voluntary or forced, based on principle or venal self-interest. (The Jiagge Commission in fact found him guilty of past financial irregularities and he was debarred from taking up the seat he had won in the Legislative Assembly. <sup>2</sup>)

The Progress Party leadership played on the theme of Gbedemah's financial untrustworthiness to considerable effect. At a rally in Takoradi, one P.P. speaker remarked: "If Gbedemah offers you money to vote NAL, then accept it and feel free to vote P.P. It was your money anyway before he stole it." <sup>3</sup>; and the slogan, "Say NAL and Vote Progress"

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1. Quoted in The Birth of the Second Republic, (Accra: Editorial and Publishing Services, 1970), p.47.
  2. Report of the (Jiagge) Commission to enquire into the assets of specified persons, (Accra: Government Printer, 1969).
  3. Interview with Samuel Essien, Takoyadi correspondent of the Ghanaian Times, 7th September 1971.



became widely current during the last weeks of the campaign.<sup>1</sup> According to most interviewees in Sekondi-Takoradi, it was this issue, not that of alleged Ewe tribalism, that persuaded them to vote P.P. rather than NAL.

There were other reasons for the Progress Party's electoral victory, some of them, it must be said, reflecting (strictly speaking) irregular advantages it held over other parties. Mr. Joe Appiah, leader of the United Nationalist Party (which won only 2 seats), claimed that, "certain persons have been going about the country indulging in a vile propaganda that the NLC will not hand over power to civilians if the Progress Party is not voted into power."<sup>2</sup> Whether or not this was strictly accurate, it was certainly the case that Brigadier Afrifa toured the country in August-September advising the chiefs to use their influence to secure a P.P. victory, and that he openly threw all his prestige as the youthful hero of the 1966 coup behind Dr. Busia. According to one newspaper report, he even announced that he owed the inspiration for the coup to Busia and therefore hoped the "Prof" would some day be taking over from himself and his military colleagues.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the NLC regime provided Dr. Busia with special assistance of an organisational nature by appointing him Chairman of the Centre for Civic Education in February 1969. This was supposed to be a non-party political organisation, designed to help educate the electorate in their democratic rights and responsibilities, and to stimulate discussion of major national issues on a non-partisan basis. But, in practice, Busia was able to use the C.C.E., and his trips by state heli-

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1. The Birth of the Second Republic, op.cit., p.82.

2. The Pioneer, 5th July 1969, p.3.

3. The Spokesman, 22nd May 1970, p.1.

copter on C.C.E. business, to lay the foundations of his party, developing political contacts throughout the Regions, and providing jobs in the Centre's organisation for men of talent who could later be mobilised to run the Party's campaign in their areas. This was at a time when other politicians had no chance of openly soliciting for support, since the NLC's ban on party political activity was not lifted until May.

In spite of its possession of these advantages, and the distinctly mediocre quality of its rivals, it would be wrong to suggest that the Progress Party leadership possessed no more positive electoral appeal. In addition to the obvious attraction of self-advancement for its organisers and 'enthusiasts', the Progress Party promised to provide honest, democratic government, a promise lent more credibility than that of other parties by its leadership's record of opposition to the Nkrumah regime. For this leadership consisted essentially of a regroupment of the old United Party leaders, who claimed to be "the champions of democracy" in Ghana, together with a new crop of professional men and intellectuals who had surfaced in the political vacuum created by the 1966 coup. Dr. Busia himself, J. Kwesi Lamptey, S. D. Dombo, W. Ofori-Atta, R. R. Amponsah, Jateo Kaleo and Victor Owusu had all suffered preventive detention or exile under the C.P.P. regime for their oppositional activities. It was a well-calculated strategy to emphasise the 'democratic' element, and divert attention from the tribalistic and elitist tendencies in this group's political record, by launching the Progress Party in Sekondi-Takoradi (rather than Kumasi, the 'heart' of the old National Liberation Movement). Dr. Busia specifically appealed to the railwayworkers, as natural allies in the fight for democracy, to help vote the Party into power: "Some in Nkrumah's government, I am told, called you 'Western Rats' for going on strike. Today we salute you as Western

heroes, for you rose to resist tyranny .... We will strive constantly to merit your support and confidence." <sup>1</sup> This appeal did not go unheard. Some of the railwayworkers were among the leading Progress Party activists in Sekondi-Takoradi, and the Railway Union Executive had to issue a warning that the Union's platform should not be used for party political propaganda. <sup>2</sup>

Beyond the vague commitment to democratic Government, and to recognising and protecting the independence of the trade union movement, the Progress Party did not go in defining its community of interest with the lower-paid workers. This was not necessarily because it had already formulated, with any clarity, a policy programme unfavourable to labour. More probably, it was simply because, with the addition of several young intellectuals of varying ideological complexion to an original leadership, itself united more by common opposition to the Nkrumah regime than by positive beliefs, the Progress Party high-command was something of a hotch-potch of conflicting ideas. Together with some of the most extreme and eccentric of Ghanaian conservatives - men such as Victor Owusu and R. R. Ampansah - were to be found several young welfare-state liberals, such as Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah, K. G. Osei-Bansu and Dr. Jones Ofori-Atta, and even the former young radical, J. H. Mensah, author of the C.P.P.'s Seven-Year Development Plan. Such a gathering dictated that the identification of ideological aims be muted, a strategy made the more feasible by the failure of rival parties to engage the Progress Party in a meaningful ideological debate.

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1. Ghanaian Times, 19th June 1969, p.1.
  2. RUA, Railway Union Working Committee Minutes, 14th September 1969.

Yet, in a sense, this disinclination to present definite programmes itself constituted a distinctive ideological self-projection, that of the rule of experts or "the best brains in the country". The Progress Party had succeeded in attracting to its senior ranks the majority of the nation's intellectual figures, including, it seemed, almost the entire indigenous staff of the University of Legon, and, presiding over them, Ghana's most famed academic, Professor K. A. Busia.<sup>1</sup> Were not such men best fitted, even essential, to sort out the economic mess into which the Nkrumah regime had plunged the country, and to find the path to progress? As Dr. Busia himself put it:

"The Progress Party has power to overcome - power to overcome the heritage of debt, corruption, inefficiency and poverty. Power to overcome the present unemployment, the low standard of living, disease, and poverty, and the humiliation of our nation and of the Blackman.... The solution to these problems will be based on carefully collected data." 2

This was an argument of some force with the electorate, and certainly of great influence on the Progress Party leadership's image of itself and actual conduct of government. But it is important to note a certain ambivalence in the reaction of the urban populace to this assertion of an educational right

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1. Dr. Fynn, a University history lecturer and a Progress Party candidate in the elections, explained that, "many university graduates have decided to do politics because it is irritating to see incompetent and dishonest men running the affairs of the nation." The Pioneer, 13th August 1969, p.3.
  2. Quoted in The Birth of the Second Republic, op.cit., p.34.

to rule. The intellectual arrogance which led Dr. Busia to claim he was the only man fitted to rule Ghana was liable to be perceived as a gross insult to the abilities of her ordinary citizens if academic expertise failed to produce the promised economic progress. It was the intellectual elitism which characterised the P.P. regime's conduct of government and its attitude to critical voices, at least as much as the conservatism of its socio-economic policies, which was responsible for the rapid deterioration of relations between the regime and the Ghanaian labour movement. The development of an open confrontation with the P.P. regime, within just two years of its accession to power, derived from frustration not only of the economic expectations of the union rank-and-file, but also of that aspiration to an effective and acknowledged political voice which, for union leaders and the skilled worker class more generally, was central to the notion of democratic trade unionism.

#### Economic policies of the Progress Party regime.

The Progress Party came to power without a clearly formulated economic programme, and no such programme was systematically presented to the country prior to the Budget of 30th July 1971. Before this date, the regime simply proclaimed its commitment to 'privatisation' of the State sector, appealed for an increase in National Discipline and Self Help, and made vague avowals of its especial concern for the poorest sections of the national community, the rural populace and the unemployed. It will later be argued that it was, in part, this failure to present and implement a consistent and dynamic programme of action more speedily which encouraged workers to resort to strike actions to impress their demands on Government.

This, in turn, was largely responsible for aggravating the friction between Government and the TUC to the point where it finally escalated into head-on-conflict. In the interests of objectivity, however, and in order not to prejudge the issue, it is here intended to describe the regime's economic programme as presented in its most systematic and appealing form in the July 1971 Budget. It is then proposed to describe the reactions and objections of the majority of skilled and semi-skilled workers to that Budget programme. This presentation is based on structured interviews with 90 railwayworkers in Sekondi-Takoradi during August 1971, the results of which, though they cannot be assumed to be typical of the views of other groups of workers in any strict sense, are certainly indicative of labour reactions more generally.<sup>1</sup> Such a presentation will help to assess the degree to which the strikes and demonstrations of September 1971 were motivated by opposition to the Budget proposals, and to what degree by other considerations or sources of conflict. More particularly, since these interviews were conducted in the months of July and August, (i.e. before Bentum began to mount his attack on the Budget), this will go some way to showing in which sense, and to what degree, Bentum was thereby representing rank-and-file opinion or alternatively seeking to create an 'artificial' conflict.

The first priority and cornerstone of the P.P. regime's economic strategy was the focussing of resources on Rural Development.<sup>2</sup> There were really two aspects to the rural development

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1. For further details of the questionnaire and its administration, see Chapter Seven.
  2. J. H. Mensah's budget statement was reproduced in full in the Daily Graphic and Ghanaian Times, 27th - 30th July 1971. In addition, both of these newspapers published special supplements on 17th August, explaining its rationale in somewhat simpler terms for the benefit of the mass audience.

programme, the one of particular concern and benefit to the rural populace, the other conceived rather in terms of the general interest of rural and urban dwellers alike. The former aspect consisted in the provision of pipe-borne water, electricity supply, and medical centres for the rural areas so as to reduce the disparity between urban and rural standards of existence. This was presented by the Government as an essentially altruistic, compassionate policy, calling for self-sacrifice on the part of the politico-administrative elite and the urban populace more generally, though the motivation was clearly not lacking an element of electoral interest.<sup>1</sup> The second aspect was that of encouraging the production of sufficient food to sustain Ghana's growing population, thereby to reduce the cost of living in the urban areas and also to improve the nation's balance of trade position. Other advantages were claimed for this programme: that of increasing employment opportunities in the rural areas, for instance, and so reducing the flow of young migrants to the cities where sufficient job openings simply could not be provided. The Government hoped to stimulate this agricultural revolution by constructing more 'feeder' roads between the rural areas, the towns, and the cities,

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1. The somewhat peculiar combination of elitist and populist ideological tendencies which characterised the Progress Party leadership was well illustrated by a remark of Dr. Busia's reported in the Daily Graphic on 31st August 1971. Dr. Busia explained his decision to cut his own and other cabinet minister's salaries as the result of a trip he made to a village where the drinking water was visibly filthy. On returning to his home, he apparently thought to himself, "I can sit in Accra and the water I use in my toilet is cleaner than the water my fellow-countrymen are drinking."

by educating Ghanaian farmers in more advanced agricultural techniques, and by setting the National Service Corps to work to extend the area of land under cultivation.

The Government's second major priority was described by the Minister of Finance, J. H. Mensah, as "the launching of a frontal attack on the problem of unemployment."<sup>1</sup> This was to be tackled partly through the expansion of rural employment opportunities, but also by embarking on a massive programme of housing and public works construction in the urban areas. This would also have the beneficial effect of "stemming the rise in rent which is placing such a burden on the finances of the lowest paid workers".<sup>2</sup> It was by means of reducing the cost of food, housing and transport in the urban areas, rather than by awarding wage increases, that the Government aimed to relieve the financial position of the lower-paid workers.

As to whether any wage increases at all could be anticipated the Government was somewhat vague and vacillatory. During its first eighteen months in office, the P.P. regime consistently refused to consider raising the minimum wage in spite of the fact that the financial position of lower-paid workers continued to deteriorate seriously under the impact of inflation. In May 1971, however, the Minister of Labour and Co-operatives, Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah, declared that the Government recognised "that the gap between the lower and higher income groups was becoming too wide and needed bridging", and announced the appointment of the Campbell Commission "to look into this problem and the conditions of service of employees of the public

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1. Budget Statement, Ghanaian Times, 30th July 1971, p.6.

2. Ibid.



service with a view, primarily, to bridging this gap." <sup>1</sup>  
 Workers' hopes were obviously raised. Yet, in his Budget  
 speech on 30th July, J. H. Mensah announced that:

"Upon a careful examination of the information and advice offered by the Commission, government has come to the conclusion that it would require very large proportionate increases in the wages of the lower paid public officers to compensate them for the changes in the cost of living since the last increase in wages, or to bridge the gap between their incomes and those of the higher paid officers. Such a scale of wage increases for the lowest paid servants, even if not promulgated as an increase in the national minimum wage, would inevitably lead to repercussions in other parts of the income structure. In the face of the existing inability of the country to provide more food, housing, transport and any of the other goods and services which the workers would wish to buy, a general increase in money wages would undermine the stability of the whole economy. It would also be self-defeating." <sup>2</sup>

It seemed then that the Government was not contemplating increasing wages in the near future. Moreover, its decision to embark on an ambitious and expensive rural development programme, in spite of the nation's weak balance of payments position and huge external debt, necessitated that new tax measures should be introduced. These included a National Development Levy "which will require every employed person to help the development effort." <sup>3</sup> The imposition of additional taxation on even the lowest paid workers was justified on the grounds that,

"In Ghana there are two classes of people who can be said to be relatively poor: those who live in the big towns and cities but have no work to do, and those who live in the villages and can only afford the bare necessities of life. By comparison to these groups, anyone with a regular job, even at the minimum wage, is well off." <sup>4</sup>

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1. Daily Graphic, 10th May 1971, p.4.
  2. Budget Statement, Ghanaian Times, 30th July 1971, p.6.
  3. Budget Supplement, Ghanaian Times, 17th August 1971, p.6.
  4. Ibid, p.7.

Many lower-paid workers no doubt found it difficult to accept this assessment of their situation; but the Government later qualified its position by announcing that those earning less than N¢34 per month would be exempt from the Levy. Furthermore, the Levy was to be scaled according to income level, rising from a 1 per cent tax on incomes below N¢1,000 per annum to 5 per cent on the chargeable incomes of corporations. This was hardly as steep a scaling, perhaps, as the demands of social justice might require, but then the higher paid were to make additional sacrifices in the form of losing various perquisites and allowances. Car and entertainment allowances were to be abolished, for instance, and the subsidised rents for government bungalows raised to a more realistic figure. Taken together, these measures could perhaps be interpreted as a negative form of "bridging the wages gap".

#### Labour's reaction to the Budget.

The equitable character of the budget, taken as a whole, was not lost on Ghana's lower-paid workers. The large majority approved of it in most of its aspects and general orientation. But they were concerned, firstly, to question certain items, and secondly to distinguish between the theory, or stated objectives, of the budget and what they believed it would mean in practice. The idea of rural development appealed very strongly, partly because they recognised that the rising price of foodstuffs was the major burden on their wage packets, but also because the persistence of strong ties between most workers and their rural (or less urban) homes, whether practical or more vaguely emotional, inclined them to support plans for improving rural living standards. As one interviewee commented,

"Every man living on the coast has some village people living in wretched conditions. And this will enable them to produce more food and bring it to us." <sup>1</sup> And another, of slightly different perspective, remarked "Up in those rural areas, they're still living very darkly and savagely. Therefore, they should deduct just a bit of our pay to polish them, because they are so dark over there." <sup>2</sup> Similarly, the idea of temporary sacrifice in order to help create jobs for the unemployed appealed to both altruistic and self-interested motivations, mixed as they generally were. The burden of supporting relatives who could find no work was a major drain on many workers' incomes. Questioned more generally as to the primary objectives which the trade union movement should be pursuing, 70 per cent rated "helping to solve the unemployment problem" as being of the highest priority. <sup>3</sup>

However, many workers were sceptical as to what would actually materialise from these programmes. As far as the creation of new industries and job opportunities was concerned, the P.P. regime had so far been all talk and no action. More important perhaps, Government aid for rural development seemed so far to have been allocated on a regionally favoritistic basis. Rural development had meant development for the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, the home areas of the majority of Progress Party leaders, and, to a lesser extent, for the Volta Region where the Party was concerned to win over the Ewe people to its support. As Dr. Busia had announced on 21st November 1969, "The Progress Party Government has within barely two months of

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1. Interview with railway worker, 23rd August, 1971.
  2. Interview with railway worker, 21st August 1971.
  3. See Chapter Seven, Table 7.3.

assumption of office, voted approximately N¢5.6 million for development projects in the Ashanti Region alone."<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful whether the Central and Western Regions received as much as this during the first two years of Progress Party rule.<sup>2</sup> Workers who originated from these Regions, as did the majority in Sekondi-Takoradi, and many in Accra-Tema, were therefore sceptical as to what rural development would mean for their relatives: "Rural development is good, but not if there is too much concentration in one area. We have yet to see any in Ahanta."<sup>3</sup> The influence of this communal division on the determination of workers' attitudes to the budget (and to the regime more generally) became apparent when considerable numbers of workers in Kumasi proclaimed their support for the National Development Levy and disassociated themselves from the TUC's critical stance.<sup>4</sup> (With the exception of the members of the Confederation of Labour, the rival trade union centre, they were the only workers in Ghana to do this.) Nevertheless, this communal dimension was of marginal significance relative to other factors in generating labour opposition to the budget.

More important by far was the Government's apparent refusal to make any positive concession to the demand for an increase in wages, or to the idea of bridging the gap between lower and higher income groups. The need for sacrifice was generally recognised, the argument that wage increases tended to be self-defeating without a concomitant increase in food production widely appreciated. But, as the Government itself admitted, it would be some years before the agricultural revolution was sufficiently advanced to produce a fall in prices or before the problem of unemployment could be significantly reduced.

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1. The Pioneer, 21st November 1969, p.1.
  2. This, at least, was the impression of the Senior Community Development Officer for the Western Region. Interview with H. Bossman, 2nd August 1971.
  3. Interview with railway worker, 28th August 1971.
  4. Ghanaian Times, 17th September 1971, p.1.

In the meantime, the lower-paid workers were having to provide for the unemployed, and, with basic foodstuffs costing at least 50 per cent more by the summer of 1971 than at the time of the Progress Party's accession to power, many were finding it quite impossible to make ends meet.<sup>1</sup> They survived only by further reducing their consumption of staple foods, such as yam or "fu-fu", or else turning to "gari", "a food formerly considered fit only for pigs",<sup>2</sup> according to one elderly Ghanaian, and certainly of very low nutritional value. Whether conceived in terms of social justice or of the preconditions for raising productivity, some increase in the minimum wage was surely justified, even if it offered only relatively temporary relief. This could be financed by severe cuts in the salaries of higher-paid wage-earners and the political elite. As one speaker argued at a Railway Union mass-meeting, "We want to take at least N¢200 off all those rich men. How can one man possibly eat thirty-nine times as much as another?"<sup>3</sup> - a perspective of

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1. This (admittedly very rough) estimate of the increase in price of local foodstuffs is based on conversations with market-women and customers in Sekondi market on 13th August 1971.
  2. Interview with Joseph Ansah, 8th July 1971. It is worth quoting in full the remark of this 75 year old Sekondi inhabitant, who was private secretary to the famous pan-Africanist, J. Caseley Hayford, in the 1920's, the uncle of P.P. Minister, J. Kwesi Lamptey, and in no sense a 'radical': "Our workers are now having to eat food, this 'gari', formerly considered fit only for pigs in the old days, food not fit for Ghanaians. And meanwhile the Government carries on playing 'moneytics'. I really would not wish to live much longer to see my beloved Ghana in the days of bloody revolution that are coming."
  3. Speaker at a Railway Union mass-meeting on 26th August 1971 at which the writer was present.

distinctly radical implications. Most workers remained quite unconvinced by J. H. Mensah's argument as to the impracticality of attempting to 'bridge the gap'; and perhaps rightly so, since this was not necessarily an argument for refusing to make any concession at all in that direction. Certainly, to raise workers' hopes of some concession by appointing the Campbell Commission only to dash them three months' later was politically inept in the extreme.

This served to bring to the surface a great deal of simmering resentment at the wealth and insensitivity of the Progress Party elite. "Why should we shoulder more of the burden when they are not attempting to sacrifice at all?"<sup>1</sup> This was perhaps not strictly accurate, since in August 1971 Prime Minister Busia announced that, in order to "set an example of making sacrifice", his salary was to be cut by N£6,000, that of Cabinet Ministers by N£4,000 and that of Ministerial Secretaries and Regional Chief Executives by N£2,000.<sup>2</sup> But such a lead was long, perhaps too long, overdue. On its assumption of office, the P.P. regime had set the salaries and allowances of its Ministers and Regional Chief Executives at levels almost twice as high as those enjoyed by their equivalents in the C.P.P. regime.<sup>3</sup> The Prime Minister was to receive N£18,000, Cabinet Ministers N£14,000, Ministerial Secretaries and Regional Chief Executives N£10,000, while the allowances for which they were eligible raised their total emoluments several thousand cedis above these figures.<sup>4</sup> These awards provoked jealousy among ordinary M.P.'s who began pressurising in May 1970 for

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1. Interview with railway worker, 17th August 1971. This sentiment was expressed, in similar words, by virtually all railway worker interviewees.
  2. Ghanaian Times, 28th August 1971, p.1.
  3. At the end of the C.P.P. period, Ministers received salaries of N£9,000 per annum.
  4. The Spokesman, 18th May 1970, p.1.

substantial increases in their allowances, and in July most of their demands were granted, giving them total emoluments of some N¢7,000 per annum. It was clearly hypocritical to to the point of being ludicrous, therefore, to characterise Bentum's demand for an increase in the minimum wage from N¢0.75 to N¢1.00 per day as "a very high level to set workers' demands" and "calculated to incite workers against the government by making demands which Mr. Bentum knew were impossible."<sup>1</sup> Rather, these early measures of the P.P. Government had made it extremely difficult for Bentum to restrain workers' demands at that level.

There were further examples of such insensitive behaviour during the following twelve months. Mention will here be restricted to those instances to which workers specifically referred in interviews in August 1971. It rapidly became obvious during 1970 that many Progress Party leaders were building up very considerable commercial empires for themselves. In December, Lt.-General A. K. Ocran, a leader of the 1966 coup who retained a great deal of popular respect, especially in the Western and Central Regions of Ghana, wrote to the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Presidential Secretary expressing his disappointment that many members of the Legislature had not yet declared their assets as they were required to do under Articles 67 and 89 of the Constitution. Instead of meeting this criticism squarely, the Progress Party's General Secretary accused Lt.-General Ocran of being "only concerned with creating sensation and publicity for himself."<sup>2</sup> In consequence of this,

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1. J. H. Mensah, quoted in the Ghanaian Times, 11th September 1971, p.2.
  2. The Star, 18th December 1970, p.1.

according to one newspaper report, "Both at Cape Coast and Takoradi party officials were admitting that they are going to have a tough time overcoming the effect of 'Mr. da Rocha's tactless and arrogant statement'".<sup>1</sup>

Then, in March 1971, there was further disquiet over the Government's announcement that, in spite of the continuing economic crisis, it had been spending N¢2.8 million on the construction of rest-houses in the regions for members of the Government. A month later, it was decided to allow judges to retire on full salary. And shortly afterwards the Government's image was hardly improved by Dr. Busia's admission that (himself excluded, of course), "There is not a single honest person in my Cabinet."<sup>2</sup>

It was hardly surprising, then, that the lower-paid workers were reluctant to heed the Progress Party Government's call for National Discipline and voluntary sacrifice, or to refrain from strike action in support of their demands; or that by July-August 1971 they were inclined to view Mensah's austerity budget with scepticism, although admitting to approval of most of its stated objectives. Bentum was therefore expressing general rank-and-file opinion when he began criticising the National Development Levy and Government's failure to do more to bridge the wages gap in the first week of September. But there was more to the TUC's confrontation with Government than this, in the perception of rank-and-file as well as leadership.

Bentum's TUC and the P.P. regime: the sources of confrontation.

In the first week of September, Bentum toured the District Labour Councils criticising the budget on various

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1. The Spokesman, 5th January 1971, p.1.
  2. The Spokesman, 25th May 1971, p.1.



particular points and more generally the Government's refusal to listen to the TUC's objections. Government leaders saw this, quite correctly, as an incitement to direct action for other than strictly economic aims; yet, within the broader context of Government - TUC relations, it was a defensive rather than aggressive move, a last determined protest against the regime's known intention to amend the Industrial Relations Act so as to emasculate the TUC. This was the culmination of a progressive deterioration of relations between the TUC and the Progress Party regime since October 1969, a process which derived from several sources and levels of conflict.

#### The strike-incidence issue.

At one level, conflict centred on the continuing high level of strike actions, and the issue of whether or not the TUC could, or could properly, do more to prevent them. Relations with the P.P. regime began well with Dr. Busia agreeing to find jobs for the 2,000 Tema dockworkers dismissed by the NLC regime.<sup>1</sup> But friction developed as the TUC leadership proved unable to lower the level of strike incidence. In 1970, there were 55 strikes, involving a loss of 123,000 man-days, a level showing no improvement on that occurring under the NLC regime, and quite unacceptable to the new Government, (see Table 5.2). The TUC's official position on strikes remained essentially unaltered from that adopted under the NLC regime:

"We are not happy with the limitations which are imposed under the law on the right to strike... nor with the long and complicated procedures for the resolution of industrial disputes which exist in the present law.... But we are willing to accept these and work within them as our contribution to the national task of reconstruction. We feel..

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1. Daily Graphic, 3rd December 1969, p.3.

"..that our nation faces an emergency in this respect which is almost as great as if it were in a state of war - war against internal and external enemies, and war against the numerous social evils and economic hazards that plague our society today." 1

This position was implemented through a code of conduct instructing the national unions to take disciplinary measures against officials or members resorting to unauthorised strike action. At District Labour Council meetings and seminars organised by the TUC, local officials were consistently admonished to follow the official procedures for settlement of disputes, and impressed with the need for harmonious industrial relations in the cause of national economic reconstruction. At the same time, however, Bentum made public his view that the dilatory and inadequate procedures for dispute-settlement, often deliberately exploited by management, together with the widening income gap between lower-paid, manual workers and the top-level salariat, were primarily responsible for the high level of strike actions. Until these basic sources of conflict were remedied, he suggested, it would be useless and improper for the TUC to take a sterner line against strikers. And as the real incomes of lower-paid workers continued to decline in 1970-71, and the P.P. regime failed to respond to the demand for a 'bridging of the gap', there was a shift of emphasis in the TUC line from condemnation of strike actions to criticism of government's inaction.

The Government's position, as enunciated by Dr. Busia in August 1970, was that "the unions have the greatest responsibility to raise our productivity", that strikes served no purpose except to hurt the whole community, including the workers themselves, and that virtually all recent strikes had

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1. The Light, 31st March 1971, p.1.

been unnecessary and illegal: "In all these strikes the procedure laid down for settling disputes was not used.... some of the reasons for the strikes could hardly bear examination." <sup>1</sup> The regime was not, however, united on the issue of how to deal with this problem. There was mounting pressure from the right wing of the Progress Party to introduce amendments to the Industrial Relations Act so as to stiffen the anti-strike provisions. But up until June 1971 this was resisted by the first P.P. Minister of Labour, Mr. Jatoo Kaleo (later Minister of Transport and Communications) who insisted that "strikes are human problems and they can't be solved by legislation"; <sup>2</sup> and also by his successor, Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah who, while often critical of the inability of union leaders to control their rank-and-file, displayed considerable appreciation of the difficulties involved, and a desire to appease rather than confront the unions. As late as 10th May 1971, Dr. Bruce-Konuah publicly acknowledged that "strikes and demonstrations among employees of the public services can be attributed to the cumbersome and complicated procedures for dealing with the workers' grievances", and that "the gap between the lower and higher income groups is becoming too wide and needs bridging." <sup>3</sup> Accordingly, he established commissions to recommend solutions to these problems.

But this show of action came too late to avert a series of major strikes which disturbed the country in June-August 1971. The sanitary workers and Public Works Department employees in Accra, dockworkers in Tema, and the railway engine-

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1. Dr. Busia's speech to the TUC Congress of August 1970, reported in the Ghanaian Times, 1st August 1970, p.3.
  2. The Spokesman, 30th June 1970, p.1.
  3. Ghanaian Times, 10th May 1971, p.5.

men in Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi all went on strike.<sup>1</sup> All resulted from management's refusal or tardiness to implement agreed or stipulated conditions of service. But they coincided with, and, reinforced, growing pressure from the Party's right-wing to take a stiffer line against strikers. Some of these extremists went so far as to promise that all participants in illegal strikes would be dismissed and replaced by party supporters amongst the unemployed.<sup>2</sup> Partly, no doubt, in deference to this pressure, Dr. Bruce-Konuah ordered the dismissal of 400 striking dockworkers when they failed to respond to a government ultimatum to return to work, supported the laying-off of 150 striking P.W.D. workers, and issued a similar return-or-be fired ultimatum to the railway enginemen.

The leadership of the TUC condemned these dismissals and threats of dismissal as "arbitrary, wicked, degrading, and indeed a flagrant violation of the Industrial Relations Act", and demanded that they be rescinded or else "the co-operation which the TUC has given to the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives will have to be reconsidered."<sup>3</sup> The Government was warned that, by intervening directly and arbitrarily in disputes which should rather be settled by unions and management, it ran the risk of being "drawn into head-on collision with the workers."<sup>4</sup> Yet Bentum clearly did not relish the prospect of

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1. The sanitary workers went on strike from 10th-15th June; the dockworkers from 20th-24th June; and the railway enginemen from 3rd-13th July. For details of the rather sordid background to the sanitary workers' strike, see Chapter Eight, p. 316.
  2. See, for example, reports of speeches by Victor Owusu, Stephen Krakue, and Dr. Aboagye in The Spokesman, 11th May and 22nd June 1971.
  3. Daily Graphic, 28th June 1971, p.5.
  4. Ibid.

a destructive confrontation with the Government, and accordingly put out peace-feelers. Early in July, he wrote to the Minister of Transport and Communications, Mr. Jatoo Kaleo expressing his "dismay at the way the labour situation in the country is deteriorating as a result of recent methods of handling strike actions"; assuring him of "the assistance of the Congress and its affiliated unions in bringing about peace and harmony"; and requesting the Minister's intervention as an impartial authority in the railway enginemen's and other disputes, "using your good offices to invite the managements and the unions to settle the issues amicably."<sup>1</sup> This resulted in talks between the Minister, the Railway Enginemen's Union Executive, and a TUC delegation, which succeeded in resolving the dispute and getting the strikers back to work a few hours before expiry of the Government's ultimatum. Yet, instead of building on this successful initiative in the improvement of Government-Labour relations, Minister Kaleo immediately returned to the attack, accusing union leaders of being primarily responsible for "the issuance of ultimatums and threats that have crept into our industrial relations", and expressing bafflement at Bentum's "apparent silence and seeming indifference" with regard to many recent strike actions.<sup>2</sup> There were to be further indications during the following months of the ascendant influence of the right-wingers over the P.P. regime's labour policy.

#### Trade unionism and party politics.

The industrial disturbances of June-August 1971 played

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1. Ghanaian Times, 9th July 1971, p.8.
  2. Ghanaian Times, 14th July 1971, p.1.

into the hands of those right-wing elements in the Progress Party who wished to curtail the independence and undermine the strength of the Ghanaian trade union movement. Yet the pressure for such measures did not originate with those disturbances but rather dated back to the earliest days of the regime and derived from other sources of conflict. At the first Congress of the TUC to be held under the Progress Party regime, certain P.P. Ministers, most prominently R. R. Amponsah, backed a bid by K. A. Ossei-Mensah, General Secretary of the Petroleum and General Transport Workers' Union, to displace Bentum as Secretary-General of the TUC. Ossei-Mensah, it was felt, would prove more easily controllable than Bentum since he originated from Dr. Busia's home area and had close links with the Party leadership. In the event, Bentum defeated Ossei-Mensah by 94 votes to 17, and gained a public assurance from Dr. Busia that he disassociated himself from any attempts to intrude party politics into trade unionism or to check the freedom of trade unions.<sup>1</sup> Government support was nevertheless forthcoming for the attempt to develop an alternative trade union centre, the Confederation of Labour, during the first half of 1971.<sup>2</sup> And in July-August of that year, Amponsah, Owusu,

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1. Ghana Workers' Bulletin, Vol.3, No. 9, (September 1970), p.2.
  2. The Ghana Confederation of Labour required the Government's special assistance even to exist, since, according to the Industrial Relations Act of 1958, (still in force, though amended in 1965), only one trade union centre, the TUC, was permitted legal identity in Ghana. Similarly, the main force behind the G.C.L., the splinter-Railway and Harbour Employees' Union, had required Government's special intervention to gain registration, since it did not possess the membership - 40 per cent of the total labour force in an industry - legally required for the establishment of a second union within that industry. In addition, overt support was provided for the new centre by ministerial statements in the national press. See, for example, the statement of the Minister of Labour in the Daily Graphic, 28th August 1971, p.3.

Kwow Richardson, and other right-wingers, succeeded in fuelling the conflict between Government and the TUC with inflammatory public statements, and in winning over a majority of Progress Party leaders to a policy of confrontation and repression.<sup>1</sup>

The hostility of these right-wingers to Bentum seems to have derived partly from the (somewhat irrational) fear of a possible recrudescence of support for the former President, Dr. Nkrumah. Bentum, they believed, was still secretly a Nkrumah supporter, or at least a Soviet-trained Communist who would take every opportunity to exploit labour unrest for subversive political purposes. This was in spite of the fact, obvious to virtually everyone in the labour movement, that as far as strikes and wage demands were concerned, Bentum had consistently played a moderate, restraining role. At the July 1970 Congress, for instance, the delegates' decision to press for a rise in the minimum wage from N¢0.75 to N¢1.50 per day entailed their rejecting the recommendation of the Committee on Resolutions, and a passionate appeal by Bentum himself, to retain the N¢1.00 demand.<sup>2</sup> Bentum later came round to supporting the N¢1.50 demand as the impact of inflation further undermined the real value of wages in 1970-71, and, in his 'Proposals to the Campbell Commission', he pointed out that N¢2.50 would be a more realistic figure according to the Government's own statistics.<sup>3</sup> (Allowing for the ideal character of the Ministry of Health statistics, and possibly a slight exaggeration in the food prices used by the TUC in its calculations, the finding that a balanced diet for a family of man, wife, and two children, would cost N¢3.30 per day was strikingly indicative of the inadequacy of the

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1. For example, see the speeches reported in the Ghanaian Times, 4th August 1971, p.1; and Daily Graphic, 28th August 1971, p.5.
  2. The Spokesman, 28th July 1970, p.1.
  3. "Proposals submitted by the TUC (Ghana) to the Salary Review Commission (1971)", (Accra: TUC, mimeo).

existing minimum wage of N(0.75). But, in setting the TUC's demands at steadily higher levels, he was continually resisting pressure from middle-level unionists to raise them even higher. It is worth noting, moreover, that, whatever Bentum's personal feelings about the Progress Party, the large majority of both top and middle-level unionists were P.P. supporters, at least in the sense of having voted P.P. in the 1969 elections, and certainly held no lingering affection for the C.P.P. regime. Richard Baiden, for instance, the General Secretary of Maritime and Dockworkers Union, and Acting Secretary-General of the TUC during Bentum's absences, had ties with the Progress Party leadership extending back to his role as a United Party 'agent provocateur' in the 1961 Sekondi-Takoradi strike; yet he became far more scathing even than Bentum in his criticisms of the regime's economic and labour policies in the summer of 1971.<sup>1</sup>

As far as strike actions were concerned, Bentum had a remarkably successful record of intervention in labour disputes to negotiate compromise agreements between Unions and Management, and so persuade strikers to return to work. The Obuasi minesworkers' and railway enginemen's strikes were perhaps the most notable instances, in that either might have developed into major political crises had it not been for Bentum's intervention. Admittedly, he generally delayed intervening until strike action had actually commenced and an impasse between Union and Management had clearly been reached, so provoking the Government to accusations of dilatoriness on his part. But this was the course of action required by the constitutional provisions of the TUC. And it was largely because he faithfully observed these provisions for protecting the powers of individual unions, and made apparent his sympathy with workers' grievances,

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1. See, for example, Baiden's speech reported in the Daily Graphic, 28th June 1971, p.3.



that he was able to perform the role of 'conciliator' so effectively.

The Progress Party right-wingers' hostility to Bentum was, in this sense then, irrational. But, in seeking to displace him, they were also representing a strong pressure (neither rational nor irrational) from within the ranks of the Party, like all parties something of a bandwagon, to maximise the advantages that being in power might give it. Many of the Party's core-following, and especially those with a personal interest involved, resented the fact that avowedly pro-P.P. unionists, such as Quist and Quartey of the Railway Union (i.e. the leaders of the splinter-Railway Union and of the Confederation of Labour), had not succeeded to the positions of TUC leadership they were thought to deserve. More generally, they disliked the fact that a major centre of power should remain outside the Party's grasp. It is unlikely, however, that Dr. Busia would have given in to this pressure had it not been for the emergence of more genuine grounds for anxiety as to the likely political consequences of Bentum's leadership of the TUC. After all, the Prime Minister had largely resisted similar pressure to intrude the Party into the Civil Service.<sup>1</sup> But in the summer of 1971 he united with the right-wing over the issue of the TUC's claim to a larger voice in national decision-making, and supported, not a party take-over of the TUC, but its dissolution.

The TUC's concept of "democratic participation".

Benjamin Bentum was ideologically committed to an extremely assertive, participant conception of political

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1. In fact, Dr. Busia dismissed 608 civil servants within one month of taking office, but he was apparently under pressure to go further than this in sacking 'suspects' and replacing them with party loyalists. See The Times (of London), Supplement on Ghana, 30th September 1971.

democracy, and more particularly of the role of the trade union movement within such a democracy. Progress Party Ministers preferred to suggest that he had an exaggerated sense of his own wisdom and self-importance. Yet since this personal drive to political influence was so closely geared to the interests and opinions of the union rank-and-file, these amounted in practice, to very much the same thing. Bentum's leadership of the TUC was not an especially radical political force, and certainly not intentionally subversive. It could perhaps have been quite easily accommodated, and even constructively utilised, by a regime more genuinely democratic in spirit, or simply more sensitive in its handling of criticism. Unfortunately, the leadership of the Progress Party regime was characterised by an extreme intellectual arrogance which made it unwilling to compromise its expertly formulated programmes, and intolerant of the criticisms of its policy voiced by Bentum, and encouraged by him in the local forums of the TUC. It was, moreover, undoubtedly the case that, confronted with this intolerant and intransigent attitude, Bentum was inclined to mount increasingly radical and open attacks on the policies of the regime. Given the prevalence of urban unrest at these policies, and Bentum's immense prestige with the rank-and-file of the labour movement, he was capable thereby of transforming the TUC into what was less a pluralist pressure-group than a powerful oppositional party or movement. Certainly, this tendency in the TUC presented a far more serious challenge to the standing of the regime than that posed by the official parliamentary opposition, the Justice Party, (an amalgam of NAL and the other minority parties), whose leaders were generally as detached from the urban masses as those of the Progress Party. <sup>1</sup>

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1. If the local organisation of the Progress Party was somewhat skeletal by 1971, that of the Justice Party was non-existent. The J.P.'s leading representatives in Sekondi-Takoradi consisted of a young lawyer, of absolutely no local standing or renown, who spent most of his time in the expatriate-dominated Golf Club, and confessed that he

Indeed, it was partly because of the lack of an effective, responsive opposition party that many urban dwellers looked to the TUC to perform the function of expressing 'mass' grievances. The populist tendency in TUC ideology reflected sensitivity to this pressure as much as Bentum's personal political ambitions.

During the first twelve months of the Progress Party regime, Bentum had announced various measures to further decentralise the TUC and, at the same time, extend the effective reach of the TUC's educational programme beyond middle-level officials to local officials and the union rank-and-file. The District Labour Councils were to be strengthened both financially and in terms of personnel so that they could organise regular educational programmes and seminars for the workers in their areas.<sup>1</sup> These seminars did in fact materialise, unlike most of the schemes of the C.P.P.-TUC, and proved to be remarkably active and well-attended. They were designed partly to instruct the rank-and-file and inexperienced local officials in the proper procedures to be followed in labour disputes,

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Footnote 1 continued from previous page.

... wasn't much interested in politics; and a building-contractor, ex-C.P.P. Chairman of the City Council, who was totally discredited politically as a result of his reputation for fraudulent practice.

It was significant that, shortly after the military coup of 6th January 1972, several Justice Party leaders were detained along with Progress Party officials, and the new government leader, Colonel Acheampong "blamed some members of the former opposition for compromising their positions by obtaining big government loans, thus laying themselves open to political blackmail."

West Africa, 25th February 1972, p.12.

1. TUC Secretariat Statement published in the Spokesman 24th July 1970.

and in the advantages of peaceful negotiation over direct, disruptive action. But they also provided for discussion of national political and economic issues along lines which were often extremely critical of the 'status quo' and Government's inaction. The workers, as speakers from TUC headquarters repeatedly stressed, must act as the "watchdogs" or "the eyes and ears of society", speaking out against injustices and abuses. An extract from an introductory lecture given by Richard Baiden to the Sekondi-Takoradi District Council of Labour will serve to illustrate this theme:

"We must challenge the economy as presently structured and administered.... We are still operating an obsolete colonial work structure and educational system, geared toward the production of administrative personnel, when the need is rather for providing incentives and training opportunities for technicians and skilled workers. It is the duty of workers to speak out against this and against other stupidities and injustices. A labour movement must be bold and free to express our views, make our criticisms. It is only the trade unions which can check these things - corruption, waste of public money, the irresponsibility of those in authority. The labour movement should participate in economic development not only through hard work, but through contributing to the necessary re-thinking of our national priorities. We must concern ourselves not only with the worker but with everything in our community life, for bad men can only prosper while good men do nothing." 1

Such calls to political participation met with an enthusiastic response from the type of person who generally took an especial interest in union affairs, became a local official, and attended

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1. Speech delivered by Richard Baiden to a meeting of the Sekondi-Takoradi District Council of Labour on 7th July 1971, at which the writer was present.

these TUC seminars. These were mostly young (in their twenties or early thirties), and extremely active people. Many were 'leaders' in several other organisations apart from their trade unions. Generally educated to 'middle-school' level, many had taken, or were taking, correspondence courses to further their education.<sup>1</sup> For such people trade union participation was motivated by something more than a desire to protect a particular group of workers; by a desire for self-improvement certainly, but also by the ideal of actively contributing to the creation of a wealthier, and more just society.

At the national level, also, Bentum pursued the line that, "nation-building is not the responsibility of Government alone but also that of the citizens... politicians should consult the workers on all matters affecting them before a decision is taken."<sup>2</sup> In addition to pressing the demand for a radical restructuring of the national wage and salary structure, he was continually tendering his advice to the Government, through the national press and the TUC's own organs as well as in private, on virtually the entire range of national policy issues: unemployment, the external debts problem, reform of the educational system, the siting of new industries, assistance for the fishing industry, etc. Most crucially, he claimed that the TUC had a right to be consulted in the formulation of the budget. "The Congress cannot accept the principle that the destiny of the country should be determined only by a chosen few, neither can

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1. Out of 24 'local' officials of the Railway Union who attended a TUC course on Industrial Relations in June 1971, 16 were under 35 years of age, 22 were educated to middle-school level, and 9 had taken further courses of some kind to improve their education, (i.e. not including apprenticeship or specifically trade union courses).
  2. The Pioneer, 17th November 1969, p.3.

we accept that wisdom and knowledge is with a few." <sup>1</sup>

The Progress Party regime did not take kindly to such criticisms and claims. A relatively moderate statement of the Government's objections was provided by Dr. Bruce-Konuah in a private interview:

"The idea that we should practice democracy like America today is absolute nonsense. Did America have developed trade unions when she was fifteen years old? No, she had slave labour... This idea that the workers should act as the "watchdogs of society", we don't accept it at all. What is the proportion of workers to the rest of the population? They are just a minority. It's all wrong for them to say, 'The Government must consult us'. The trouble with Bentum is that he has such an inflated idea of his own importance. He has never really adapted himself from NLC days to a civilian government. Under the NLC, of course, he was the leading spokesman and adviser on labour affairs, and he is still trying to lay down the line." <sup>2</sup>

Whatever the validity of the Minister of Labour's argument, it was politically unwise for Progress Party leaders to display their scornful disregard of Bentum's opinions and demands so openly. During the summer of 1971, several Ministers, in conjunction with the editorials of the Daily Graphic, (to all intents and purposes the Government's mouthpiece), made ever more frequent and hostile attacks on "the impudent claim of the trade union leaders to represent the people in matters which do not concern them." <sup>3</sup> This only served to incline Bentum to more vociferous criticism of the regime's policies and to swing the rank-and-file more solidly behind him. To describe Bentum's demand for a rise in the minimum wage from N¢0.75 to N¢1.50 as

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1. Ghanaian Times, 3rd September 1971, p.5.
  2. Interview with Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah, Minister of Labour, 11th October 1971.
  3. Daily Graphic, 7th September 1971, p.2.

"outrageous and politically instigated",<sup>1</sup> for instance, carried no conviction with union members who were well aware that he was doing no more than pressing the minimal demands of their own delegates, and that "it is an old trick of governments to charge the unions with playing politics as soon as they stand up for their rights."<sup>2</sup> During July and August, several of the District Councils of Labour passed resolutions calling on the Prime Minister "to advise his Ministers and Ministerial secretaries from attacking the TUC unnecessarily on political platforms."<sup>3</sup>

#### The confrontation of September 1971.

These various sources and levels of conflict came to a head in mid-August when Dr. Bruce-Konuah alleged that the TUC contained too many politicians "who had identified themselves with trade unions in order to use them for their political ends."<sup>4</sup> He announced that the Industrial Relations Act was to be amended in the current session of Parliament so as "to remove anomalies in the Act and bring it in line with the provisions and spirit of the constitution."<sup>5</sup> This was interpreted by TUC leaders, quite correctly as it proved, as a reference to the demand of Victor Owusu and Oheneba Kwow Richardson for the abolition of the "check-off" system, which they

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1. Ghanaian Times, 27th August 1971, p.1.
  2. Interview with Kofi Baaku, railway worker, 4th September 1971.
  3. Daily Graphic, 17th August 1971, p.4.
  4. Ghanaian Times, 17th August 1971, p.1.
  5. Ibid.

claimed "smacked of Communism".<sup>1</sup> The compulsory check-off system, introduced by the 1958 Industrial Relations Act, was an arrangement by which union dues were deducted at source from workers' wage-packets and distributed, according to the stipulated proportions, to the TUC, national union, and local branches. In some industries, but not all, workers could contract out of this arrangement if they so wished. The "check-off" was certainly a major source of strength and unity for the Ghanaian trade union movement, assuring the unions of financial viability, and freeing officials from the arduous task of dues-collection. It also reduced the opportunity for, and occurrence of, fraudulent practices at the level of local officialdom, and thereby contributed to an improvement in quality of that officialdom. Some Progress Party Ministers, however, together with the leaders of the Confederation of Labour, claimed that the system gave too much power to the TUC and national union leadership, and freed them from the necessity of regular contact with, and accountability to, the rank-and-file. While there was doubtless some validity to this argument, (as the C.P.P. experience had shown), it is difficult to see how good communications between union leadership and rank-and-file could be fostered better by a continuous preoccupation on the part of union officials with the business of collecting dues than by directing their time and energy to grievance-handling and other more positive functions.

Bentum published a reply to the Minister of Labour's statement, pointing out that the check-off system was operated in England and many other non-communist countries, and reminding him that a sub-committee of the Labour Advisory Council, representing the TUC and the Employers' Association, was at present finalising its recommendations to the Government on the proposed

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1. Ghanaian Times, 4th August 1971, p.1.



amendment of the Industrial Relations Act. "At our last meeting of the Labour Advisory Council, a firm decision was taken that the report of this Sub-Committee be submitted and the Council given the chance of examining it before any move to amend the Industrial Relations Act is taken."<sup>1</sup> He further rejected the Minister's charge that union leaders were playing politics, and described it as "a mere cover for you to escape from facing the realities and the challenges of an independent labour movement in our present-day democracy."<sup>2</sup>

Confronted with this threat of legislative action to undermine the strength of the Ghanaian labour movement, Bentum was hardly inclined to play down his objections to the Government's July budget. During the first half of August he had maintained silence on the budget proposals apart from remarking that the National Development Levy exactions made some increase in the wages of lower-paid workers all the more necessary. In private, however, he had written to the Minister of Finance on two occasions, requesting a meeting so that the TUC's views on the budget should be made known to the Government. On the 21st August, he published a letter to the Minister in the national press, deploring the fact that no reply to these approaches had been received and criticising the implementation of the National Development Levy at a time when workers were still waiting for the publication of the Campbell Commission Report and hoping for an improvement in their wages.<sup>3</sup> Still no reply was received, and, in the last week of August, Bentum began a tour of the District Councils of Labour, declaring that, "the TUC will not be disturbed by threats or intimidations from con-

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1. Ghanaian Times, 21st August 1971, p.5.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

tinuing to fight for the rights of the workers... the TUC will not be a rubber-stamp to the Government... No Government in the world can succeed without the workers." <sup>1</sup> He still refrained from calling an official General Strike, but, early in September, declared his support for proposals to stage demonstrations against the National Development Levy.

The Government reacted by warning workers that any strike against the Levy would be regarded as a political strike and "treated in a way different from the way in which we treat genuine strikes". <sup>2</sup> It claimed to be aware "that for two years some people have tried to use the labour movement for political purposes." <sup>3</sup> On the 8th September, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Mr. N. Y. B. Adade, announced, "We'll stop Bentum" and issued a notice freezing the assets of the TUC. <sup>4</sup> Within two days, an Industrial Relations (Amendment) Bill was rushed through the National Assembly, abolishing the check-off system and the legal status of the TUC, and stipulating that a ninety-day cooling-off period be observed in the event of threats of strike action. <sup>5</sup> By the end of the week, 8,000 workers in Sekondi-Takoradi were out on strike.

Demonstrations of opposition to the Levy and support for Bentum were staged in Accra, Tema, and other industrial centres, and it looked as though the Sekondi-Takoradi strikers would be joined by workers throughout the country. There were a number of reasons why this failed to materialise. In the first place, the Government instantly dismissed 500 State Transport Corporation workers for stopping work, and this deterred

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1. Ghanaian Times, 1st September 1971, p.5.
  2. Ghanaian Times, 27th August 1971, p.1.
  3. Ibid.
  4. Ghanaian Times, 8th September 1971, p.1.
  5. Daily Graphic, 10th September 1971, p.1.

other groups from risking a similar fate.<sup>1</sup> But it was possible for the Government to pick off strikers in this manner only because they did not come out simultaneously in solid, concerted action. Bentum's failure to call and co-ordinate an official General Strike must therefore be considered a major blunder. As it was, his declaration of support for demonstrations against the Government's policies threw the responsibility for taking strike action onto the leaders of the individual unions, most of whom, having earlier been informed of Bentum's opposition to the idea of a General Strike, were now found surprised and unprepared.<sup>2</sup> In addition, although his relations with the General Secretaries of the national Unions were mostly very good, some had recently become jealous at the extent of Bentum's personal popularity with their own rank-and-file.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, the near universality of labour support for Bentum's stand was indicated by the immediate resolution of all the national unions, with the exception of the Seamen's Union, to join in forming another trade union centre with Bentum as leader.<sup>4</sup> The only instances of dissent from this stance were:

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1. Ghanaian Times, 15th September 1971, p.1.
  2. Private communication with Jon Kraus, who interviewed five General Secretaries of the national Unions in the summer of 1972.
  3. Private communication with Richard Pratt, who interviewed three General Secretaries of the National Unions in the summer of 1973.
  4. This resolution did not in fact materialise in a new TUC, owing largely to the organisational chaos into which the unions were thrown by the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act of 9th September 1971.

the National Seamen's Union, whose General-Secretary, Smith-Mensah, had recently been involved in a bitter dispute with Bentum and Baiden over the jurisdiction of his union; a group of some 700 railwayworkers in Kumasi, almost half the railway labour force of that city, who expressed their support for the budget measures and agreed with the Government in seeing Bentum's opposition as politically motivated, (presumably in the sense of being designed to topple the P.P. regime)<sup>1</sup>; and, finally, the leaders of the Ghana Confederation of Labour, the rival trade union centre, who were also the leaders of a splinter-group of Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers, now formed into the Railway and Harbour Employees Union. (The Ghana Confederation of Labour consisted at this time of the R. & H.E.U. and the Manufacturing and Commercial Allied Workers' Union, a small Takoradi-based splinter-group from the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union.)

But, although support for Bentum was so widespread, and the Ghana Confederation of Labour failed to make any significant inroads among the TUC's membership, it was again the Sekondi-Takoradi workers who alone were prepared to maintain a forceful stand against the Government. 8,000 workers in that city stayed out on strike from the 12th to the 17th September. The strikers' placards suggested, (and interviews confirmed this), that the issues as far as they were concerned, were two-fold: "Suspend Development Levy, it is unjust", and "We still recognise Mr. Bentum as TUC boss".<sup>2</sup> A further placard slogan provided deeper insight into these grievances: "An End to P.P. false aristocracy". The interrelation was clearly articulated by one railway unionist: "We must stand by Mr. Bentum's effort to speak up for us poor people and tell those big men what sacrifices

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1. Daily Graphic, 17th September 1971, p.4.

2. The writer was present at the strikers' demonstrations.

they should be making".<sup>1</sup> Interviews conducted during the strike also indicated a great deal of sympathy from other groups for Bentum and the strikers' stance, though this was more apparent among middle- and lower-middle class groups such as the market-women, middle-ranking executives and teachers, who stood to be directly affected by the Levy and other budget provisions, than amongst the unemployed.

For most participants, the aim of the strike was simply to impress on Government their opposition to the Levy exactions and their confidence in the TUC leadership and its stated objectives. Some certainly hoped to displace the regime. In the outspoken atmosphere of the Sekondi akpoteshie bars, workers could sometimes be heard speculating that, "We'll show this Government and its Development Levy. If the military are sent in to stop the strike, it could bring the Government down."<sup>2</sup> But in general, the whole point of the strike was rather to refute the suggestion that they had been misled by a politically subversive union leadership, while standing by the TUC's demand for reform of the wages structure and its view that popular criticism of the regime's policies was an essential element in real democracy. The majority of strikers and their leaders were P.P. voters, (some, indeed, were officials of the Party's ward committees), and it was precisely such 'real democracy' that the Progress Party had stood for, in their eyes, in the 1969 elections.

It was partly the disinclination to go beyond making this point that led the strikers to return to work after five days. Robert Mensah, Chairman of the Takoradi Branch of the Railway Union, expressed the views of many when he observed,

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1. Interview with B. T. Nahr, railway unionist, 13th September 1971.
  2. Conversation overheard in Sekondi 'akpoteshie' bar, 15th September 1971.

"I tell you, the workers are the eyes of the country. They know what is going on, and you should not try to treat them like trees. If only the Government had co-operated with the TUC in educating them, it would have been good for Ghana. But this attack on the TUC does not make for stable government. We want to impress this on the Government, but we also want to make it clear we are not after political ends. So it is best to cool the situation now we have made our point." 1

The strike leaders' decision to return to work was greeted with hisses and boos when it was first put to the assembled strikers on Thursday, 16th September. But Mensah eventually convinced them with the promise that, "We will never let you down. The struggle has reached a new phase and we must react accordingly. But if those of our leaders who have been arrested are not released by next Monday, then we will resume the strike." 2

The arrest of these union leaders had resulted from violent confrontations with members of the splinter-Railway and Harbour Employees Union who insisted on attending duty. This was the second reason for abandoning the strike action. Some wished to take it to a more decisive conclusion, but the railwayworkers' front was far from solid; and, with such division in their ranks, the morale of the strikers was relatively low. Approximately one-third of the railway and harbour workers were members of the break-away R.H.E.U., and nearly all of these abided by their leaders' decision not to strike against the Levy. An analysis of the reasons for this decision, and of the sources of division within the Railway Union rank-and-file, will be presented in the following chapter. Here, the important point

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1. Interview with Robert Mensah, 15th September 1971.
  2. Speech delivered by R. Mensah to a meeting of strikers on 16th September 1971, at which the writer was present.

to note is the practical significance of this conflict in the situation of September 1971 as an example of successful 'divide and rule' tactics on the part of the Progress Party regime; and one which illustrated government leaders' appreciation of the crucial importance of control of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers in the politics of Government-Labour relations.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE RAILWAY WORKERS DIVIDED : THE SOURCES AND STRUCTURE OF  
POLITICAL CONFLICT IN THE RAILWAY UNION.

Introduction.

At a mass-meeting of the Sekondi Location Branch of the Railway and Ports Workers' Union on the 21st January 1970, a majority of the assembled workers resolved to secede and to form themselves into a new union. This splinter-group, officially terming itself the Railway and Harbour Employees' Union, but known in local parlance as the "Biafrans" (in distinction from the "Federalists") explained their action in terms of the fact that, "There has been no improvement whatsoever in the administration of our former union since we passed a vote of no confidence in the national officers in May 1967."<sup>1</sup> Almost two-thirds of the Location manual workers, (i.e. some 900 out of a total of 1,580) became members of the new union, and they were soon joined by approximately a quarter of the workers employed at Takoradi Harbour, (i.e. some 1100 out of a total labour force of nearly 5,000), together with small groups in Tema and Kumasi.

The leadership of the new union, (hereafter referred to as the 'splinter-union' in distinction from the 'mother-union' - terms also used by the railway workers themselves), then proceeded to extend the object of its criticisms to the leadership and structure of the Ghana TUC. In June, its General Secretary, K. G. Quartey, called on the Government to repeal the Industrial Relations Act (inherited from the C.P.P. regime) and to proscribe the TUC.<sup>2</sup> In September 1970, the union was granted official registration, and in August of the following year, its

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1. Ghanaian Times, 23rd January 1970, p.8.
  2. Ghanaian Times, 22nd June 1970, p.3.



leaders launched a new national trade union centre, the Ghana Confederation of Labour. The other affiliates of the G.C.L. consisted of the Manufacturing and Commercial Allied Workers' Union, a small splinter-group from the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, and the Co-operative Distillers' Union.<sup>1</sup> These developments clearly had the tacit backing of the Progress Party Government, without whose special assistance the R.H.E.U. could not even have gained official registration. In September 1971, the Government reaped the reward of its sponsorship when the splinter-unionists proclaimed their opposition to the strike of mother-union members, and remained on duty, so undermining the aims and morale of the strikers.

Apart from its practical political significance in the situation of September 1971, this major division in the ranks of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers raises serious questions as to the validity of the argument developed in previous chapters of this thesis. Bentum's leadership of the TUC, it has been argued, succeeded in developing an unprecedented level of unity and sense of solidarity in the Ghanaian trade union movement. The appeal of its programme and ideology was especially powerful for many of the railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi, strongly attached as they were to the norms of trade union solidarity, independence from government, and self-assertion in opposition to elitist tendencies in Ghanaian society. But what degree of support and solidarity, one must ask, did Bentum's TUC really achieve in view of the secession and criticism of this splinter-group of railway workers? How accurate is the depiction of the railway workers as subscribing, with remarkable consistency over time, to a unifying political culture? This alleged ideological continuity, and,

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1. Ghanaian Times, 24th August 1971, p.8.

more particularly, the idea that Bentum's TUC represented an approximate realisation of an ideal model of trade unionism for which the railway workers had long been fighting, surely requires substantial qualification. One's reservations must be augmented by the knowledge that the leaders of the splinter-union were precisely those people who had led the 1961 strike action.

In response, it should first be admitted that the general interpretation thus far propounded does constitute a simplified presentation of a far more complex reality; though, in defence, one might also point out that a certain degree of over-simplification might well be justified, and indeed be necessary, in the interests of a clearly intelligible analysis. It is the writer's view, moreover, that the complexities and inconsistencies which came into play in creating the split of 1970-71 can, and should, be acknowledged as integral and long-dating elements in the structure of Railway Union politics without undermining the essential validity of the general interpretation thus far presented.

Turning to more particular points, it has already been emphasised that Bentum's leadership was extremely popular with the supporters of the mother-railway union, the criticisms of the splinter-union leaders (which were far from universally shared by their own supporters) notwithstanding. But Bentum's popularity, and the relatively high degree of unity he brought to the Ghanaian trade union movement, derived from, and were dependent on, a more complex set of factors than mere direct ideological rapport. For instance, he was generally very adept in his handling of relations with both the general secretaries and middle-level leaders (Branch and Association officials) of the national unions, and in accommodating their ambitions, satisfying their aspiration to a certain autonomous status, within the reformed and rejuvenated TUC. This was a crucial factor in labour movement unity since these middle-level unionists,

acting as communicators and interpreters to their rank-and-file, generally possessed a great measure of control over the perceptions and behaviour of their constituencies. But, in the case of the Railway Union, it proved impossible to accommodate the ambitions of all the Union's middle-level leaders, partly because there were simply too many aspirants for the available positions, partly because the ambitions of certain of these leaders were so grandiose, extending to leadership of the national trade union movement as a whole. This situation of a superabundance of men experienced in union officialdom, and determined to retain or accede to the limited number of positions available, was especially likely to occur in a union, such as the Railway Union, where leadership was so highly valued; but it was exacerbated in this particular instance by a most singular set of historical circumstances shortly to be described.

Further, the relative unity of the trade union movement in 1966-71, while reflecting the rank-and-file's common experience of seriously declining living standards, was greatly facilitated by the Government's general failure to exploit potential sources of division within the working classes. But here again the railway workers were an exception to the general rule. The severely depressed financial situation of the lower-paid workers during these years exerted a double-edged effect, increasing the potential for labour solidarity and radicalism under a sufficiently united and responsive leadership, but, at the same time, intensifying rank-and-file desperation for whatever benefits it seemed possible to gain, and consequently their susceptibility to divisive 'carrot-politics'. This susceptibility was exploited with uncharacteristic skill by the Progress Party regime in the case of the Railway Location 'tradesmen', through the agency of malcontents among their leadership.

Thirdly, ideological differences as to the degree of co-operation which should be extended to the Government's economic policies constituted an additional dimension of the Railway Union split. It is worth pointing out here that there was ample room for genuine differences of opinion in this regard, irrespective of party political allegiances, and within a common commitment to independent, reformist trade unionism. In the previous chapter, an attempt was made to depict the peculiar mixture of elitist and populist, liberal and authoritarian, tendencies characteristic of the Progress Party regime. This gave considerable scope for differences of interpretation and opinion among union leaders, as to the merits of Progress Party rule, slight in themselves perhaps, but of potentially serious political consequence. The fact that Bentum generally succeeded in subsuming these differences again illustrated his very considerable political and rhetorical skills.

Nevertheless, one is bound to ask, did not the Railway Union split of 1970-71 illustrate the relative weakness, or certainly a weakening, of the norm of solidarity amongst this, historically the most solid, of groups of Ghanaian workers? To some degree this was certainly so. But the fact is that the railway workers' history of solidarity in action has always been achieved only through subsuming potentially serious sources of division. Indeed, the very 'activism' of railway unionism has made for strong divisive tendencies. We have seen how the railway enginemen, for instance, determined to ensure the best possible representation of their grievances, have several times broken away from the main Railway Union. Furthermore, in so powerful a union, and so active a union culture, positions of leadership, being so highly prestigious, have naturally been keenly fought over. Consequently, leadership factionalism, too, has frequently proved especially divisive. As regards the ideol-

ogical consistency which, it has been argued, the railway workers have displayed right through from the era of Pobe Biney to that of Benjamin Bentum, this is admittedly, an accurate depiction only of the dominant tendency in Railway Union politics, that which has generally won out in the end (and become, in a sense, the 'official' interpretation of the historical principles of railway unionism). A divergent tendency for some railway workers and union leaders to seek to involve the union in party politics, whether the control-oriented politics of the governing party or the subversive aims of opposition parties, has been a common feature of the Railway Union political arena. Biney and his followers had to battle to overcome the influence of C.P.P. loyalists in the union in 1954-61. And, in the course of the 1961 strike action itself, a conflict developed between those leaders allied with the United Party interest and those seeking to limit the objectives of the strike action to a non-partisan reformist protest. In 1970-71, these several sources of division - leadership factionalism, economic sectionalism, and ideological differences over the issue of union-government relations - all coincided to undermine the solidarity of the railway workers to a quite unprecedented extent. An analysis of the various sources and levels of this division will serve to illuminate the complex reality of Railway Union politics, the mediation of general ideological tendencies and issues through particular structures of power and communication, and so provide a necessary corrective to the simplified presentation of previous chapters.

It nevertheless appears justified, as regards the correct weighting of emphasis, to conceive Railway Union history in terms of the directing and unifying influence of a strong proletarian/populist political culture, and to interpret the 1970-71 splinter-union as an exceptional (and temporary) deviant

case. Two main reasons might be adduced for this interpretative standpoint. In the first place, many supporters of the splinter-union, unlike those of the mother-union, tended, in interviews, to be markedly defensive as to the legitimacy of their position, recognising its inconsistency with the Railway Union's historical principles of worker solidarity and strict independence of party political ties. Some of these in fact 'crossed the floor' back to the mother-union during the crisis of August-September 1971. Moreover, in order to retain what support they possessed, the leaders of the splinter-union were very much concerned, in their speeches at mass-meetings, to try to justify their stand in terms of the railway workers' historical experience, and to emphasise their independence of Government influence, (though they were equally concerned to emphasise their influence with the Government). In other words, the dominant culture of railway unionism continued to exert a significant re-unifying influence on the rank-and-file, and imposed severe limitations on the position which it was politic for the leaders of the splinter-union to take.

Secondly, this split in the ranks of the railway workers resulted, and, it might well be argued, could only have resulted, from a situation in which divisive forces were of quite exceptional intensity and tended to coincide very closely. Ideological differences, factional conflict between union leaders, sectional jealousies as to the respective conditions of service of different job categories, these were all familiar aspects of the Railway political scene. But, as the following account will make clear, each was present in especially intense form in 1970-71 for particular historical reasons. And while these various issues and lines of division cross-cut in a minority of individual instances each other, they generally tended to coincide and interrelate so as to re-inforce the division into two camps.

Indeed, from the point of view of analysis, this close inter-relation of divisive factors makes it extremely difficult to clearly separate and weigh their respective influence in the determination of allegiances. This is especially the case with respect to the important question of the relative significance of sectional economic interests, on the one hand, and ideological differences, (including here differences of perception as to the sincerity and wisdom of particular union leaders), on the other. The majority of supporters of both unions appeared, in July-September 1971, to attach great importance to the differences in the stance of the rival unions, and to believe sincerely in the positions taken by their own leaders. Yet, again in the majority of cases, union allegiance followed the lines of sectional economic interest very closely. It is necessary to recognise that the ideological issues must have exerted a significant influence on behaviour in order to account for the quite numerous instances of deviation from this dominant pattern. But, generally speaking, they should doubtless be seen as rationalisations of positions essentially dictated by considerations of practical (economic and political) self-interest. This is not to deny them importance. It was precisely the ability to develop quite seriously tenable ideological justifications of divergent perceptions of economic interest (and of different approaches to their promotion) which served to weld the two groups into relatively solid, opposing camps.

#### Sources and Utilisation of Data.

The following analysis of the Railway Union split is based on several sources of data: official records of the mother-union for 1961-71, direct observation of union mass-meetings and of day-to-day interaction between union officials and rank-and-file, interviews with officials of both unions, and a

questionnaire survey of the workers employed at the Sekondi Location Workshops. This survey was designed with the purpose of ascertaining what pattern of correlation existed between individual allegiance to either of the rival unions and other group identifications: party political allegiances, for example, or membership of particular age, tribal, occupational, or educational groups. These various allegiances were then related to divergent attitudes on various topics which appeared to be of especial relevance to the ideological differences between the leaderships of the two unions. These topics may be stated, in brief, as comprising the following: (a) the ideal qualities of a union leader, and the degree of commitment of individual workers to following a particular leader; (b) the goals of highest priority for union activity; (c) the main causes of the high incidence of strikes in Ghana, and the "legitimate" occasions of resort to strike action; (d) the ability, honesty, and preparedness to sacrifice of Ghana's politico-administrative elite; (e) the merits and demerits of the Progress Party Government's economic policy, and more particularly of the Budget of July 1971.

The questionnaire, (reproduced in Annexure A), consisted firstly of several 'introductory' questions as to the interviewee's age, job category, union membership, etc.; and, secondly, a series of questions as to his attitudes on both particular and more general 'political' issues. This latter set of questions were sufficiently precise as to demand replies which could be fairly easily and meaningfully tabulated and analysed in statistical terms, but were administered in such a way as to elicit fairly full 'in-depth' responses rather than simple snap answers of the 'Yes/No' variety. Each interview lasted approximately 40 minutes so that the respondent could be asked to



explain why he held certain views, and encouraged to talk at length about the topic in question. The aim of adopting this relatively open-ended approach was to develop some understanding of how the respondents themselves formulated or structured the topics being investigated. Prior notice had been taken of M. Brewster Smith's exhortation to avoid "the pollster's undue reliance on categorical statements of preference about pre-formulated issues, and the tendency of much academic attitudinal research to reduce attitudes to the scalable dimensions of direction and intensity." <sup>1</sup>

The chief disadvantage which this approach is commonly held to entail lies in "the formidable task of systematizing the analysis of cognitive structure." <sup>2</sup> In this instance, however, no such sophisticated analysis was to be attempted, the aim being merely to gain some fairly general insight into the interviewees' understanding and perceived inter-relation of various issues, and of the most important variations in this regard. A more serious problem in interpreting the survey data was that of judging in which direction particular correlations (primarily) operated. For example, members of the splinter-union tended to hold a rather more favourable view of the honesty and performance of the Progress Party Government than did supporters of the mother-union. But it was impossible to assess, from the survey itself, whether a favourable view of the Progress Party preceded (or helped determine) attachment to the splinter-union, or, alternatively, whether the sympathetic presentation of Government policies by splinter-union leaders influenced their rank-and-file toward a favourable image of the Progress Party

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1. M. Brewster Smith, "Opinions, Personality, and Political Behaviour", in Dahl and Neubauer (eds.), Readings in Modern Political Analysis, (New Jersey, Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p.361.

2. Ibid., p.362.

regime. Granted that the interrelation was to some degree two-way, which was the stronger direction of the flow of influence? Insight into such questions was provided by a consideration of the historical origins and process of development of the splinter-union. It was also with questions such as this in mind that the structure of communication within the unions was studied, both through direct observation and through long and frequent interviews with union leaders.

The survey was administered to a 'random' sample, (using this term, technically, in a rather loose sense), of 90 workers at Sekondi Location. The original intention was to interview 1 in 12 of the Location labour-force, the highest proportion which could be attempted given the limited resources of finance and personnel (the writer and a research assistant). The procedure adopted for the selection of interviewees was simply to map out a set course of the Location Workshops, and then to walk along this course interviewing every twelfth individual at work along it. Obviously, this was not so strictly 'random' as other possible techniques, (selecting names on a statistical basis from the labour-force roll, for instance), but it was felt that the attendant advantages of this approach outweighed technical considerations of reduced representative validity. If respondents were able to observe for themselves that their selection was random, and that their names were unknown to the interviewer, they would, it was felt, be more at ease in answering the questionnaire, more inclined to honesty and outspokenness. (In fact, many insisted that their names be noted.) The noisy and familiar atmosphere of the shop-floor was also likely to be more congenial in this respect than that of an office in the executive buildings. It was partly with the aim of establishing a relationship of openness and trust between interviewer and respondents that the writer had previously spent a great deal of time wandering around the Workshops in conversation with the leaders of both unions, thereby establishing himself as a familiar and non-partisan figure. Moreover, the leaders of both

unions had requested their members at mass-meetings to lend their full co-operation to the research project. The vast majority of respondents did in fact prove willing to talk frankly, and at considerable length, (though, as already suggested, members of the splinter-union tended to be rather more guarded than those of the mother-union).

Clearly, however, the resultant sample was not 'random' or representative in any strict sense. All job categories except the 'artisans' were under-represented in the sample relative to the numbers of each employed at Location (see Table 7.1).

Table 7.1 : Representative Status of the Sample, by Job Category.

	Location Labour-force	Numbers Inter- viewed.	%
Artisans	370	30	8.1
Tradesmen	690	34	5.0
Apprentices	270	15	5.5
Labourers	250	11	4.4
Total	1,580	90	5.7

This was, however, only partly due to inadequacies in the selection technique. More important, it proved necessary to bring the survey to a premature close, before the Carriage and Wagons Department, in which all the workers were tradesmen, labourers, or apprentices, had been fully covered. By the first week of September, it was apparent that a major confrontation between the Government and the TUC was looming near, probably to be supported by strike action on the part of the R.P.W.U. members. In this situation of mounting political tension, the writer accepted the Railway Management's advice that the survey be discontinued. In consequence, only 5 per cent instead of the proposed 8 per cent of tradesmen, labourers, and apprentices, were in fact interviewed.

The representative status of the survey was obviously impaired thereby, and in consequence it is not possible to claim validity for the findings to any great degree of statistical precision. For the purposes of this analysis, however, no great degree of precision seemed necessary. Certain general patterns were clearly indicated by the high degree of correlation between variables, (a minimum score of 0.5 by Yule's Q measurement of association being considered clearly indicative<sup>1</sup>). Beyond this, the strength and significance of these patterns could be assessed by reference to other sources of information, especially the actors' own expressed perceptions of the situation, rather than by precise statistical measurement.

#### Leadership Factionalism in the Railway Union.

##### The rewards, motivations, and norms of leadership.

W. N. Grant, a prominent leader of the 1961 strike and an interested observer of the Railway Union split of 1970-71, considered that, "The cause of all this trouble is a mad scramble for leadership."<sup>2</sup> Many others held a similar view, including the Progress Party Minister of Labour, Dr. W. G. Bruce-Konuah, who remarked that, "This division seems to me to be the only solution, since all those railway people are determined to be

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1. Yule's Q equals 1 when the association between two variables is complete, but a score of 0.5 is generally taken to indicate a clearly significant degree of correlation. For an explanation of the theory and usage of Yule's Q, see J. H. Mueller and K. F. Schuessler, Statistical Reasoning in Sociology, (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1961), pp.242-51.
  2. Interview with W. N. Grant, 20th October 1971.

leaders."<sup>1</sup> Before proceeding to an analysis of this 'mad scramble', it is worth considering, in general terms, just why positions of leadership in the Railway Union should be, and were, so keenly sought.

There were several possible reasons, and the motivations of different aspirants varied considerably in emphasis. But, generally speaking, leadership of the railway workers was highly valued in itself rather than as a stepping-stone to positions in other (e.g. professional or party) hierarchies. Historical experience had shown that prominent Union officials, usually 'clerical' unionists, had sometimes gone on to senior managerial appointments, but such cases were really extremely rare.<sup>2</sup> More commonly, branch and association officials were appointed Junior Foremen soon after their election to union office. The connecting link between advancement in these two hierarchies seemed, however, to consist in the exceptional organisational talent and intelligence displayed by certain individuals, rather than in any deliberate managerial strategy of buying off 'dangerous' union leaders. As frequently as it led to professional advancement, serving as a union official appeared to prejudice an individual's chances of job promotion beyond a certain level. Certainly, it was almost unheard of for an active unionist to be appointed a Foreman.<sup>3</sup> Generally speaking, therefore, prominence in the Union tended to constitute an

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1. Interview with Dr.W.G.Bruce-Konuah, 11th November 1971.
  2. The General Manager of the Railways Administration in 1971, Mr.P.O.Aggrey, had been Clerical Association Secretary of the Railway Union in the late '40's, and his Principal Secretary, J.S.Appiah, had been Vice-Chairman of the Union in 1958-61; but, so far as the author could discover, these instances were quite unique.
  3. Nearly all of the union officials at Location in 1961-71 were Junior Foremen, but instances of officials being appointed Foremen were extremely rare. Out of 36 Foremen at Location in 1970-71, only 2, John Eshun and E. Class-Peters, had ever been prominent officials (i.e. National Officers, or Branch or Association Secretaries or Chairmen).

alternative channel of advancement to that of the professional-managerial hierarchy - clearly an important factor in accounting for the strength of corporate solidarity among the railway workers.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the connection between mobility in union and party hierarchies, there had, as we have seen, been a close but far from simple or consistent interrelationship under the C.P.P. regime. The Party had felt obliged to reward such as Biney and Woode for their contribution to the nationalist struggle, but had rapidly realised the unsuitability, from Government's point of view, of such relatively committed and radical labour champions. Thereafter, Party leaders had looked to more reliable, if less prominent or popular, unionists as possible material for recruitment to administrative positions. These included not a single railway unionist during the whole C.P.P. period (if one excepts the somewhat farcical appointment of Biney as a security agent in 1963-65). The fact that the Railway Union rank-and-file largely succeeded in maintaining their democratic powers of election, and were increasingly disinclined to vote for known party enthusiasts, meant that extremely few reliable party supporters ever attained official positions in the Union, either through election or imposition. Even if, once ensconced in senior positions, railway unionists were tempted towards greater co-operation with the official party line by the prospect of advancement in the interlocking C.P.P.-TUC structures, they faced severe problems, on the one hand of maintaining their control over the rank-and-file and, on the other, of gaining the trust of party leaders. The downfall

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1. For comparative purposes, see the lucid analysis of the effect of alternative mobility opportunities on union leaders' attitudes and behaviour presented by Robert Bates in his study of the Zambian Minesworkers, Unions, Parties, and Political Development, (New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1971), pp.91-97.

of General-Secretary Inkumsah in 1961 was an obvious case in point.

The ideological complexion of the Progress Party Government was hardly such as would incline it to recruit trade unionists into senior positions in the party or administrative structures. Several railway unionists in fact acted as officers of the party's ward branches, but this was more an onerous duty than a privilege or an opportunity for further promotion. One railway unionist, K. G. Quartey, had been a Progress Party candidate for election to the Legislative Assembly in the 1969 General Election, only to be persuaded to step down at the last minute in favour of a future Minister, Harona Esseku.<sup>1</sup> And, as the following account will make clear, K. G. Quartey, together with a group of followers amongst the railway unionists, aspired to take over the leadership of the Railway Union, (and even of the national trade union movement) with Progress Party encouragement and assistance. In part at least, the motive was to strengthen the political control and stability of the P.P. regime. In return, they probably anticipated and received financial tokens of appreciation, and, more important, increased security against the return of the Nkrumah regime, a possibility which, after their experience of detention and professional demise under that regime, they understandably viewed with some hysteria. Yet it seems likely that most of these unionists were primarily committed to leadership, and, as they saw it, genuine representation of the interests of their railway worker constituency. The point is admittedly debatable, and indeed constituted a major

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1. Esseku, appointed Minister of Transport and Communications on the Progress Party's accession to office, replaced Quartey as candidate for the Effutu-Awutu Senya constituency. Of the other Sekondi-Takoradi railway unionists, T.B. Ward was appointed a member of the City Council Management Committee, and J.K. Baaku and T.C. Bentil served as local ward officials for the Progress Party, in 1969-71.

issue of disagreement between supporters of the two unions in 1970-71. But certainly the fundamental, and vigorously asserted Railway Union ethic of primary commitment to the corporate interests of the rank-and-file exerted a powerful influence on the attitudes and behaviour of even these 'party political' unionists. For the majority of officials in both unions, the high status accorded by the rank-and-file to an effective and faithful representative constituted the basic motivation to leadership.

The financial rewards of office-holding, whether official or unofficial, were generally speaking of strictly secondary importance. The General-Secretaryship of the Union had been a well-paid position since C.P.P. days. But the large majority of 'local' and 'middle-level' officials did not seriously entertain any hope of ever succeeding to that position, and, as association or branch officials, received annual 'honoraria' so small as hardly to compensate them for the work and responsibility entailed in such office-holding. <sup>1</sup> Instances of embezzlement of Union funds, or other forms of corruption, appear to have been extremely rare in the history of the Railway Union, except perhaps during C.P.P. days at the top-level of the Union. Only three instances have been officially brought to light during the past twenty years. <sup>2</sup> A more reliable

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1. As at 1971, Railway Union officials received the following salaries or "honoraria":

	<u>N<math>\pounds</math> per month</u>
General Secretary	170
National Chairman	16
Deputy General Secretary	18
National Vice-Chairman	12
Trustees	10
Branch Secretaries	5
Branch Chairmen	4
(N $\pounds$ 1 = $\pounds$ 0.42)	

2. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 13th August 1952 and 23rd March 1966.



indication, perhaps, is provided by the fact that rank-and-file interviewees could recall only two additional instances of suspected embezzlement or bribery by Management. The Railway Union rank-and-file did not consider 'corruption' to be widespread amongst Union officials, or to constitute a significant motivation to office-holding, which was rather conceived in terms of "fighting for one's brothers" or "the honour of receiving the trust of one's fellow-workers".<sup>1</sup> Such lack of cynicism as to officials' motives and conduct may be suggestive of a real situation if only in view of its rarity (at least in Ghana, and, it would seem, in Africa more generally).

This is perhaps not so surprising or idealistic as it might seem. Attaining the respect of a close cultural sub-community of some 8,000 workers, a sub-community moreover which accords its very highest laurels of prestige to great labour leaders, is no small personal ambition. And the experience of socialisation in Railway Union culture has inclined many to aspire to that goal. Others have noted that Ghanaians typically seek material wealth primarily as a means to the high social status which its dispensation brings.<sup>2</sup> Within Railway Union culture, a culture which automatically associates corruptibility with undependability, to seek personal financial gain through the typical extra-Union expedients of "corruption" would be to prejudice one's chances of attaining the desired high status. In any case, virtually all officials sincerely share the rank-and-file's repugnance at the closed, corrupt style of extra-Union (government) politics, and their corresponding determination to maintain an open, responsive 'clean' system within the

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1. Sample Survey Interviews, August 1971.
  2. Maxwell Owusu, for example, argues that, "Both wealth and power are related means to the supreme social value - high status, social recognition, and social dignity." Maxwell Owusu, Uses and Abuses of Political Power, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p.5.

Railway Union itself.

A word of clarification is required here however. Various particular meanings might be attached to the general notion of "representation of rank-and-file interests", and it is important to define this more clearly than simply in terms of its distinction from extra-Union careerism or party political allegiance. In the first place, such representation does not generally take the form of patron-client type relations between particular Union leaders and particular groups of workers. An element of patronage, or sponsorship, certainly does play a minor role in the structure of leader-follower relations, and, more importantly, some unionists have tended to identify themselves especially closely with the interests and grievances of particular occupational groups. But, generally speaking, Union leaders have not been in possession of regular, reliable clientele followings. The extent of their support has depended on their continuing to display their dedication and effectiveness as rank-and-file representatives, and on their being able to present a strong case in support of whatever policies they might advocate.

Secondly, "representation" does not generally signify the simple pursuit of immediate economic interests, by any means possible or irrespective of wider considerations. The majority of railway workers are not so naive as to fail to recognise the complexity of considerations affecting their real, long-term interest. More particularly, they do generally recognise the interrelation of their own interests with those of other groups, the unemployed especially, and even with the national economic interest (conceived in terms of bettering the lot of the "common people"); the importance of fighting to create or maintain a democratic political system, and more particularly a democratic trade union movement, through which they can make their griev-

ances heard; and, above all, the importance of maintaining solidarity within their own ranks - "United We Stand, Divided We Fall", as the Union motto has it. Certain situations, however, are likely to entail varying degrees of conflict between these considerations and considerable difficulty of interpretation as to the wisest course of action. The rank-and-file therefore tend to look to their Union officials, and especially the more experienced amongst them, to act as 'interpreters' and opinion-leaders, rather than representatives in the simplest sense. Moreover, they expect such interpretation to be informed by a wide political perspective on the issue at hand, and by the lessons of historical experience.

In a sense, then, railway unionists are, and are expected to be, 'politicians'. But their political perspective should be as far as possible non-partisan, and oriented primarily to the development of the Union, and the labour movement, as a powerful and 'progressive' (i.e. democratising) political force. There has, of course, been considerable variation in the degree to which Union leaders have lived up to this ethic of leadership. It is arguable, and was argued, by mother-union supporters, that leaders of the 1970-71 splinter-union were involved in betraying this ethic, in exploiting immediate sectional grievances for their own and the Progress Party's benefit. But the fact that they were very concerned to rationalise their course of action in terms of non-partisan considerations and the historical principles of Railway Unionism at least testified to the continuing influence of this ethic with their own supporters. Moreover, the rationalisation they presented was far from being untenable.

The "scramble for leadership" in the Railway Union, 1961-71.

The origins of the Railway Union split of 1970-71 were

ultimately to be found in the political aftermath of the 1961 strike. The strike-leaders had then been placed in preventive detention for periods ranging from five months to two years, and their company in the detention camps included several United Party leaders (later to become Ministers in the Progress Party regime), most notably J. Kwesi-Lampsey, Victor Owusu, and R. R. Amponsah. However tenuous or opportunistic the ties between these U.P. leaders and the strike leaders before detention, they were immeasurably strengthened by the experience of fellowship in imprisonment. V. K. Quist, K. G. Quartey, A. Y. Ankomah, T. B. Ward, T. C. Bentil, J. K. Baaku, and Kofi Imbeah were all to become keen Progress Party supporters in 1969-71, though, as we shall see, they were also to diverge in their interpretations of the obligations of this party allegiance.

In the meantime, the Railway Union was placed under the direct supervision of a TUC Administrator, J. C. Hansen, and an Interim Management Committee, composed of two representatives from each of the Branches. These were not hand-picked C.P.P. men, but rather the existing Branch Secretaries and Chairmen, and, in the case of Sekondi Location and Takoradi, junior officials who stepped into the positions left vacant by the detainees. The Location representatives were A. B. Essuman and A. E. Forson, and there is little reason to doubt the sincerity of their explanation that they co-operated with the new executive simply to keep the Union running and press for the early release of the detainees.<sup>1</sup>

Many of the 'up-country' representatives, on the other hand, saw this as their opportunity to accede to positions of leadership in the Union, and call a halt to the Union's domin-

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1. Interviews with A. B. Essuman, 15th June 1971, and A. E. Forson, 27th June 1971.

ation by the Sekondi-Takoradi militants. When the TUC Executive Board announced in November 1962 that it was prepared to allow the ex-detainees to stand for election at the forthcoming Delegates Conference, the Interim Management Committee voted almost unanimously against the proposal, with only Forson and Essuman voting for it.<sup>1</sup> F. C. Separa-Grant, the 'official' C.P.P. candidate, was elected General-Secretary at the Conference, and all the other positions on the Executive Council went to 'up-country' men.<sup>2</sup> These new officers then proceeded to concur with various measures introduced by Separa-Grant to reduce the power and stifle the voice of the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file. The most important of these measures were the abolition of the Working Committee, previously the effective day-to-day decision-making body, and generally dominated by the Sekondi-Takoradi Branch and Association representatives; and a decision to allow voting for the election of national officers by equal representation from all nine branches, rather than as previously by proportional representation (i.e. proportional to the numerical strength of each branch). Since the Sekondi-Takoradi branches comprised approximately half the total Union membership, this decision greatly reduced their influence over the selection of national officers, (see Table 7.2). A. B. Essuman protested these measures and persisted in calling for the re-introduction of the Working Committee at virtually every Executive Council meeting up to June 1965, (when he was replaced as Branch Secretary by Kofi Imbeah), but to no avail. He also led criticism of the Executive's failure to gain wage increases for the manual workers at a time when the Railway Administration was making large annual profits, and especially deplored their inaction

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 20th November 1962.

2. RUA, Railway Union Delegates Conference Minutes, 24th February 1963.

over the tradesmen's grievances, (to be dealt with at length in a later section of this chapter). He was supported in these criticisms by the other Location and Takoradi delegates, and, to a lesser degree, by A. Y. A. Bello from the Accra Branch, and W. A. Thompson from Kumasi. At the October 1963 Executive Council meeting, "a mob from Location with placards of various inscriptions came and demonstrated for 30 minutes".<sup>1</sup> They dispersed only after handing in a petition calling for Separa-Grant's resignation, and for the reform of the structure and voting procedures of the Union "so as to reflect the true feelings and aspirations of the rank-and-file".<sup>2</sup> The National Officers refused to consider these requests, and, by the middle of 1965, discontent was running so high at Location that Separa-Grant prohibited the holding of further mass-meetings there, "because he found the meetings were generating subversive motives".<sup>3</sup> According to some unionists, preparations for an unofficial strike were in train when the Army and Police intervened to displace Nkrumah in February 1966.<sup>4</sup>

Displaying quite startling insensitivity to the feelings of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers, representatives of the deposed President attempted to bribe them to stage a strike against the new regime. Their leaders' response was unambiguous:

"We vehemently denounce the vain bluff of the deposed Dictator Kwame Nkrumah calling the railway workers to go on strike, as our Union suffered the most under his wicked and ....

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 17th October 1963.
  2. Ibid.
  3. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 15th June 1965.
  4. Interview with A. B. Essuman and A. O. Wiafe, 15th June 1971.

"... capricious rule, and we are the people from whom he should expect the least support." <sup>1</sup>

But while there was no question of the railway workers' loyalty to the National Liberation Council, they were, initially, less than enthusiastic about Benjamin Bentum's appointment as Secretary-General of the TUC. A. Y. Ashielfie and Kofi Imbeah, on behalf of the Location workers, petitioned the Chairman of the N.L.C. to rescind Bentum's appointment, and were forced to apologise for this indiscretion at the April Executive Council meeting. <sup>2</sup> Apart from their objection to Bentum's C.P.P. background, the Sekondi-Takoradi workers considered that a new Secretary-General should be selected from amongst the 1961 strike leaders, men possessed of far better credentials than Bentum (at this stage, at least) as champions of democracy. In particular, they favoured V. K. Quist, Pobee Biney's successor as the 'strong man' of Location, who, on his release from detention had stayed with Dr. Busia in London. Ashielfie was regarded as Quist's agent, having acted as personal messenger for the latter during the 1961 strike action. Imbeah, too, had been closely associated with this most fiery of railway unionists, and he had been detained for his supporting role in the strike's organisation. Ashielfie and Imbeah could, it was felt, be relied upon to press Quist's candidature for the General Secretaryship of the Railway Union, and, more optimistically, for the leadership of the TUC. It was largely for this reason that they had been elected Chairman and Secretary of the Location Branch in March 1966.

Bentum's appointment had frustrated the more grandiose of these ambitions, but it was still confidently expected that

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 8th March 1966.
  2. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 30th April 1966.

Quist would be elected leader of the Railway Union at the July Delegates Conference. This expectation was rudely shattered when the result of a secret ballot was announced as 10 votes for W. A. Thompson, 5 for A. Y. A. Bello, 2 for T. B. Ward, and only 1 vote for Quist.<sup>1</sup> The main reason for Thompson's victory was quite clear. The failure to reconstitute the Union's voting procedures before this election meant that the 'up-country' delegates retained control. They had obviously felt reluctant to hand over the running of the Union to the most militant of Sekondi-Takoradi militants, and preferred to play safe politically with their own man, the more cautious W. A. Thompson. But the most shocking aspect of the result, from the point of view of the Location rank-and-file, was the fact that only 1 of the 4 Sekondi-Takoradi delegates had voted for Quist. T. B. Ward, the Takoradi Branch Chairman, and an ex-detainee, who had been expected to campaign for Quist, had apparently pressed his own candidature. And, more treacherous still, Ashielfie, it appeared, had done a deal with Thompson in order to secure his own election as Deputy Chairman.

"From that time on", K. G. Quartey explained, "we were looking for an opportunity to get rid of Thompson and Ashielfie. It came when Thompson failed to present the workers' grievances to the Mills-Odoi and Quarshie Commissions."<sup>2</sup> Quartey was himself elected Takoradi Branch Secretary in July 1966, and Quist the Branch Chairman at Location. They were supported in their campaign to displace Thompson by virtually all the Sekondi-Takoradi representatives, most prominently Kofi Imbeah and T. B. Ward, A. Y. Ankomah, (another ex-detainee, and

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1. RUA, Railway Union Delegates Conference Minutes, 5th July 1966.
  2. Interview with K. G. Quartey, 30th June 1971.



Secretary of the Electrical Association), and A. B. Essuman and A. O. Wiafe (Chairman and Secretary of the Carriage and Wagons Association, and sometimes of the Location Branch). A. E. Forson (Clerical Association Secretary) and A. Y. A. Bello (Accra Branch Secretary) joined in supporting many of the criticisms of Thompson's leadership, but sought to play a moderating role, so as to prevent this factionalism from disrupting the efficiency and solidarity of the Union. And, although the Sekondi-Takoradi unionists were united in opposing Thompson's Leadership, they were divided amongst themselves as to who would prove the most suitable and capable successor. Only Quartey, Ankomah, Essuman, and Wiafe were really solidly in support of Quist. Imbeah, Ward, Forson, and others, could not be counted dependable allies, either because they aspired to the position of General-Secretary themselves, or because they entertained genuine doubts as to Quist's possession of the necessary skills. Moreover, some were already suspicious of the motivations underlying Quist and Quartey's determined (and at times ruthless) drive to take over leadership of the Union. The feeling grew that they were perhaps motivated by excessive personal ambition, and were too closely allied with politicians such as Dr. Busia and J. Kwesi-Lampsey. As Imbeah remarked, "It seemed to us that Quartey's trade unionism had too much of a political flavour".<sup>1</sup>

Essentially, then, the situation was one of a surfeit of experienced and ambitious unionists resulting in especially fierce conflict for positions of leadership. And, while initially this factional conflict followed the lines of the long-dating Sekondi-Takoradi - 'up-country' division, the Sekondi-Takoradi unionists were in competition amongst themselves and

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1. Interview with Kofi Imbeah, 14th June 1971.

proved unable to unite effectively in support of a single candidate for the post of General-Secretary. In the 1968 elections, as in 1966, Ward stood against Quartey (who had now assumed Quist's mantle, the latter having been seconded to the Centre for Civic Education), thus again dividing the Sekondi-Takoradi vote and facilitating Thompson's re-election.<sup>1</sup> And in 1970, Quartey's faction, realising that the opposition of Imbeah, Forson, Ward and others was likely to prevent their winning the forthcoming election, determined to establish a break-away union under their own leadership. At the same time, however, this scramble for leadership was informed by real ideological differences and issues of principle.

In the first place, Quist, Quartey and their followers could make out a very strong case against Thompson for serious negligence in the performance of his responsibilities. The appointment of the Mills-Odoi Commission in 1967 provided the railway workers with their first official opportunity in ten years to argue their case for improved wages and conditions of service. Thompson set about formulating his proposals to the Commission without even consulting the Union's Association officials - i.e. the experts in grievances held by the various categories of employee. He finally produced a document which the latter were unanimous in considering seriously inadequate. Quartey and Ward demanded that Thompson's proposals be withdrawn, and an alternative set, formulated by themselves in consultation with the Association representatives, substituted in their place. A fierce argument over this issue was eventually settled by acceptance of the compromise suggestion that Ward and Quartey's proposals should be submitted in supplementary form to the

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1. RUA, Railway Union Delegates Conference Minutes, 13th October 1968.

original document.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless, Thompson was later blamed, and with some justification, for the Commission's failure to redress the most pressing grievances of the Railway Union rank-and-file. In particular, the Commission formally recognised the justice of the 'tradesmen's' claim for parity of status with the 'artisans', but declared that it felt unable to make definite recommendations owing to the insufficiently systematic nature of its information. The Pay Research Unit, it suggested, should be detailed to enquire further into the matter.<sup>2</sup> An important opportunity to secure redress of this much-resented anomaly had been lost, and another (i.e. the investigation of the Pay Research Unit) would prove to be long awaited.<sup>3</sup>

Then, in February 1968, the Quarshie Committee was appointed to make recommendations on the existing system of job categorisation in the Civil Service. While it was sitting, the Committee's terms of reference were widened to include the question of relative wage scales, but Thompson failed to bring this fact to the attention of the Branch and Association officials or to submit any memoranda of his own on the matter. Realising that yet another opportunity for presenting their demands had been wasted, the Sekondi-Takoradi unionists accused Thompson of gross negligence of duty, and presented resolutions from the Branches calling on him to resign.<sup>4</sup> Thompson refused,

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 3rd April 1967.
  2. Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana (1967), (Accra, Government Printer, 1967), para.168.
  3. The Pay Research Unit eventually reported, (favourably), on the tradesmen's case in November 1971.
  4. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 6th August 1969.

arguing that he had been attending the Constituent Assembly (charged with formulating a new Constitution for the return to civilian rule) at the time that the communique on the Committee's revised terms of reference had arrived at Union headquarters. The TUC subsequently appointed a Committee to investigate this dispute, which found Thompson guilty of minor negligence in having failed to make proper arrangements for the Union's administration during his absence, but decided that these were "inadequate" grounds for his dismissal.<sup>1</sup> The malcontents would therefore have to wait until the next Delegates' Conference, (some nine months away), to secure his replacement by a more capable man.

The Sekondi-Takoradi unionists were unanimous in deploring these examples of Thompson's inefficient, and incommunicative, running of the Union. But several of them refused on principle to support his replacement by Quist or Quartey. It was perfectly obvious, for instance, that Quist and Quartey had set out to find fault with Thompson's leadership irrespective of his real merits or demerits, and had attempted to stir up feeling against him amongst the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file on what were sometimes quite bogus charges. This unprincipled agitation was partly to blame for the poor quality of communications between Thompson and the Sekondi-Takoradi workers, and the deplorable state of the Union's administration. Moreover, it was increasingly apparent that Quist and Quartey were prepared to utilise their ties with national politicians to further their campaign in the Railway Union, and even to involve the Union, in a covert and dangerous manner, in the personal manoeuvres of these politicians. The most disturbing example of this was the role played by V. K. Quist in the 1968 Permanent Waymen's strike.

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1. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 6th January 1970.

The permanent waymen are those workers employed by the Railway Administration to service, extend, or re-route the railway track (the 'permanent way'). In 1968, these consisted of almost 1,500 semi-skilled 'trackmen', some 500 unskilled labourers, and nearly 800 men in various supervisory positions.<sup>1</sup> Approximately two-thirds of these were illiterate northerners, a fact which, according to the Secretary of their Association, accounted for the situation that "our submissions to the Management are never considered".<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of August 1968, the Association petitioned Management to up-scale certain grades of work, to increase the numerical strength of 'gangs', and to improve their working conditions by providing rain-coats and gum-boots for all. When, after waiting 21 days, they had received no reply to their petition, the permanent waymen staged a sit-down demonstration which rapidly escalated into a full-scale strike. In the course of the strike, which lasted for four days, several sections of track were removed, resulting in the derailment of an engine and injuries to its crew. The NLC leaders regarded the strike as a "gigantic conspiracy to topple the present military regime",<sup>3</sup> arrested several officials of the Permanent Waymen's Association, and issued instructions to the Railway Management to dismiss all the strikers, (though they later rescinded this decision under pressure from the Management).

While the strike had clearly arisen out of genuine job-related grievances, and Ghanaian governments commonly resort to conspiracy theories to explain major strike actions, there are good grounds for thinking (with Bentum amongst others) that

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1. RAA, Acc. 106/32, Item 37.
  2. Ibid.
  3. Ghanaian Times, 9th September 1968, p.1.

this particular incident was, in a sense, "politically inspired and directed".<sup>1</sup> The Quist-Quartey faction tried to blame General-Secretary Thompson for its occurrence, arguing that if he had raised the matter of the permanent waymen's petition at the August Executive Council meeting, they could have intervened to prevent it. Yet it would seem that Quist in fact played a major role in instigating the strike, stirring up resentment amongst the P. W. Association leaders at Management's unresponsiveness, and assuring them of the support of the Location workers. Certainly, some of the detained strike leaders informed the Government to this effect, and, in October, Quist was himself arrested on suspicion of being the 'masterbrain' behind it. The case was never proved against him, and in February he was released, and seconded from the Railways to the Centre for Civic Education. Nevertheless, it would seem significant, considering the close links between Quist and Dr. Busia, that the strike occurred at a time when Busia was becoming openly impatient at the NLC's tardiness in handing over power to a civilian government, and was attempting to impress on its leaders their declining ability to control the country.

If there was some room for doubt as to the role of Quist-Busia collaboration in the 1968 strike, there could be none as to the influence of the Quist-Quartey faction in securing the dismissal of Thompson and Ashielfie in December 1969. Thompson and Ashielfie were among 608 civil servants summarily dismissed from their positions, without grounds being given by the new Progress Party Government. Quartey argued that since they no longer held jobs in the Railway Administration, they could not continue to serve as officers of the Railway Union,

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1. Ghanaian Times, 19th September 1968, p.8.

and fresh elections should be held immediately. At last, it seemed, the 1961 strike leaders would accede to their rightful positions as official leaders of the Railway Union. But by now many of the Sekondi-Takoradi unionists, including some of those detained in 1961, were extremely perturbed at this prospect. With the party political allies of Quist and Quartey now in power, it seemed inevitable that the Railway Union (and TUC) principle of strict independence of government would be seriously compromised under their leadership. Consequently, although Ward, Forson, Imbeah, Bello, and others retained little affection or respect for Thompson personally, they supported an Executive Council decision to retain him in office until the forthcoming Delegates Conference (in June 1970).<sup>1</sup> They argued that the General-Secretary, as a full-time official, did not have to be a Railway Administration employee, and that the General Manager's refusal to recognise, or negotiate with, Thompson constituted "a gross interference in the internal affairs of the Union".<sup>2</sup> Eventually, since the General Manager stood by his position, it was decided to appoint an interim management committee, headed by Forson and Bello, to carry on the administration of the Union.

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1. Motivations of career self-interest possibly influenced these unionists' behaviour. T. B. Ward had been advised by Bentum that he was in line for the post of TUC Regional Secretary, and clearly did not want to prejudice his chances by associating with the splinter-unionists. Forson and Bello were perhaps playing for time to discredit the Quartey faction and mount their own campaigns for election as General Secretary. But it was certainly also the case that Forson, Bello, and Imbeah, were acting in line with the stance they had consistently taken since 1967.
  2. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 13th March 1970.

At the June Delegates Conference, Forson was elected General Secretary by 10 votes to Bello's 9. <sup>1</sup>

By this time, Quartey, impatient at the Executive Council's refusal to hold fresh elections earlier in the year, had decided to establish a break-away union. The leadership of this new union included A. Y. Ankomah, A. B. Essuman, and A. O. Wiafe. However, T. C. Bentil and J. K. Baaku, ex-detainees and up till now strong supporters of Quist and Quartey, refused to go along with the break-away. Bentil stayed on as an official of the mother-union, and Baaku sought to work as an intermediary between the two camps so as to engineer a re-unification. As Baaku explained:

"We were trying to overthrow Thompson for the Progress Party and ourselves, and because we thought P.P. was best for the workers. When Thompson was dismissed we saw we had our chance, and I thought we would come together to win the next election. But those TUC boys are clever, you know, and saw what we were up to, and started to campaign against us. Quartey and Ankomah thought that because the mother-union still had the majority along the line they might lose the elections. So they started their own union and refused all efforts to re-unite the two groups. This was when I left Quartey's side. It had become a selfish personal interest. I am very strong P.P., but it is not right that the Railway Union should be divided and ruled by two leaders. United We Stand, Divided We Fall. The moment you divide the workers, that moment you give access to Management and the Government to rule the workers. And if you mix politics with trade unionism too much then that will not make for stable government." <sup>2</sup>

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1. RUA, Railway Union Delegates Conference Minutes, 15th June 1970.
  2. Interview with J. K. Baaku, 28th August 1971.



The subsequent development of the splinter-union, the R.H.E.U., has been outlined at the beginning of this chapter. It is now necessary to proceed to a more detailed analysis of its ideological stance, and the sources and bases of its support.

The R.H.E.U. Leadership's Ideological Stance.

The new Union's policy position, as enunciated by its General Secretary, K. G. Quartey, was opposed to that of the TUC and the mother-union on two main issues. Firstly, Quartey argued that Bentum's TUC, formally constituted and structured as it was in line with the Industrial Relations legislation of the C.P.P. regime, was basically undemocratic. In particular, he objected to the procedure of elections within the trade union movement, by which the Secretary-General of the TUC was first elected, then the General Secretaries of the national unions, and finally the local branch and association officials. "Such a practice," he claimed, "enables the Secretary-General to influence the elections of the national unions, particularly in the choice of General Secretaries."<sup>1</sup> Bentum, he implied, had been able to maintain Thompson in power against the wishes of the Railway Union rank-and-file.

In response, the leadership of the mother-union pointed out that there had been no interference from Bentum in the Railway Union's elections, unless his refusal to dismiss Thompson in 1969 were to be construed as such; that Bentum had in fact supported the reform of the Union along more democratic lines by re-instituting the Working Committee; and that, at the TUC Congress of 1967, Quartey himself had concurred with the majority of delegates that to reverse the order of elections would unfortunately be financially and procedurally impracticable.<sup>2</sup> If the

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1. Ghanaian Times, 7th May 1970. p.3.

2. Interview with A. E. Forson, 2nd October 1971.

elections for local officials were to be held first, then when a branch official was subsequently elected as a national officer, fresh elections would have to be held to fill the vacated post. Nevertheless, Quartey certainly did have a point as regards the failure to reform the procedure for election of national officers. The G.P.P. institution of equal representation for each branch was still official procedure, and this clearly did not provide for adequate representation of the wishes of the Sekondi-Takoradi rank-and-file, who constituted more than half the Union's total membership.

Table 7.2 : Railway Union membership, by branches (June 1969).

Sekondi Location	3,000 <sup>a</sup>	Kumasi	380
Takoradi	3,200	Nkawkaw	320
Tarkwa	360	Accra	360
Achiasi	300	Tema	1,200
Dunkwa	390		
Total:		9,510	

Source: RUA, Delegates Conference Minutes, 17th June 1969.

<sup>a</sup>This figure includes more than one thousand clerical workers and permanent waymen who were officially attached to the Location Branch although not, strictly speaking, part of the Location labour force.

Quartey's second major criticism of the TUC leadership was that, often, it lent its tacit support to strike actions, instead of insisting on utilisation of the available procedures for peaceful negotiation. This was not so much a question of supporting the Government line, he emphasised, as recognising the general failure of strike actions to attain the desired improvements in wages or conditions of service. Truly resourceful and energetic union leaders should be able to secure redress of the workers' most pressing grievances through the existing negotiation machinery. Of course, this assumed that Government/Management was essentially well-intentioned toward the workers.

Quartey and his fellow union leaders admitted to having a great deal of faith in the ability and good intentions of the Progress Party regime. "But if it doesn't rule very well, if it does nothing good for us, then certainly we will consider strike action and decide to vote for another party at the next elections."<sup>1</sup>

Part of the attraction of Quartey's leadership lay in the fact that he had close ties with Progress Party Ministers, and could hopefully use these to secure redress of outstanding grievances, in particular through pressing for a speedy investigation into the tradesmen's case by the Pay Research Unit. But it was at the same time crucial to the retention of his support to maintain a convincing image of relative independence of government, and of primary commitment to rank-and-file interests and opinion.

A. Y. A. Ankomah, who tended to speak more passionately and openly of his allegiance to the Progress Party, had sometimes to be hushed up by his colleagues at mass-meetings for just this reason. And, as we shall see, Quartey was to experience great difficulty in controlling his rank-and-file in September 1971, owing to his failure to maintain a consistent line over the Budget and the consequent spread of doubts as to the location of his primary allegiance. It was indicative of the bases and of the limits of his support that mother-union members generally charged the splinter-union rank-and-file not with being P.P. enthusiasts, but rather with being easily misled ("since they are mostly illiterates") by party politicians among their leadership.<sup>2</sup>

#### The Sources and Bases of Support for the Two Unions.

By the end of 1970, the splinter-union could claim the support of almost two-thirds of the Location rank-and-file, and

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1. K. G. Quartey's speech to a mass-meeting of the R.H.E.U. on 5th August 1971, at which the writer was present.
  2. Sample Survey Interviews, August 1971.

approximately a third of the workers employed at Takoradi harbour.<sup>1</sup> Thereafter there was little alteration in the situation, until, in September-October 1971, some splinter-union supporters started drifting back to the mother-union.

Slightly more than half the splinter-union supporters claimed to have voted for the Progress Party in the 1969 elections. But this was also the case with almost half of the mother-union supporters (see Table 7.3).

Table 7.3 : Electoral affiliations of Location labour-force.<sup>2</sup>

Progress Party	44%	(40)
Other Parties	20%	(18)
Non-voters	36%	(32)

By Union membership:

	<u>R.P.W.U.</u>	<u>R.H.E.U.</u>	<u>Non-members.</u>
Progress Party	41% (17)	56% (18)	31% (5)
Other Parties	26% (11)	13% (4)	19% (3)
Non-voters	33% (14)	31% (10)	50% (8)

There was no strong or simple correlation, therefore, between party and union allegiance.

1. According to statistics provided by the Railway Personnel Manager, the registered memberships of the two unions as at January 1970 were as follows:

R.P.W.U.	6,870	R.H.E.U.	2,716
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The bulk of support for the R.H.E.U. came from some 900 workers at Location and 1100 at Takoradi.

2. In this and all succeeding tables in this chapter, figures in brackets refer to absolute numbers of interviewees. It should be noted that, of the 90 interviewees, 42 were members of the R.P.W.U. (the mother-union), 32 were members of the R.H.E.U., and 16 were members of neither union. The R.H.E.U.'s numerical predominance at Location is not reflected in these figures owing to the fact that the 'tradesmen', who provided the bulk of its support, were under-represented in the sample.

Nor, as Table 7.4 makes clear, did members of the two unions differ greatly in their conceptions of union purpose and priorities.

Table 7.4 : Perceptions of Union Priorities. <sup>1</sup>

	R.P.W.U. members	R.H.E.U. members	Non- members
(a) Obtaining improved conditions of service and promotion opportunities.	55% <sup>a</sup>	48%	88%
(b) Bridging the wages gap between the lower and higher-paid.	63%	59%	25%
(c) Obtaining more influence in the administration of the industry.	10%	15%	25%
(d) Developing more union spirit and solidarity among workers.	32%	37%	18%
(e) Improving the education and discipline of the workers.	47%	63%	75%
(f) Making workers more politically conscious.	6%	4%	0%
(g) Establishing a fuller programme of social activities and facilities.	10%	0%	6%
(h) Helping to provide employment for the jobless.	77%	74%	63%

<sup>a</sup>Interviewees were asked to select from 8 alternative goals the three which they considered of highest priority for the Ghanaian unions. Percentages therefore refer to number of interviewees selecting e.g. (a) as one of their three highest priorities.

1. This questionnaire was modelled on one administered to a sample of Chilean unionists by Henry A. Landsberger. See H. A. Landsberger, "The Labour Elite: Is It Revolutionary?", in S. M. Lipset and A. Solari (eds.), Elites in Latin America, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.273. The results are very similar for the Chilean and Ghanaian samples. The present writer would wish to dissent from Landsberger's interpretation of these results, however. A predominant concern with gaining economic concessions rather than "making workers more politically conscious" is not necessarily a non-ideological orientation as Landsberger suggests. Among other considerations, it is likely that many interviewees

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The most obvious difference in this respect was between members of both unions, on the one hand, and non-members on the other. The latter were far more concerned than union members with promotion opportunities, workers' discipline (or productivity) and education, far less concerned with wage levels as such or with union solidarity. The splinter-union supporters, also, were more concerned than mother-union members with productivity and education, but on all other questions were in substantial agreement with the mother-union members. That is to say, they attached the highest priority to helping reduce the unemployment level, and bridging the wages gap between higher and lower income groups.

It did appear to be the case, however, that, as at July 1971, a significantly higher proportion of splinter-union supporters held favourable views of the P.P. regime's character and economic policies. Almost half of them considered that the country's politico-administrative elite were reasonably honest, and that they were genuinely attempting to set an example of self-sacrifice, whereas extremely few mother-union supporters believed this, (see Table 7.5).

Table 7.5 : Political attitudes of Location labour-force.

	% giving positive response	
	R.P.W.U.	R.H.E.U.
Do you think Ghana's political leaders and senior civil servants are:		
(a) mostly fairly honest,	22% (9)	38% (12)
(b) setting an example of sacrifice,	11% (5)	36% (11)
(c) improving the country's economic situation.	38% (16)	61% (19)

footnote 1 continued from previous page.

.... interpreted "political consciousness" as meaning 'party political involvement'.

Moreover, in spite of the fact that most of the splinter-union members were agreed with the mother-union members in opposing the introduction of a National Development Levy, there was a significant difference in the proportion who granted their general approval to the July 1971 Budget, (see Table 7.6). The more favourable attitude adopted by the splinter-union supporters appeared to derive not from any difference of opinion as to the merits of the rural development programme (which nearly all agreed to be a good thing), but from the expectation that they would soon be compensated for the Development Levy exactions by a wage award from the Campbell Commission or the Pay Research Unit.

Table 7.6 : Attitudes to the 1971 Budget.

Questions:	% giving positive responses.	
	R.P.W.U.	R.H.E.U.
(a) Do you generally approve of the recent budget?	38% (16)	61% (19)
(b) Do you think the National Development Levy is justified?	14% (6)	38% (12)
(c) Do you agree that the Government's first priority should be rural development?	91% (38)	93% (30)
(d) Do you expect to gain any wage increase from the C.C. or the P.R.U.?	36% (15)	85% (27)

It would appear, then, that the leaders of the splinter-union had succeeded in presenting the P.P. regime's policies and future intentions to their rank-and-file in a more credible and attractive light than that in which they were viewed by the majority of mother-union supporters. Whereas virtually all of the latter, including those who had helped vote the Progress Party into power, had become rapidly and seriously disillusioned

with the regime, the splinter-union leaders had conducted something of a holding operation with their own supporters through performance of this 'interpretative' function. It is important to stress, however, that this was never more than a difference of degree, that the majority of splinter-union members were cynical as to the honesty of the regime, and that for few, if any, did sympathy for the P.P. regime entail willingness to entertain a close alliance with it.

Support for the splinter-union leaders initially and primarily derived from sources other than common party political allegiance, or shared general attitudes toward the Government's policies. Quist, Quartey, and Ankomah had proven themselves champions of labour through their sustained and courageous opposition to the Nkrumah regime, and through their outspoken criticisms of Thompson's inefficiency as General Secretary. Quist, in particular, enjoyed immense popularity at Location, and especially among the 'tradesmen' in the Carriage and Wagons Department, whose case for parity of status with the 'artisans' he had insistently pressed. An element of patronage also tied the tradesmen to his support, since he was apparently always willing to help them out with a Cedi or two when in especially difficult financial straits. A number of illiterate interviewees gave as their main reason for supporting the splinter-union the simple fact that they had always followed Quist. Although he was not present in person on the Railway Union scene in 1969-71, Quartey was seen as his chosen successor, and Essuman and Wiafe had taken up his spokespersonship of the tradesmen's case.

As this formulation implies, however, the following of the splinter-union leaders derived from a combination of respect for their general qualities and past records, together with their identification with the grievances of particular



groups of workers. And this latter identification was generally decisive in influencing workers' attitudes towards the course of action Quartey advocated and pursued in 1970-71. Most of the artisans and apprentices at Location concluded that, "Although Quartey is a strong trade unionist and we would have liked him to be our leader, he became too politically ambitious."<sup>1</sup> The Quist-Quartey faction retained their credibility as champions of the rank-and-file primarily amongst those groups of workers who had special reason to trust in their determination and ability to redress particular, sectional grievances. Hence, the large majority of tradesmen at Location supported the splinter-union, and indeed most of its support came from workers in this particular job category, (see Table 7.7).

Table 7.7 : Support for each union by job category.

	Artisans	Tradesmen	Apprentices	Labourers
R.P.W.U.	57% (17)	18% (6)	100% (15)	36% (4)
R.H.E.U.	23% (7)	65% (22)	-	28% (3)
Neither	20% (6)	17% (6)	-	36% (4)

As previously indicated, the tradesmen's case had been a long-standing issue in Railway Union politics, Thompson's greatest 'sin' as General Secretary having been his failure to secure government action on the matter through the Mills-Odoi Commission. There were two main grievances involved. Firstly, those machinists and fitters in the Location Workshops classified as 'tradesmen' (i.e. fully skilled but not having taken the Railways' own apprenticeship course) did not enjoy parity of status with the 'artisans' (i.e. those who had taken the course), even though they performed very much the same type and standard of work. This meant that they neither enjoyed equal opportunities

1. Interview with B. Maurice, apprentice, 7th August 1971.

for promotion to supervisory grades, nor qualified for the various perquisites of pensionable staff, such as free travel on the Railways and a special vacation allowance. The second major grievance consisted in the anomaly that many of the fitters in the Carriage and Wagons Department were not classified as tradesmen, even though they had taken the Ministry of Labour's trade test. This should theoretically have entitled them to tradesman status, but the Railway Administration insisted on considering them 'semi-skilled'. In consequence, they received rates of pay considerably lower than those of the artisans and classified tradesmen.<sup>1</sup>

As early as 1963, the strength of feeling over these anomalies was apparent from reports that, "the tradesmen have refused to train the apprentices, and they (the apprentices) are even debarred from using the tools which belong to the tradesmen."<sup>2</sup> In spite of persistent pressure from Quist, Essuman, and Wiafe, the Union's Executive had failed by January 1970, to gain more than a vague government assurance that the Pay Research Unit had been detailed to enquire into the matter. The tradesmen hoped that Quartey would be able to use his personal contacts with Jatoe Kaleo, Minister of Transport and Communications, to speed up the P.R.U.'s enquiry and secure early government action on the report. This was clearly the main reason why they supported his break-away from the ineffectual mother-union. At the same time, however, Quartey's general stance of opposition to strike action and his emphasis on the

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1. In 1970-71, the 'semi-skilled' Carriage and Wagon fitters, Grades I and 2, received basic daily rates of N¢1.72 and N¢1.62, compared to those of N¢1.88 and N¢1.74 for Tradesmen, Grades I and 2. RAA, Railway Staff Manual (1970), para. 169a.
  2. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 18th February 1963.

advantages of peaceful negotiation carried some real conviction with a group of workers whose particular grievances the Government had declared itself prepared to consider. A policy of peaceful negotiation offered little prospect of demand-satisfaction for those such as the artisans, in contrast, who were rather concerned to fight for general wage increases for the lower-paid workers (i.e. skilled and unskilled manual workers, earning less than N£50 per month) in the face of Government's apparent unwillingness to make any such general concessions.

The apprentices, like the artisans, tended to respond enthusiastically to Bentum's call for a major reform of the national wages structure, since, as trainee-artisans, they obviously had a keen interest in the future pattern of rewards. It is not to belittle their enthusiasm for Bentum's general stance to point out that they also had particular grounds for hostility to the splinter-unionists, (as their absolutely unanimous support for the mother-union might lead one to suspect). Essuman and Wiafe, as Branch Chairman and Secretary at Location in 1968-70, had displayed little sympathy for the apprentices' protest against the threatened introduction of examinations. Rather, they had openly supported Management's plan to make them sit an examination at the end of their five-year course, considering it unfair that only the tradesmen should have to pass some form of trade test. Thompson, Forson, and Imbeah, however, successfully opposed this plan, and thereby earned the gratitude and solid support of all the Location apprentices.<sup>1</sup>

To some degree, the pattern of division of allegiance between the two unions followed similar lines at Takoradi Harbour. Although precise figures were impossible to obtain, both sets of

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1. Interview with U. I. Viala, Apprentices' Association Secretary, 15th August 1971.

union leaders agreed that the splinter-union was especially strong amongst workers in the Electrical and Marine Departments. Approximately three-quarters of the Electrical Department workers (or some 70 out of 94) followed their long-serving Association Secretary, A. Y. Ankomah, into the break-away group. Ankomah had built up a strong personal following in his Association 'constituency', primarily through his record of grievance-handling, but also through the assistance he had given to some of his members in gaining employment in the Railways, and in helping them to pass their trade tests. Nevertheless, the fact that some of the Electrical Department workers stayed with the R.P.W.U. demonstrated that even Ankomah could not claim to possess a totally reliable bloc of personal followers.

In the Marine Department, some two-thirds of the 300 workers employed there left the mother-union out of anger at its leadership's inability (or refusal) to redress their grievance over the 'salvage case'. In 1968, a Nigerian ship had run aground just off Takoradi harbour, and the Marine Department's tug and launch crews had been called out on a salvage operation. The tug crews played the largest part in this operation, but the launch crews involved were understandably aggrieved when only the former received the special salvage allowance, their own efforts going completely unrewarded. B. T. Nahr, the Marine Association Secretary, was suspected of favouritism in his handling of this matter, (very probably, quite unfairly), since he was himself a tug crewman. All the launch crew joined the splinter-union when Quartey assured them that he would intervene with the Attorney-General, Victor Owusu, to secure a more just settlement.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Interviews with K. Oforri (R.H.E.U. Marine Association Secretary), 9th September 1971; and B. T. Nahr, (R.P.W.U. Takoradi Branch Chairman and formerly Marine Association Secretary), 12th September 1971.

Yet these two groups of workers (in the Electrical and Marine Departments) accounted for only a minority of the splinter-union's total support at Takoradi harbour, (approximately 300 out of 1100 members). Quartey enjoyed the support of a number (though generally a minority) of workers in all of the Departments there, most of which were numerically very much larger than Electrical and Marine. There was no indication that sectional economic grievances or patron-client type followings played a major role in determining the allegiance of these workers. In the opinion of virtually all interviewees at Takoradi, the division centred on the issue of whether or not Quartey (whose past record as Takoradi Branch Secretary was universally respected), was now seeking to intrude party politics into trade unionism; and, related to this, whether it could possibly be justified to secede from the main Railway Union and so divide the railway and harbour workers. In addition, the majority of mother-union members expressed great admiration for Bentum and found Quartey's criticisms of the TUC quite unjustified. There seems no reason to doubt that these ideological differences constituted the real determinants of allegiance in the case of the majority of workers at Takoradi harbour.

It is worth noting, however, that mother-union supporters frequently explained the apparent blindness of Quartey's followers to the merits of Bentum, and the dangers of Quartey's brand of 'political unionism', in terms of their illiteracy. Although precise figures on the proportion of illiterates in each following were not obtained, it was indicative that many splinter-union members acknowledged the existence of this 'educated-illiterate' division, even if they interpreted its significance rather differently from the mother-unionists: "We illiterates must stick together since those tricky people

(Bentum, Nahr and Thompson) did nothing for us." <sup>1</sup> It was also significant in this respect that Quartey deliberately recruited several illiterates to positions of officialdom in his union. None of the mother-union officials, in contrast, were illiterate, and they were often to be heard complaining, "Most of our rivals are uneducated, and we find great difficulty in reaching them since those illiterates are all so stubborn." <sup>2</sup> More generally, illiteracy did perhaps constitute an obstacle to the communication of Bentum's views and activities, and thereby contribute, in a negative manner, to his relative lack of popularity with R.H.E.U. members.

The significance of the 'educated-illiterate' division was also frequently remarked upon at Sekondi Location, but, there, its importance as an independent variable was difficult to assess owing to the fact that it largely coincided with job category divisions, (see Table 7.8).

Table 7.8 : Educational characteristics of Location labour-force.

Job categories.	% educated beyond 'elementary' level.
Artisans	100% (42)
Apprentices	100% (15)
Tradesmen	59% (19)
Labourers	27% (3)

The only empirical indication that it may have been a significant factor was provided by the fact that, of the six tradesmen interviewees who supported the mother-union, five (or 83%) were educated to 'middle-school' level. The representative validity

1. Interview with K. Mensah, crane driver, 28th August 1971.
2. Interview with J. E. Annan, R.P.W.U. Marine Association Secretary, 18th July 1971.

of so small a sample must, however, be regarded as dubious.

Far more clearly than at Takoradi harbour, the basic pattern of allegiance at Location followed the lines of sectional economic differences. Yet there were quite numerous exceptions to this pattern which indicated the additional influence of ideological factors. These were it must be stressed, relatively minor ideological differences, perhaps more accurately described as differences of perception and of degrees of confidence in particular union leaders. They were operative within a general consensus on the legitimate principles of trade unionism. The important point to emphasise here, however, is that such differences of perception, while generally following the lines of division between sectional economic interests, did constitute an additional dimension of some force, and sometimes led individuals to act at variance with the general pattern. Twenty-three per cent of the artisans interviewed at Location, for instance, supported the splinter-union, generally out of personal admiration for Quist and Quartey. As one of these explained, "They (Quist and Quartey) have always talked straight with us and said things boldly. If it's no good, they say so. But if they lead us to expect something, we know it will materialise. That Thompson was too tricky, and the new lot are not much better." <sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, 18 per cent of tradesmen interviewed remained in the ranks of the mother-union. All of these expressed admiration for Bentum's leadership of the TUC, and scepticism as to the wisdom of "moving so closely with the Government as Quartey appears to be doing". <sup>2</sup> Some tradesmen

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1. Interview with F. K. Awortwi, artisan, 7th August 1971.

2. Interview with J. H. Amissah, tradesman, 24th August 1971.

(17 per cent) also followed J. K. Baaku in turning back from support of Quartey when he proved ready to split the railway workers into two unions:

"There could be no reason for this except selfish political interest. I will not become a member of either until they come together, but I attend the meetings of both and hit from outside." 1

The Railway Union split of 1970-71 derived basically, therefore, from the exploitation (or claim to representation) of divergent sectional economic interests by competing leadership factions, (though it might be argued that the interests represented by the splinter-unionists were more distinctly 'sectional', less 'general', than those of the mother-unionists). Yet ideological differences, very loosely defined, constituted an additional, and far from superficial dimension; and, related to this, the prestige and interpretative role of particular union leaders. This was especially apparent in the case of workers at Takoradi, where attitudinal differences seem to have been related to a certain friction between literates and illiterates. Tribal differences, it should be noted, played no perceptible role in the determination of lines of division and allegiance. The leadership cadres of both unions were tribally heterogeneous but predominantly Fanti, as were their rank-and-file followings, (see Table 7.9).

Table 7.9 : Tribal composition of rival union followings.

Tribe	R.P.W.U.	R.H.E.U.
Fanti	25 <sup>a</sup>	18
Ahanta	6	7
Nzima	3	1
Ashanti	3	3
Akwapim	3	-
Ewe	-	3
Others	2	-

<sup>a</sup> Absolute numbers of interviewees.

1. Interview with A. J. Odonkor, tradesman, 14th August 1971.



These various dimensions of the split, though in many individual instances cross-cutting, tended generally to coincide with, and thereby re-inforce each other. This coincidence of several sources of division helps account for the creation and maintenance of so critical a split in the ranks of a group of workers previously renowned for their exceptional solidarity.

#### The Re-unification of the Railway Workers.

It is important to stress the fact that a certain communality of political attitudes and perceived economic interest continued to characterise the railway workers in 1970-71, in spite of their division into competing camps. The large majority of supporters of both unions were extremely cynical of politicians as a class, and inclined to blame Management and Government for low productivity and the necessity for resort to strike actions. They were also determined to assert the ethic of leadership accountability to the union rank-and-file and their independence of Government (in distinction from the Government view that the primary responsibility of union leaders was to "explain" Government policies to their rank-and-file). Admittedly, the splinter-union supporters displayed a somewhat more sympathetic attitude to the economic difficulties and policies of the P.P. regime, and proved ready, through desperation for some financial relief, to connive at their leaders' cultivation of ties of friendship with Progress Party Ministers. But they immediately reacted, perhaps a little unrealistically, against any indication of the representative responsibilities of these leaders being distorted or compromised by their party political loyalties. K. G. Quartey faced a crisis of credibility over this issue in his handling of rank-and-file opinion on the July 1971 Budget.

At a Location mass-meeting on 5th August, Quartey argued that, by seeking to relieve the unemployment problem and reduce

food prices, the Budget should bring substantial benefits to the workers. Several of his rank-and-file members, while not dissenting from this, insisted that the National Development Levy imposed an excessive burden on them, and should be modified to exempt the lower-paid (i.e. the skilled and unskilled manual workers). Quartey, in turn, agreed with this, but pointed out that the Campbell Wages Review Commission was due to release its report very soon, and would hopefully award them a more substantial wage increase than the amount due to be deducted by the Levy. He promised to travel to Accra to request Minister Jatoe Kaleo for an assurance on this matter. If this was not forthcoming, then they would protest against the Levy. "No money come, no money go," he shouted, and was enthusiastically cheered.<sup>1</sup>

Just one week later, however, he reported back to the rank-and-file:

"The Minister has told me that there is no money in the country, and so there will be no increase for us. But he will be sending the Pay Research Unit very soon, so you must tell the workers to pay the Levy as requested. If you want promotions you should not follow the advice of people who say to go on strike." 2

This was not at all well received. The first speaker from the floor expressed the widespread feeling of disenchantment:

"You have been to Accra just to see your girlfriends and have brought us back unwanted messages. You have not been able to do what we wanted. We are very fed up with your speech. It is making us very angry. I tell you, General ..

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1. K. G. Quartey's speech to a mass-meeting of the R.H.E.U. on 5th August 1971, at which the writer was present.
  2. K. G. Quartey's speech to a mass-meeting of the R.H.E.U. on 12th August 1971, at which the writer was present.

"..Secretary, if money is deducted from my pay next month, I will go on strike even if I have to do so on my own." 1

Another rank-and-file member followed up with the charge that

"These politicians are asking us to tighten our belts while they are filling their own pockets. We all know the ins-and-outs of it. The same thing will happen to this regime as to the old one if they are not more careful. When will the Pay Research Unit come? We demand to know. If they do nothing for us, it will be the same as 1961." 2

Quartey sought to pacify his followers by assuring them that if the Pay Research Unit had not arrived at Location within three weeks, then he would call them out on strike. Fortunately for him, and perhaps for the Progress Party regime, the P.R.U. officials met with the leaders of the two unions within this time limit. Most of the splinter-union's members were thereby persuaded to stay on duty during the September strike. They received their due reward with the announcement in November that the tradesmen's grievances would be redressed and that several categories of employee were to receive increases in their incremental scales. All the same, two or three hundred of the splinter-union members did join in the strike, and approximately half of these 'crossed the carpet' back to the mother-union, dismayed at the realisation that they were being used as a counter in the Government's campaign against the TUC.

Others simply refused to re-register with the splinter-union - (the Industrial Relations Act of September 1971 required all unions to re-register their members) - and, together with J. K. Baaku and others who had refused to join either union, set

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1. Unidentified speaker at the R.H.E.U. mass-meeting on 12th August 1971.
  2. A. Rockson, tradesman, speaking at the R.H.E.U. mass-meeting on 12th August 1971.

out to work for the re-unification of the railway workers. The leadership of the splinter-union refused to consider this prior to the military coup of January 1972. But, in March of that year, partly under pressure from the new regime, the National Redemption Council, they agreed to form an Interim Management Committee, composed of representatives of both camps, and to participate in the election of officers for a reformed, re-unified Railway Union. According to the admission of one of the ex-splinter union leaders, "There was much relief amongst our members at this news." <sup>1</sup>

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1. Private correspondence with A. B. Essuman, 10th April 1972.

SECTION TWO  
CLASS, POWER, AND IDEOLOGY.

The purpose of this section is to take up the general questions raised in the Introduction to this thesis and consider them in a more systematic, theoretical manner than has been attempted hitherto. The previous section has already demonstrated the importance of the railway workers as a group in the Ghanaian political arena. It is now proposed to analyse the sources of this exceptional political strength and assess the significance of its being wielded with such relative consistency in opposition to post - as well as pre-Independence governments. One central question which must obviously be considered here is that of how illuminatingly a Marxian model of class-conflict can be applied to railway worker political behaviour. In more general (and less preconceived) terms, the primary theoretical concern of this section is with the interrelationship of socio-economic position, ideology, and political action. That is to say, what role might be attributed to ideological factors in determining railway worker political behaviour, and how does the railway workers' ideology (or 'political culture') reflect their socio-economic situation. It is clear that an assessment of the significance of railway worker political activity should in turn take into account its 'class' implications, (though, as will be argued subsequently, this is not the only perspective from which it might be judged).

It is worth noting at the outset, however, that a classical Marxist interpretation of the politics of African labour is far from generally accepted even in left-wing academic circles. More influential by far at the present time is the 'Fanonist' thesis of John Saul and Giovanni Arrighi, which portrays unionised workers economically as a privileged 'labour aristocracy' relative to the 'peasantry', and, politically, as

an essentially non-radical force.<sup>1</sup> The high status generally accorded this interpretation is, in the present writer's view, seriously misjudged. It is nevertheless worth outlining it at some length here in order to provide, as it were, a tableau against which the argument developed in this section might stand out in greater relief.

The literary origins of Saul and Arrighi's view of the class position and political orientation of unionised labour in Africa are to be found in the writings of Frantz Fanon, most particularly in Les Damnés de la Terre.<sup>2</sup> For Fanon, whose prophecy of the emergence of an immense Elite-Mass division certainly has proved accurate:

"The workers, now that they have their 'independence', do not know where to go from there. For the day after independence is declared the trade unions realise that if their demands were to be expressed they would scandalise the rest of the nation: for the workers are in fact the most favoured section of the population and represent the most comfortably off fraction of the people."<sup>3</sup>

Elaborating this view in more systematic and academic form, Saul and Arrighi see the peasantry as the main, even the sole, productive force in African societies. The available surplus they

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1. This thesis is developed in two articles written conjointly by Giovanni Arrighi and John Saul: "Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. No. 6, 2, (1968), pp.141-69; and "Nationalism and Revolution in sub-Saharan Africa", in R. Miliband and J. Saville, The Socialist Register, 1969, pp.137-88. I am indebted to Adrian Peace for bringing my attention to the current fashionability and thought-provoking character of the argument developed in these articles.
  2. Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1965).
  3. Ibid., p.98.

produce is expropriated and drained away as the repatriated profits of overseas firms or consumed by self-indulgent domestic elites, and the generation of a larger surplus thereby discouraged. This explanation of the obstacles to increased productivity and economic development in underdeveloped societies has now passed into the realms of acceptable economic and sociological orthodoxy. But of more immediate concern here, and, it is suggested, of more doubtful validity is the position which Saul and Arrighi see unionised labour as occupying in this pattern of expropriation.

Beginning in the colonial period, but developing in more extreme form after Independence:

"Higher wages and salaries.... foster the stabilization of the better-paid section of the labour force whose high incomes justify the severance of ties with the traditional economy. Stabilization, in turn, promotes specialization, greater bargaining power, and further increases in the incomes of this small section of the labour force, which represents the proletariat proper of tropical Africa. These workers enjoy incomes three or more times higher than those of unskilled labourers and together with the elites and sub-elites in bureaucratic employment in the civil service and expatriate concerns, constitute what we call the labour aristocracy of tropical Africa. It is the discretionary consumption of this class which absorbs a significant proportion of the surplus produced in the money economy." <sup>1</sup>

In contrast to the classical Marxist theory of increasing class conflict between ruling class and working class as economic development proceeds, Saul and Arrighi see the ruling class and the unionised workers developing an ever more solid complementarity of interests, both economic and political. The main

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1. Arrighi and Saul, "Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", op.cit., p.149.

polarisation of interests occurs between two modes or sectors of production, urban and rural, rather than within one mode of production. Minor differences of interest and opinion might develop within the urban elites. For example, "Where wage restraint began to be demanded of the junior partners to the 'aristocracy', its imposition was made difficult by the unambiguously privileged position of its other members, the politicians and the salariat."<sup>1</sup> Yet such differences are of slight consequence alongside the overriding consensus.

Saul and Arrighi do, however, acknowledge one major source of differentiation within the wage-earning class which is of considerable importance here:

"The wage-working class is polarized into two strata. Wage workers in the lower stratum (i.e. unskilled, migrant workers) are only marginally or partially proletarianized as, over their life cycle, they derive the bulk of the means of subsistence for their families from outside the wage economy. We feel therefore justified in considering wage workers in the lower stratum as part of the peasantry. .... this lower stratum, consisting of workers and unemployed who retain strong links with the peasantry has in fact interests which are antagonistic to the present order." 2

In a qualified manner, the authors suggest that Fanon's vision of the lumpen-proletariat acting as the urban spearhead of the peasant-based revolutionary movement may have considerable relevance here.

Before moving to a critique of the Saul-Arrighi position by setting it against the Ghanaian experience, one can point to certain merits. Firstly, they have attempted to develop

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1. Ibid., p.162.

2. Arrighi and Saul, "Nationalism and Revolution", op.cit., p.169.



generalisations of a systematic, comparative nature, relating the pattern of economic development to the structure and significance of political action. In themselves, such perspectives merit attention since they are by no means characteristic of commentaries on the nature of economic and political underdevelopment. Further, the labour aristocracy thesis does attempt to offer an explanation of the behavioural tendencies characteristic of unionised labour in a fairly wide range of African states - the general lack of sustained trade union militancy, the apparently passive incorporation of most unions into the one-party state system - without resorting to the all-too-common official or semi-official fallacy of the essential unity of these societies in the struggle for development.

Nevertheless, the labour aristocracy thesis has severe failings and limitations, some of a broad theoretical nature, others the result of over-generalising from particular empirical instances. Empirically, their interpretation of the class position of unionised workers, while no doubt valid for administrative staff, and possibly for skilled workers in certain industries and countries, is quite misleading as to the real income levels of skilled and semi-skilled manual workers in the cities of Ghana and Nigeria.<sup>1</sup> Theoretically, Saul and Arrighi, following Fanon, operate with a naively over-simple conception of the relationship between class position and political action. The skilled railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi constitute a clear and important exception to the labour aristocracy thesis, both as regards their class position and the political orientation they have (partly in consequence) developed. On the inter-

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1. For the case of Nigeria, see Adrian Peace, "Industrial Protest in Nigeria", in E. de Kadt and G.P. Williams (eds.), Sociology of Development, (London: Tavistock Press, 1973).

pretation presented here, there can be no doubting the sincerity or radicalism of their reformist orientation. Moreover, the failure (and apparent improbability) of a peasant revolutionary movement, or any kind of concerted 'mass' resistance to government to materialise, lends to the railway workers' oppositional activity far greater significance than might be attributed to it in a different political context. The present Ghanaian political context in turn sets limits to the goals and strategy which the railway workers can realistically pursue, and it is this rather than their (allegedly 'privileged') class position which accounts for their reformist rather than revolutionary political orientation.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CLASS

The concept of 'class' is currently used in a number of rather different, if related, senses. It was originally employed by Marx to denote a group of persons occupying the same position in the structural relations of economic production. This, however, was conceived as merely a minimal definition of 'class'. Marx laid great stress on the importance of a subjective awareness of common interests as a precondition for organising a class as an economic and political force.<sup>1</sup> Among the processes by which workers developed this sense of common identity and solidarity, two were seen as being of particular importance. The first consisted in the experience of regular conflict over the distribution of economic rewards between classes. Secondly, a sense of class identity was fostered by easy and regular communication between individuals in the same class position such as was facilitated by the increasing concentration of workers in the towns of nineteenth century Britain.

The term 'class' is often currently employed to refer to major and relatively distinct divisions in the pattern of socio-economic stratification in a society. Although this is a rather looser usage than that generally employed by Marx, it is one which clearly enters into his analysis of the development of class-conflict. It perhaps also provides a more appropriate starting-point for the analysis of political conflict in societies where the emergence of distinct classes (on a national scale) is, at most, only incipient. Similarly, the common sociological

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1. See R. Bendix and S. M. Lipset, "Marx's Theory of Social Classes", in R. Bendix and S.M.Lipset (eds.), Class, Status, and Power, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953), pp.6-11.

usage of the term to refer to cultural and other barriers to social intercourse between members of different strata can be illuminatingly applied here, if in a somewhat wider-than-Marxist manner. It is proposed to consider these several 'objective' dimensions of 'class' structure in this chapter, while reserving a specific discussion of the 'subjective' consciousness of the railway workers for Chapter Ten.

Whichever of these three dimensions of 'class' is considered - economic interrelations, socio-economic stratification, or patterns of social intercourse - Saul and Arrighi's notion that skilled workers form a 'labour aristocracy' seriously misrepresents their position in Ghana's developing social structure. (As previously noted, it is the skilled workers who are generally recognised as constituting "the backbone of the Ghanaian trade union movement".) In the first place, it is far too simple to suggest that only the 'peasantry' produce any significant economic surplus, and that all urban wage-earners take part in expropriating this surplus. If the term 'peasantry' is interpreted to refer to all 'farmers', (a very loose usage but the only one which seems to make sense in terms of this argument), then it is certainly true that the Ghanaian economy is highly dependent on the production of cocoa. But the transport and service industries are hardly less important to cocoa's arrival on the international market than its actual cultivation. The Saul and Arrighi interpretation of the pattern of production and expropriation in African societies represents, of course, a major deviation from the classical Marxist interpretation, and there is something to be said for this change of emphasis, recognising as it does the radically different politico-economic structures of industrialised and underdeveloped societies. But it is simply perverse to suggest that skilled manual workers, even if in government employment (as distinct from executive officials in the state bureaucracy and enterprises) are essentially non-productive. A more balanced interpretation should

recognise the existence of serious economic conflict within both urban and rural sectors of production as well as between them. If the rural producers are most directly exploited by the buyers and distributors of agricultural produce, the urban poor also suffer indirectly from excessive profit-making on the part of rural-urban entrepreneurs. More important, as this chapter will show, Ghana's manual wage-earners, including the skilled workers, are in a position of serious conflict with the politico-administrative elite over the pattern of distribution of the national surplus, and over the failure to curb corrupt practices by state officials, to the detriment of both rural producers and urban poor.

#### The Pattern of Economic Stratification in Ghana.

With what justification can the skilled workers be regarded as part of the urban poor? Saul and Arrighi include them in that class which enjoy incomes "three or more times higher than those of unskilled labourers".<sup>1</sup> The first point to be noted here is that this generalisation is based on East African experience. In Kenya and Uganda, the large majority of skilled workers are employed in capital-intensive, multinational manufacturing enterprises, which, as Saul and Arrighi rightly point out, are so technologically structured as to allow of a relative lack of emphasis on keeping wage rates as low as possible. The ability and willingness of these enterprises to pay high wages to attract and stabilize a skilled labour force results, they suggest, in a spiral process ensuing, with African governments becoming increasingly concerned to win over skilled workers from one sector to the other.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Arrighi and Saul, "Socialism and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", op.cit., p.149.
  2. Giovanni Arrighi, "International Corporations, Labour Aristocracies and Economic Development in Tropical Africa", in R. I. Rhodes (ed.), Imperialism and Underdevelopment: a Reader, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1970), pp.220-67.

In Ghana, in contrast, a majority of the country's skilled workers have been employed in government industries or public corporations. In the absence of a serious labour shortage, the private industries have tended to follow government's lead in keeping wage rates down, (though the wage rates for skilled workers in large-scale private enterprises have still been slightly higher than for government employees<sup>1</sup>). Consequently the differential ratio between skilled and unskilled workers' wage rates has not significantly widened since the 1920's and remains at something less than 2:1. In the Railway Administration in particular, the average earnings of skilled workers stood at N¢39 as at 1970<sup>2</sup>, compared to the national minimum wage of N¢21 and the actual average earnings for unskilled railway workers of approximately N¢24, (see Table 8.1).

Table 8.1 : Rates of Pay in the Railway Administration.(per day)

	1910	1930	1950	1970
Labourers	1/-	1/6	3/6	7/6 <sup>a</sup>
Artisans	2/- to 3/-	2/6 to 5/-	6/- to 10/-	12/- to 20/-

Source: RAA, Railway Administration Staff Lists.

<sup>a</sup>After 1968 many unskilled workers received considerably more than the basic (i.e. national minimum) wage of 7/6, or 75 pesewas, per day, in accordance with the Mills-Odoi Commission's recommendation that incremental scales be introduced for unskilled workers in government employment.

1. According to the 1967 Mills-Odoi Report, the average earnings of skilled and unskilled workers in the private sector "appeared to be between 20 per cent and 25 per cent above those in the Public Sector". The Report of the Commission on the Structure and Remuneration of the Public Services in Ghana, (Accra: Government Printer, 1967), para. 184. Hereafter cited as the Mills-Odoi Report.
2. Calculated from data on incomes provided in the Railway Administration Staff List (1970), RAA.

Secondly, there is an important difference to be noted between East Africa and West Africa in the criteria used for assessing the minimum wage by both colonial and post Independence administrations.<sup>1</sup> In East Africa, where the creation of a surplus wage labour force has proved a considerable problem for administrations and employers, and that of a stable, skilled labour force even more so, the minimum wage rate was calculated from the start to take account of the costs for maintenance of workers' wives and children and various other obligatory and socially desirable expenditures. In Nigeria and Ghana, in contrast, countries which have generally not been characterised by problems of labour shortage, the minimum wage rate was calculated to cover no more than the basic subsistence costs of the individual worker. Successive wage commissions did no more than raise the minimum wage in correspondence with rises in the cost of living. Often, in fact, they did less than this on the grounds of preventing the emergence of significant urban-rural income differentials. Whenever the more radical members of wage commissions suggested that a more generous notion of "need" should be utilised making recommendations, this was invariably rejected by other members and by the administration of the day (with the partial exception of Biney and Woode's influence on the relatively generous Lidbury-Gbedemah Award of 1952). The rates of pay for skilled workers in Ghana, unlike Kenya and Uganda, have generally been kept down in steady relation to the minimum wage. This further helps to account for their much lower (relative) incomes compared to those of skilled workers in East Africa.

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1. See John F. Weeks, "Wage Policy and the Colonial Legacy - a Comparative Study", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.9, No. 3, (1971), pp.361-87.

In consequence of the reluctance of Ghanaian wage commissions to compensate workers fully for rises in the cost of living, the real wage levels for both skilled and unskilled tended actually to decline between 1939 and 1971, and so far as one can calculate, very seriously at that (see Table 8.2). The 1950's provided a temporary exception to this tendency, with real wage rates rising back to the 1939 level and slightly above it by 1961. But two points should be noted here. Firstly, the 1939 level was hardly considered 'aristocratic' for skilled workers, or even 'the bare minimum' for the unskilled, by those best qualified to judge. Captain J. Dickinson, the Colonial Government's first Labour Officer, estimated that the 1939 level "is now on the level of 1914, and it is certain that the cost of living has risen since then."<sup>1</sup> The wage rate for unskilled workers was, theoretically perhaps, the bare minimum for an adequate diet, but "since the labourer, like anyone else, spends a certain proportion of his wages on luxuries, cigarettes, for example, or visits to a lover, he thereby does not reach the standard but lives in a sort of secondary poverty."<sup>2</sup> Secondly, it is worth repeating the point (for which evidence was presented in Chapter Three) that the 1950's wage increases were largely the product of successful pressurising activity by the unions on a relatively weak pre-Independence government. The railway workers' feeling that the maintenance of the strike weapon was essential to the protection of their interests was amply borne out by developments in 1960-66.

During these years, the unskilled workers experienced

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1. Quoted in W. B. Birmingham, "An Index of Real Wages for the Unskilled Labourer in Accra", in Economic Bulletin of Ghana, Vol.4, No. 3, p.16.
  2. Ibid.



Table 8.2 : One Index of the Real Minimum Wage, 1939-1968.

Year	Minimum Wage	Index of Minimum Wage	Accra Retail Price Index	Index of Real Minimum Wage
1939	15	100	100	100
1941	18	122	151	81
1942	18	122	159	77
1943	18	122	168	73
1944	18	122	168	73
1945	18	122	186	66
1946	21	139	198	70
1947	27½	183	212	86
1948	27½	183	227	81
1949	31½	211	243	87
1950	32½	217	285	76
1951	32½	217	333	65
1952	45	300	326	92
1953	45	300	324	93
1954	45	300	324	93
1955	45	300	344	87
1956	51½	344	351	98
1957	51½	344	351	98
1958	55	367	354	104
1959	55	367	364	101
1960	65	433	367	118
1961	65	433	390	111
1962	65	433	426	102
1963	65	433	446	97
1964	65	433	502	86
1965	65	433	643	67
1966	65	433	672	64
1967	70	467	623	75
1968	75	500	685	73

Source: Kodwo Ewusi, The Distribution of Monetary Incomes in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, 1971), p.43.

a fall in their real wage levels way down below what could reasonably be considered a subsistence level even for a single man. The Mills-Odoi Commission estimated a decline of 45 per cent in the value of the minimum wage between 1960 and 1966, and acknowledged that the living standards of unskilled labourers in the latter year were "distressingly low".<sup>1</sup> It is doubtful whether their real incomes compared favourably with those of hired farm labourers, the poorest section of the rural populace (at least in the southern half of Ghana)<sup>2</sup>. Yet the Commission felt unable to award more than a 5 per cent wage increase on the grounds of "the futility of trying to improve living standards by wage increases which are not related to ability to pay measured in terms of national productivity."<sup>3</sup>

During 1968-71, government's refusal to grant any further increase in spite of continuing inflation meant a further deterioration in real incomes for the lower paid wage-earners. Some indication of the unskilled labourer's plight as at 1971 was provided by the TUC's calculation of a minimum living wage in its Proposals to the Campbell Commission.<sup>4</sup> Employing statistics on basic nutritional requirements provided by the Ghana

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1. Mills-Odoi Report, op.cit., par.186.
  2. The Mills-Odoi Commission concluded, on the basis of a Ministry of Agriculture Sample Survey, that "it is feasible to calculate a daily-hired farm labour imputed income (i.e. converting income in kind into cash) of approximately 70 New Pesewas - that is, the present minimum daily rate in the wage sector of employment." Mills-Odoi Report, op.cit., para.208.
  3. Ibid., para.183.
  4. "Proposals submitted by the TUC Executive Board to the Campbell Salary Review Commission", (1971, mimeo.).

Ministry of Health, together with a list of food item prices drawn up by TUC officials from observation of market prices in Accra, it was estimated that the cost of a balanced diet for a single worker would be N¢1.05 per day.<sup>1</sup> The minimum wage of N¢0.75 would not even cover the worker's basic food costs, and the skilled workers' average income of N¢1.30 would barely suffice. Moreover, the great majority of skilled workers, and an increasing proportion of the unskilled, had wives and children living with them in town.<sup>2</sup> Few had any additional source of income except for the small amounts their wives might make from petty trading. The TUC calculated that the cost of a balanced diet for an average family (i.e. man, wife, and two children) would be N¢3.30 per day. Allowing for a certain (perhaps wilful) idealism in the Ministry of Health statistics, and some slight exaggeration in the TUC's list of food item prices, it is nevertheless clear that, taking into account additional obligatory expenditures on housing, clothing, transport, etc., something in the region of N¢3.50 per day would constitute a minimum living wage for a married worker. Yet not even the most senior skilled workers received this amount, and the average was less than half this figure. One might well ask, "How could the skilled and unskilled workers survive on such inadequate incomes?" The TUC's answer was clearly rhetorical, but far from ridiculously exaggerated:

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1. Ibid., p.19. The TUC's example of a 'balanced diet' consisted of: Breakfast - Akasa (a light porridge) with bread; Lunch - Palmut soup with 'fufu' (a dough made from yam and cassava, and the staple meal of most Ghanaians); Supper - Garden egg stew with 'banku' (another kind of dough). This is a fairly typical day's fare for skilled railway workers. Quantities were calculated to provide a total of 3000 calories.
  2. 89 per cent of the workers interviewed at Location had wives living with them in town, and 78 per cent had at least one child also. In Margaret Peil's sample of Ghanaian factory workers, skilled workers had, on average, 2.28 children living with them in town, and unskilled workers..

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"The answer is simple. The worker has not lived a full life. He has only existed by a continuous chain of private borrowing, crediting of food and consumer goods, and where these facilities are exhausted he has to compulsorily subject himself to self-denial of the essential needs of life and live below the level of human standards, only to exist to work, and not to work to live." 1

It becomes even more clear when one attempts to calculate the relative real incomes of local farmers that the notion of the skilled workers constituting a 'labour aristocracy' is absurd in the case of Ghana. They have generally enjoyed incomes almost twice as high as the imputed incomes of hired farm labourers, but lower than those of many (perhaps most) independent farmers. It is, of course, extremely difficult to generalise about rural real incomes, partly because of the shortage of reliable data on the subject, partly because what data we do have indicates immense differences in income between large and small farmers, and between average incomes in the different regions.

Polly Hill's research has clearly illustrated the thoroughly capitalist structure of Ghanaian cocoa production, and the early development of a large, imported, hired-labour force to work on the cocoa farms. 2 In consequence, economic differentiation within the rural populace has already proceeded to a degree where the notion of a single peasant class is

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Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

1.24 children. Margaret Peil, The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p.196.

1. "Proposals submitted by the TUC Executive Board to Campbell Salary Review Commission", op.cit., p.21.
2. Polly Hill, The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963).

transparently inappropriate. Some indication of this is provided by Kodwo Ewusi's calculation of the distribution of income among cocoa farmers in 1963-64, (see Table 8.3).

Table 8.3 : Distribution of Income of Cocoa Farmers, 1963-64.<sup>1</sup>

Income Class, N¢.	Percentage of Farmers	Total Income, N¢.M.
1-60	18.0	1.7
60-120	20.0	4.2
120-240	22.0	9.1
240-600	25.0	22.2
600-1200	10.0	19.1
1200 and above	5.0	25.7

N.B. Not including imputed income from consumption of own food.

This clearly reveals the development of a class of extremely large, wealthy farmers, some of whom, according to Ewusi, earn as much as N¢12,000 per annum. One quarter of the cocoa farmers might be categorised as "middle peasantry", (i.e. those earning N¢240-600 per annum), and 60 per cent as "poor peasantry", (to perseverewith Saul and Arrighi's term).

It is also worth noting here that these different classes of agricultural producer tend to be located in different regions of the country, (though, obviously, producers of virtually all types and size are to be found in every region). Most of the large, wealthy cocoa farmers are to be found in the Ashanti and Brong-Ahafo Regions, and, to a lesser extent, in the Akwapim area of the Eastern Region. In the Central and Western Regions, in contrast, the majority of farmers would

1. Reprinted from Kodwo Ewusi, The Distribution of Money Incomes in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research, 1971), p.75.

have to be classified as 'poor peasantry' with a sprinkling of 'middle-peasants'.<sup>1</sup>

This regional differentiation is reflected in a recent study for the International Labour Organisation, in which Dr. Blair Rourke reports that:

"Incomes of farmers were assessed to be highest in Brong-Ahafo Region. In 11 out of the 19 sub-districts covered in that region more than one-half of the farmers were estimated to have cash incomes above N¢500. Incomes were relatively high in Ashanti Region, followed by Eastern Region, Northern Region, and Volta Region. Farmers in the Western and Central Regions were considered to be relatively poor but not as poor as those in the Upper Region. In the Upper Region, 11 out of the 18 sub-districts covered did not have one-quarter of the farmers receiving income in excess of N¢500."<sup>2</sup>

If we take the Eastern Region as the median, however, information on the relative incomes and expenditures of rural and urban households is provided by a recent household survey of that region undertaken by Mr. Dutta-Roy.<sup>3</sup> Mr. Dutta-Roy calculated an average imputed income (i.e. including the imputed value of consumption of one's own produce, but not that of rent) for rural families of N¢33.08 per month, compared to one of N¢37.54 for urban families. This latter figure is marginally higher than the median monthly wage of skilled workers calculated by Margaret

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1. See K. Ewusi, op.cit., p.78.
  2. Blair Rourke, Wages and Incomes of Agricultural Workers in Ghana, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, 1970), p.82.
  3. D. K. Dutta-Roy, The Eastern Region Household Budget Survey, (Legon, Ghana: Institute of Statistical, Social and Economic Research, 1968).

Peil on the basis of a sample survey conducted in the same year (1967) as Dutta-Roy's.<sup>1</sup> This suggests that most skilled workers are slightly better off than most farmers, though the difference is small and such generalisations are necessarily very rough indeed. Some would argue that in calculating urban real incomes it is necessary to take into account the "implicit wage supplement" conferred on families by social overhead expenditures on schools, medical services, sanitation, etc. In recent times, however, with successive governments committed to rural development as a first priority, the implicit wage supplement to rural incomes has been as substantial in many cases as that to urban incomes. When one further adjusts both rural and urban incomes for the effect of unilateral transfers from the urban to the rural areas, it becomes very doubtful whether the skilled wage-earners can be considered a privileged group in any sense. According to Margaret Peil's survey, 72 per cent of skilled workers regularly remitted part of their wages to relatives in the countryside. The average amount sent was N¢36.64 per year, or N¢3.05 per month.<sup>2</sup> The institution of 'family parasitism' effectively wipes out any significant difference between the real incomes of skilled industrial workers and the majority of farmers.

Some indication of the factory workers' own perception of their economic position relative to that of the 'peasantry' is provided by Dr. Peil's survey of status perceptions.<sup>3</sup> The

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1. Dr. Peil found that the median monthly wages of skilled workers in the various cities of Ghana were as follows: Accra - N¢28.94; Kumasi - N¢38.57; Takoradi - N¢36.43. M. Peil, op.cit., p.76.
  2. Ibid., p.210.
  3. Ibid., p.118.

large majority of her interviewees, she points out, equated status ranking with relative income levels. Factory workers placed "farmers" 10th on the ladder of occupational prestige, "fitters" (i.e. skilled workers) 21st, "farm labourers" 33rd, and "building labourers" 34th, out of a total of 35 occupations. Of course, the perceptions of other groups might be expected to differ considerably from those of the factory workers themselves, and there are no grounds for thinking that the latter's perceptions are any more objective than others. But none of the urban populace at all in touch with realities could imagine that skilled manual workers enjoy an 'aristocratic' standard of living. They are obviously better off than the unskilled and unemployed, most importantly in that they enjoy relative security of employment. But none of the unskilled workers interviewed by this author considered that the gap between skilled and unskilled workers' incomes was excessively great. Virtually all unskilled workers agreed that the greater training and skills of the artisans justified their being paid considerably higher wages. Some even conceded that this was especially necessary in view of the greater job stability of the artisans and the additional financial burden involved for them (but for very few unskilled workers) in supporting a family in the city.

Moreover, the difference in income levels between skilled and unskilled workers could not but appear trivial in the light of the huge and growing gap between the lower paid (i.e. all manual wage-earners) and the elite of politicians and the salaried classes. In 1962, Professor J. E. Isaacs prepared a report for the International Labour Organisation in which he made international comparisons of the differential above the rate of the unskilled worker of thirteen occupations.



In almost all cases, (the skilled workers being one exception), the differential in Ghana was among the highest.<sup>1</sup> By 1968-71, as the Ghana TUC leadership frequently pointed out, the differential ratio between the lowest- and highest-paid employees in government service was in the proportion 1:39. In more concrete terms, the annual income of the General Manager of the Railway Administration in 1971 was N¢6,972, that of Senior Executive Officers N¢1,608, whereas the skilled workers' starting rate was N¢402. The political elite were even more highly paid than the senior civil servants. At the end of the C.P.P. period, Ministers received salaries of N¢9,000 per annum. The N.L.C. regime awarded its civilian commissioners, who were performing ministerial duties N¢6,000. The Progress Party Government decided to pay its Ministers N¢14,000 with additional allowances of N¢4,000. Workers in Sekondi-Takoradi often remarked, "We workers in Ghana receive so much less than workers in Britain, yet our Ministers and Judges receive so much more."<sup>2</sup> Though inaccurate as regards the absolute salaries of British and Ghanaian Ministers, this view was at least correct in relative terms, and the bitterness with which it was expressed readily understandable.

Such statistics do not of course necessarily mean a great deal unless income tax rates are also taken into account. It is a commonly recognised fact of life in Ghana that members of the elite are generally able to avoid paying the full income tax for which they are liable. Yet, even accepted at face value, the rate of Ghanaian income tax increases only relatively slightly with income levels. As at 1970, a gross monthly emolument of N¢34 attracted a tax of 2 per cent of earnings, N¢100 attracted 6 per cent, N¢500 15 per cent, and N¢1,000 27 per cent. There was no super tax.<sup>3</sup> This was a much lower rate of increase than

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1. J. E. Isaac, Questions of Wage Policy in Ghana, (I.L.O., 1962).
  2. Interview with B. T. Nahr, 8th July 1971.
  3. Central Revenue Department's General Information on Taxation in Ghana, (Accra: Government Printer, 1970).

that operative in the United Kingdom, for instance. The picture is further confirmed of a disproportionately rich Ghanaian elite.

Moreover, post-Independence development in Ghana has resulted in a large increase in the elite's proportionate share of national wealth. According to the estimates of Kodwo Ewusi: in 1956 the upper 6 per cent of wage and salary earners received 12.9 per cent of the total national income; in 1962 the upper 5.1 per cent received 20.3 per cent; and in 1968 the upper 4.6 per cent accounted for 24.7 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Ewusi concludes, "The relative distribution of income in Ghana has radically deteriorated, resulting in the relative immiseration of the lower income groups."<sup>2</sup>

#### Corruption.

The skilled workers of Ghana are most accurately categorized as a relatively comfortable section of the lower income group, rather than a distinct labour aristocracy: and, as such, with their real incomes steadily deteriorating while the upper income group becomes richer, they are in a position of acute conflict with the politico-administrative elite over the proportionate distribution of the national income. A further source of conflict, or rather an additional dimension of this economic conflict, is provided by the issue of corruption. Corruption is seen primarily as a further mechanism of elite self-enrichment to the severe detriment of the lower income group and the national economy as a whole.

There has recently been a tendency among British and American writers to take a more sympathetic, positive view of corruption in the underdeveloped states than that presented in

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1. K. Ewusi, op.cit., p.96.

2. Ibid., p.95.

earlier accounts. <sup>1</sup> Donal Cruise O'Brien for instance, has argued that,

"Where 'corruption' and 'nepotism' have become general principles of political action, it may be more fruitful to see them as such, rather than as deviations from an officially proclaimed norm which is honoured above all in the breach. Corruption and nepotism correspond fairly closely to patronage and factionalism, and the stigma attached to the former pair of terms can obscure serious analysis. Clans in particular may be seen as the democratic dimension of the Senegalese state, as a means for local notables (and, indirectly, their followers) to assert claims on the governing elite. Possible access to patronage in this manner helps to explain the otherwise surprisingly docile attitude of peasants in the face of bureaucratic exploitation. Some do benefit substantially from government handouts." <sup>2</sup>

There is a great deal to be said for this change of perspective, so long as "the docile attitude of peasants" is not automatically interpreted as "acceptance of the corruption system" rather than mere "helplessness". But it remains important to recognise that corruption and patronage vary in the form they (predominantly) take from one social and political system to another, and in their relation to each other. It is necessary to analyse the predominant system of patronage and corruption in each society with some precision, and to assess its implications for different social groups.

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1. Perhaps the most critical account of 'corruption' in the African states is that of S. Andreski, The African Predicament, (London: Michael Joseph, 1968).
  2. Donal Cruise O'Brien, "Clan, Community, Nation: Dimensions of Political Loyalty in Senegal", (paper presented to the Institute of Commonwealth Studies Seminar on African Urban Politics, November 1973).

This is not the place to attempt a broad account of the patronage and corruption system in Ghana. But it is worth pointing out that, as far as the skilled workers are concerned, they have gained, and stand to gain, very little from patronage. Many gain their jobs initially through sponsorship, but that of relatives already employed by the firm rather than of politicians or other members of political 'clans', which do not exist in nearly so extensive or organised a form as they appear to do in Senegal, for instance.<sup>1</sup> Once given employment, the skilled worker is relatively secure in his job, and has no need to maintain or cultivate patronage ties either to retain it or gain promotion. Due partly to the strength of union organisation amongst skilled workers and their ability to protest favouritism, promotion is generally on the basis of seniority and organisational ability. In any case (and above all) promotion opportunities are very limited. A skilled manual worker can never hope to become more than a Foreman. The situation for clerical workers is very different, promotion being based on examination qualifications and bosses' favouritism, and there being far less definite limits to the heights a clerical worker might attain in the course of his career. Patronage affects the skilled workers mainly in the form of possible attempts by TUC or Party leaders to win over their union representatives, and is therefore strongly disapproved and resisted as a threat to their corporate unity.

While corruption may be involved in the operation of patronage networks, it might also, in the form of demanding bribes, be simply a means of self-enrichment through the exploitation of official position. Skilled workers have no opportunity to benefit directly from this form of corruption, unlike executive staff in the state administration who come into direct contact with the public. They do, on the other hand, suffer directly

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1. See Guy Pfefferman, Industrial Labour in the Republic of Senegal, (New York: Praeger, 1968).

from corrupt practices on the part of the politico-administrative elite. Mention has already been made in previous chapters of a number of examples of this; how, for example, the skilled railway workers frequently attribute the Railway's failure to make a profit, and their own consequent failure to gain wage increases, to the corrupt practices of senior executives. It is widely suspected that Railway finances are embezzled, and that traffic is reduced by administrative staff demanding bribes from would-be buyers of freight space. This latter form of corruption was held to be responsible for the increasing use of road, rather than rail, transport, by timber contractors in 1970-71. Perhaps the most sordid example of the directly pernicious effects of top-level corruption on the working-conditions of the lower-paid was provided by the background to the strike of Accra-Tema sanitary workers in June 1971. The Accra-Tema City Council claimed that it simply did not have the money to provide its sanitary workers with the boots, gloves, and other clothing they were requesting, and to which they were officially entitled. Enquiries by a national newspaper revealed that the Council's pay roll included some 1,800 "ghost" employees.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the money supposedly being paid out to these non-existent employees was in fact being misappropriated by Council officials. This clearly constituted fraud on an immense scale, and readily accounted for the Council's financial inability to provide its real employees with clothing essential to the hygienic performance of their work.

It might be argued that a great deal of the money extracted and embezzled in such ways is eventually redistributed back to the lower income group through elite hospitality, extended family ties, or other social networks. This question will be

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1. See the Spectator, 19th June 1971, p.1.

examined at greater length in the final section of this chapter. It is worth remarking here, however, that the skilled workers of Sekondi-Takoradi certainly do not think of corruption operating in this way. It is sorely resented. Indeed, if corruption were not fairly widely resented in Ghana, it is difficult to understand why newly ensconced regimes should attempt to court popular favour by initiating investigations into the corrupt practices of their predecessors. What distinguishes the unionised workers, and especially those of Sekondi-Takoradi, is perhaps less their resentment of corruption than their lack of resignation to it, their feeling that something can, and should, be done to check it. This feeling derives largely, no doubt, from their own relative success in checking corrupt practices within the political sub-community of the Railway Union. Hence their enthusiasm for Bentum's attempt to develop a similar role for the labour movement on a national scale, acting as the "eyes and ears of society".

#### The Middle Class and Mobility.

The pattern of post-Independence development in Ghana has, then, resulted in the progressive emergence of very real and serious sources of conflict between the skilled worker class and the governing elite. In protesting the inefficiency, corruption, and excessive wealth of this elite, it is readily understandable that they have conceived themselves as the spokesmen of the poor, common people. Such a self-identification reflects awareness of their minority position as an occupational group, and the consequent need to rationalise their claim to a major political voice in national decision-making by projecting themselves as the representatives of a wider, mass constituency. In actuality, the radicalism which characterises the skilled

workers' view of the prevailing socio-economic order is perhaps atypical rather than strictly representative of the attitudes of other sections of the 'common people'. Certainly, it is more articulate and openly asserted. But this self-image does at least correspond far more closely to their objective position in the socio-economic structure than does their depiction as a labour aristocracy. This latter view retains what little currency it still has in Ghana primarily as a stratagem of governing elites to foster division in the ranks of the poor and divert attention from the major discontinuities in the ladder of economic stratification.

Nevertheless, one might properly ask: Is not this picture of a society sharply divided into elite and masses quite as over-simplified as that presented by Saul and Arrighi? Surely, the pattern of stratification is more complex, the ladder of stratification more continuous than this suggests. To what degree does the existence of a sizeable middle stratum between elite and masses, and the persistence of a relatively open society with extended family and other ties between the different strata, inhibit the development of conscious class antagonisms?

Some of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers interviewed by this author, generally the more educated and articulate amongst them, differentiated the social order in terms of "those big men", "comfortable people", and "us poor", rather than a simple mass-elite division. The existence of a fairly distinct middle class was recognised, but the skilled workers did not consider themselves members of it. This is a different view from that generally taken by Ghanaian governments which have rather persisted in including the skilled workers, though not the unskilled, in the category of wage-earners eligible for additional taxation in the form of Compulsory Savings, for instance, or the National Development Levy. Similarly, the 1960 Survey of High Level Man-

power distinguished three main strata in Ghanaian urban society: a top-level elite of professionals, senior civil servants, managers (and of course politicians), constituting some 4 per cent of the total national labour force; a middle class of clerks, traders, miners, transport workers and other skilled workers constituting 16 per cent; and an unskilled category, including petty traders, accounting for 20 per cent of the total national labour force.<sup>1</sup> But this categorisation is quite misleading as to the sharpest discontinuities in prevailing income levels. The difference between skilled and unskilled workers' incomes is far less great, in proportionate as well as absolute terms, as that between skilled workers and the middle strata of medium-scale businessmen and middle-ranking executives. Recognising this, Kodwo Ewusi suggests the following categorisation of income classes:

Table 8.4 : Distribution of Income by Classes.

Class	% of Employment	% of Income Earned
Lower (N¢1-1,200)	89.5	63.4
Lower Middle (N¢1,200-2,400)	7.9	20.6
Upper Middle (N¢2,400-6,000)	2.0	10.8
Upper (N¢6,000 and above)	0.3	5.2

Source: K. Ewusi, op.cit., p.55.

The figure of N¢1,200 seems rather high for the upper limit of the lower income class, which this writer, following the definition of a 'worker' suggested by most trade unionists interviewed, would set at around N¢800. In any case, only 8.6 per cent of the 89.5 per cent of wage-earners included by Ewusi in this

1. Survey of High-Level Manpower in Ghana (1960), (Accra: Government Printer, 1961).



category earned between N¢800 and N¢1,200. The Upper Middle Class might properly be included with the Upper Class in the Elite. We then have: a Lower Class of 81 per cent of wage-earners at the upper limit of which are situated the most senior of skilled workers; a Middle Class of 16.5 per cent of wage-earners, earning between N¢800 and N¢2,400 per year; and an Elite of 2.3 per cent receiving more than N¢2,400 per year. The advantage of this classification is that it not only corresponds to the sharpest and clearest discontinuities in the national wage and salary structure, but also to the increasingly apparent differences in life-style, consumption patterns, and social habits between these three classes. Whereas the skilled worker's income, even if twice as high as that of the unskilled worker, barely enables him to subsist on basic home-produced foodstuffs, the incomes of this middle class are sufficient to support a far more comfortable and westernized style of living, entailing the regular consumption of certain imported foodstuffs, beer rather than 'akpoteshie' (the locally produced gin), and the possibility of affording secondary school or even university education for one's children. The question of cultural differences and social distance between classes will receive more detailed consideration in the following section. But, here, it is important to emphasise the close relationship between education and mobility opportunities in Ghana, and the impact of differential access to educational opportunities on the formation of classes on an inter-generational basis.

If Ghana at Independence was a relatively open society, plentiful in opportunities for individual and inter-generational mobility, it has rapidly become relatively closed. Such opportunities as earlier existed lay mainly in the field of government employment, private business openings (on any large scale) being relatively limited. A declining economy, combined with the over-staffing of the bureaucracy and state enterprises under

the C.P.P. regime, has resulted in a sharp contraction of employment openings at all levels.<sup>1</sup> In this context, the introduction of higher and more rigid educational qualifications for employment in the clerical-executive branch of the civil service, together with the abolition of free secondary school education, might properly be interpreted as an attempt by the elite and middle class to consolidate their position on an inter-generational basis in the face of a serious decline in the number of higher positions available. Certainly, this has severely reduced the chances of sons of lower-paid workers entering the ranks of the elite or even the middle class. One indication that this reality is widely recognised is provided by a finding of Margaret Peil's Survey.<sup>2</sup> Nearly all factory workers aspired that their children might in turn become factory workers, preferably in the skilled category. Very few could seriously entertain any hope of their children becoming "professionals" or even "clerical staff". Recognition of this reality was most pronounced, as one might expect, in Sekondi-Takoradi, the city which has experienced economic decline and the subsequent contraction of job openings in most severe form over the past decade. Only 3 per cent of Takoradi parents expressed the desire that their sons become professionals, compared to 22 per cent of Kumasi parents.

#### The Social and Cultural Dimensions of Stratification.

In Sekondi-Takoradi at least, these three main income groups tend increasingly to lead distinctive styles of social life and to mix predominantly with friends drawn from members

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1. On the subject of "overstaffing" under the C.P.P. regime, see Douglas Rimmer, "The Crisis in the Ghanaian Economy", in The Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol.4, No. 1, (1966), pp.17-32.
  2. See M. Peil, op.cit., p.111.

of their own class. The elite generally keep 'closed' houses in secluded suburbs of the city, travel always by car rather than by public transport, and consume imported European food-stuffs in the main. Their social life consists largely of having friends round to dinner. If they go out to eat and drink, it is invariably to a club or to the local plush hotel, the 'Atlantic', inhabited almost entirely by white expatriates and other members of the native elite. The middle class are more inclined to consume traditional foods and maintain the traditional values of sociability and keeping an open house. They generally live in closer contact to the urban poor, in the smarter central residential areas. But they nevertheless lead distinctly more comfortable, in-door, and westernized lives than the mass of urban residents. If they go out drinking, it is to a beer-bar, where the music is quiet and the atmosphere "cool" in the local parlance, and most of the clientele are smartly dressed. Some do still drink akpoteshie occasionally, but this is very much 'on the quiet'. Very few would ever admit to frequenting akpoteshie bars which they regard as rowdy and vulgar. For the urban poor, their house, or more commonly their single room, serves as little more than a bedroom. Life is led almost entirely out of doors, strolling the streets, or sitting talking with friends on street corners. They generally drink in the akpoteshie bars which consist of little more than a small shack, or occasionally in one of the dancing bars where both beer and akpoteshie are sold.

This differentiation of various types of hostelry, catering for different social classes is a far more significant phenomenon than the work of most sociologists suggests. Drinking with friends is a major social activity in Ghana, and the different types of bar present a highly visible indication of social

class barriers. The position of the skilled workers in this class structure is vividly illustrated by their social drinking habits. Unless they are single men, the skilled workers cannot possibly afford to drink in beer-bars regularly. The Household Budget Survey of 1955 discovered that few workers spent more than 5 per cent of their income on drinking and tobacco <sup>1</sup> - in other words, approximately N¢2-3 as at 1971 if this proportion was maintained. This figure is probably an understatement. But still the average skilled worker could not possibly afford to buy many bottles of beer at N¢0.50 per bottle. Akpoteshie, in contrast, costs N¢0.15 per large glass, enough for a whole evening for most people. On most evenings, therefore, the skilled workers meet with friends in akpoteshie bars, where the conversation often turns to the great drinking exploits of Pobee Biney and other cultural heroes. Yet many of these same workers do attempt to save a couple of Cedis a month in order to spend at least one evening in a beer-bar with the more esteemed amongst their friends or possibly with middle class relatives. There is a certain ambivalence, therefore, in the skilled workers' cultural orientation, corresponding to their socio-economic position on the threshold of the middle class world.

It has become a commonplace of the literature on social stratification in Africa that the persistence of the extended family and its network of obligations has inhibited the process of class formation by maintaining regular contact and patronage ties between members of the elite and relatives among the lower social strata. <sup>2</sup> In the case of Sekondi-Takoradi at least, such

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1. Sekondi-Takoradi Survey of Population and Household Budgets (1955), (Accra: Office of the Government Statistician, 1955).
  2. See, for example, P.C.Lloyd, Classes, Crises, and Coups, (London: Macgibbon & Kee, 1971), pp.101 and 135; W.B.Schwab, "Social Stratification in Gwelo", in A. Southall (ed.), Social Change in Modern Africa, (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), pp.126-44; and, in the same volume, J.E.Goldthorpe, "Educated Africans", pp.145-58.

a formulation is quite misleading as to the nature and regularity of contact between the majority of workers and members of the elite. It is certainly true that most workers still attribute great importance to extended family ties and participation in family events, especially funerals. But such family activities take up only a very small proportion of their leisure time, most of which is spent with friends of roughly similar socio-economic position. In any case, very few workers are at all closely related to members of the elite, and those extended family ties which are most regularly maintained tend to be those between members of similar educational and socio-economic status. The principle of reciprocity, of being able (or expecting one day to be able) to return equivalent favours to those received, operates as a restricting factor on both Ghanaian friendships and, increasingly, extended family relationships. Many of the workers interviewed by the author who claimed to be related to "big men" said that they would be far too embarrassed ever to ask such a relative to loan them money or find them a job because they knew they could do no similar favour in return. Some said they could not even consider visiting such relatives since they knew they would be thinking that the purpose of the visit was to beg a favour. It is a commonplace of akpoteshie bar conversation, as distinct from the sociological literature, that members of the elite display unmistakable snobbery, unsociability, and annoyance with the theoretical obligations of the extended family when visited by lower strata relatives. As one railway worker put it:

"What? A rich man give money to his poor relatives? A rich man only knows his parents. It makes little difference whether they are relatives or not, he soon forgets his poor cousins and friends. They do not even give...

".. 20 pesewas to the very poor. Have you ever seen a wealthy man stop his Mercedes to get out and dash (give money to) a poor man. Not at all. It is rather we workers who have to look after our jobless brothers and friends. The rich men are too selfish." 1

Participation in voluntary associations is of interest here as providing, in theory at least, arenas of regular mass-elite contact and communication. More particularly, ethnic associations might be seen as fostering the perpetuation of tribal divisions which cross-cut, and thereby inhibit awareness of, class-type divisions. Yet associational life in Sekondi-Takoradi is extremely sparse. At one time, apparently, it was more vigorous. Busia informs us of the popularity of tribal associations in the city in 1949-50, and emphasises their importance in providing mutual assistance and arbitration in disputes.<sup>2</sup> But, by 1971, only one ethnic association was to be found in active existence, that of the Ashantis, the "Asante Mnoa Kuo". There are two possible reasons for this. It seems probable that those described by Busia, or many of them, were the tribal youth associations inspired and organised by C.P.P. enthusiasts for the purpose of electoral mobilisation, and, as this purpose became obsolete, they withered away along with the rest of C.P.P. grass-roots organisation. But, in addition, those of independent origin and purpose appear to have mostly collapsed during the past two decades owing to problems of efficient administration and financial trustworthiness (and, in particular, to the tendency of financial secretaries to run off with the subscriptions).<sup>3</sup>

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1. Interview with B. Maurice, 13th August 1971.
  2. K. A. Busia, Report on a Social Survey of Sekondi-Takoradi, (London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1950), pp.74-75.
  3. Interview with S. Biney, Community Development Officer for Sekondi-Takoradi District, 10th June 1971.

Common tribal origin has proved no reliable basis for mutual trust. A few small, multi-tribal mutual help associations, generally organised on a neighbourhood basis, are still in operation. But most inhabitants of Sekondi-Takoradi now prefer to participate in very small, informal mutual-aid groups, consisting of no more than ten members, who are usually from the same home-town or village and know each other extremely well. They are also usually of similar class position. <sup>1</sup>

Tribal division are not embodied in the form of large mass organisations, therefore, and, although common home-town origin tends to make for a special degree of mutual trust, ethnic differences constitute no obstacle to friendship as such. Similarly, the residential pattern is characterised by a remarkable lack of ethnic prejudice or tribal conglomerations. The majority of southerner Ghanaians are scattered throughout the city on a socio-economic basis, and, to some degree, by considerations of proximity to the place of work, rather than concentrated in tribal sub-communities. This is partly to be explained by the history of property development in the city and the factors governing accommodation allocation. The Railway Administration and National Housing Corporation have generally allocated their houses on a non-tribal basis, and the City Council has similarly distributed land for development. This has been facilitated by the fact that, as the city grew, the local Ahantas were rapidly outnumbered by incoming Fantis, and, since the establishment of the Municipal Council in 1921 (to become the City Council in 1954), have never really succeeded in dominating the Council or other local institutions. <sup>2</sup> In consequence, the main neighbour-

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1. For example, the three groups with which the writer became familiar consisted of: (a) a bank manager, a car importer, an assistant headmaster, a police lawyer, and two sisters who owned a bar and lodging-house (Ga); (b) two school-teachers, a naval officer, a cloth-seller, and two clerks (Ashanti); and (c) three skilled workers, a taxi driver, a technical school teacher, and two seamstresses (Fanti).
  2. F.N.Arko, "A History of the Sekondi Town Council", (M.A. thesis, Legon, 1970); and interviews with five ex-councillors.

hoods rapidly became multi-tribal, and newcomers simply took whatever accommodation they could find and afford rather than heading for particular clusterings of co-ethnics. But, in any case, ever since the early decades of this century Sekondi-Takoradi has been characterised, according to observers, by a distinctly cosmopolitan ethos.<sup>1</sup> As the country's major sea-port, its inhabitants quickly grew accustomed, and came to look forward (largely no doubt for financial reasons) to the regular visits of foreign seamen. In addition, one might give some credit for the development of this ethos to the railway workers and their attempts to organise, from the first, on a strictly non-tribal basis (though, obviously, the relationship between their collective industrial experience and the social pattern of the wider community was one of two-way influence).

There are two minor exceptions to this pattern. The Ewe people from the Volta Region of Ghana have tended to cluster in a small area along the coast road between Sekondi and Takoradi, and other citizens frequently accuse them of displaying favouritism to co-ethnics in job recruitment and promotion wherever they have the opportunity. But the Ewes comprised only a very small proportion of the total city population, certainly no more than 4 per cent (or 6,000 out of 161,000), by 1971. Secondly, the northerners and non-Ghanaians still tend to live together in the "zongo" areas (i.e. the stranger communities), one being situated on the northern outskirts of the central residential area of Sekondi, the other out at the suburban village of Kwesi-Mintsim, to the north of Takoradi. Here, a modified version of the traditional northerner community structure persists, with headmen, and, above them, a zeriakin (or "supreme chief") settling disputes and organising communal activities. Although very

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1. Interview with Joseph Ansah, 75 year old resident of Sekondi, 14th June 1971.



considerable economic differentiation characterises the northerners, some of them being wealthy butchers and traders, others unskilled labourers, this does not find expression in perceptible differences in style of living. Instances of northerners living in other, non-zongo, areas of the city were found to be virtually non-existent. Even the most eminent northerner in the city, the Regional Government's Publicity and Liaison Officer, a highly educated and sophisticated man, lived in a simple two-roomed house in Sekondi zongo. Elsewhere, he pointed out in explanation, it would prove impossible for him to maintain observance of the Moslem religion and the life style it dictates.<sup>1</sup> Also, he claimed to gain more satisfaction from assisting his (mostly illiterate) fellow Moslems to cope with the problems of city life than he could possibly obtain from setting himself off as a member of the elite. In effect, he and other eminent northerners act as 'brokers' on behalf of the zongo community, intermediaries between its culturally disadvantaged, semi-encapsulated, citizenry and the local government bureaucracy.

It would be misleading, however, to over-emphasise the degree of northerner encapsulation, or to identify this with social conflict. The zongo areas are geographically integrated with the rest of the city and perfectly open to non-northerner visitors. Southerners often attend their cultural festivities, such as wrestling competitions and the visits of prominent Moslem preachers, and the northerners in turn are enthusiastic supporters of the local football teams. Many cases of close friendship, and even marriage, between young northerners and southerners were encountered.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, with the departure of

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1. Interview with J. Y. Abdulai, 20th September 1971.
  2. Margaret Peil provides evidence to suggest that the rate of inter-ethnic marriage is considerably higher in Sekondi-Takoradi than in other Ghanaian cities. See M. Peil, op.cit., p. 192.

many non-Ghanaians, in consequence or anticipation of the Aliens Compliance Ordinance of June 1970, large numbers of young southerners, mostly unemployed, have moved into the cheap accommodation to be found in Kwesi-Mintsim zongo. Many of these make a living from petty theft or prostitution and pimping, operating in 'rings' frequently composed of southerners and northerners together. In other words, one finds in Kwesi-Mintsim the development of a multi-tribal criminal lumpen-proletariat. This is the reality behind middle class allegations of northerner responsibility for the increasing rate of crime in the city, allegations which the skilled workers, being more in touch with this reality, are far less inclined to make. The growing incidence of crimes against property is rather seen by skilled workers as the understandable product of elite irresponsibility and uncharitability.

The only form of associational life in which any substantial proportion of the Sekondi-Takoradi populace participates is provided by the various churches. These are certainly classless in the sense that people from all social strata are generally to be found amongst their membership. And the older 'historic' churches, such as the Roman Catholic, Methodist, and Presbyterian churches, tend rather to be differentiated along ethnic lines, having originally established themselves in different regional areas. But even here the growth of class-consciousness is to be observed as a contributory factor in the drift of many lower strata members away from the 'historic' to the 'spiritualist' churches. The Apostolic Church and the Musama Disco Christo Church, in particular, have large and rapidly expanding congregations in Sekondi-Takoradi.<sup>1</sup> A large

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1. This assertion is based on interviews with church leaders, and the (perhaps more reliable) evidence that both of these sects were in the process of constructing large new churches in Sekondi in 1971. Information on the origins and beliefs of these churches is provided in C. G. Baeta, Prophetism in Ghana, (London: SCM Press, 1962).

part of their appeal would seem to lie in the 'healing' services they claim to provide, and in the preference of many lower strata Ghanaians, especially women, for their more traditional musical style. But, in addition, there is a clear difference in the social composition and ethos of the two types of church. The more brotherly, less status conscious, atmosphere of the spiritualist churches constitutes an important attraction for many new recruits. A railway worker who had recently joined the Apostolic Church put it this way:

"The most obvious difference between us and the Methodist Church is that they don't do the clapping and joyful singing the way we do. There's a difference in ways of worshipping God. We observe God's instruction in the Bible, that if you want to worship Him, it's best to do so by clapping of hands and joining together in brotherly, happy singing. But also we don't believe in looking up to rich men. I mean, in that Methodist Church, all the men wear suits to services and all the women kente cloth. They'll tell you to go home if you go in wearing clothes like these (working clothes). Well, if I don't own a suit, how can I go to worship there? And they're really very pompous, those people. The wealthiest or most important amongst them expect to be given the official positions in the church. And when they're collecting money for Thanksgiving or at Harvest time, for instance, they say, 'You should pay so much because you're a lawyer, and you should pay so much because you're a worker'. And you have to pay even if you can't afford it. And then the wealthy ones will embarrass you by shouting, 'I can afford to pay more than the 5 Cedis you said, here's 10 Cedis'. And then another one shouts 'Here's 15 Cedis'.

"It's not that we don't have wealthy men in our Church. We have an army officer at our church in Accra, I'm told. And we have some very big collections. Two months ago, we collected N¢260 for an outdoor. But we just pay how much we want to. It all comes out of the heart. It's voluntary and therefore better in the sight of God. And...

"wealthy people are not the officials in our church, rather the older, wiser men. We all mix together, and your dress doesn't make any difference. That's why a lot of people are coming to join our Church from the Methodists and Presbyterians." 1

### Conclusion.

Post-Independence development in Ghana has resulted in a large proportionate increase in the share of national wealth going to the top-level elite, and a considerable expansion in size of the "comfortable" middle class of medium scale businessmen, large cocoa farmers, and middle-ranking civil servants; but the proletariat of skilled and unskilled manual workers has suffered relative impoverishment of a degree which has wiped out any significant difference between their own and average rural incomes. These three income groups increasingly approximate to classes in the strict sociological sense of the term. Children of the lower income group are severely disadvantaged in terms of life chances, or mobility opportunities, relative to those of the elite and middle class. And each class tends to lead a distinct style of life and mix (at all regularly) only with people of roughly similar economic and educational status. The theoretical obligations of the extended family are increasingly ineffective in serving to maintain regular contact between members of different classes.

Of course, this class differentiation is not complete or absolute. It would also appear to be much less pronounced in Kumasi, where commerce provides the main form of employment and the gradation of income levels is far more continuous, than in Sekondi-Takoradi or Tema, where a majority of the population is

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1. Interview with J. Blankson, 3rd July 1971.

employed in wage and salary earning in industry and the state bureaucracy. But, in Sekondi-Takoradi, at least, class differences and barriers have developed in a highly visible form and they are not significantly cross-cut by ethnic or other types of division. If social barriers are less rigid than in England, for instance, they are all the more resented for being of such recent origin and little traditional legitimacy. Also, the difference in living standards between the elite and the lower class is even more extreme.

The level of urban unemployment has risen rapidly since 1966. Official figures are notoriously inaccurate, but most observers estimate that something like 20 per cent of the adult male labour force is unemployed or seriously under-employed.<sup>1</sup> The skilled workers are, of course, relatively privileged compared to this group, but only in this sense are they a labour aristocracy, and even this is the aristocracy of "noblesse oblige" to care for dependants rather than luxurious consumption. Their economic and social distance from the middle class is considerable, being able to afford only occasional forays into the "smart clothes, beer-bar" world of the latter. If their position on the extreme threshold of the middle class induces a certain ambivalence in their aspirations and cultural orientation, this only serves to increase the militancy of their pressure for a radical redistribution of national wealth. Glimpses of a more comfortable world exacerbate their discontent at being forced even further down into the ranks of the urban poor.

Economically, then, the skilled workers are in an intermediate position between the poorest sections of society, on the one hand, and the elite and middle class, on the other. Their awareness of this situation is reflected in the claim to act as the "spokesmen of the people". But this self-image also

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1. See Keith Hart, "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana", in the Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol II, No. 1, (1973) pp.61-89; and John Weeks, "An Exploration into the Problem of Urban Imbalance in Africa", in Manpower and Unemployment Research in Africa, Vol.6, No.2, (1973),pp.9-37.

reflects awareness of their singular position in the structure of power in Ghanaian society. Before proceeding to a consideration of this question, it is worth making one further point here. The relationship between objective economic position, or even class formation in the sociological sense, and class action is by no means so simple as some writers suggest. Deterioration in the economic situation of a group tends to have the double-edged effect of increasing its susceptibility to division, and perhaps its political bewilderment, at the same time as exacerbating discontent with the prevailing order. Effective and united leadership, and the provision by that leadership of a persuasive, unifying ideology, are crucial to class action on the political level. Hence, in the absence of a united leadership in 1970-71, the railway workers were divided in spite of their deteriorating position in an ever more visible and inequitable class structure.

CHAPTER NINETHE POWER OF THE RAILWAY WORKERS.

One of the most striking aspects of post-Independence politics in the African states is the relative ease with which the 'masses', at one time seen as involved in a populist surge toward greater participation, have in fact been effectively excluded from active political involvement. The chief exception to this tendency, in many states, has consisted in the staging of 'political' strikes by unionised workers, especially railway workers. Elliot Berg and Jeffrey Butler might well be correct in suggesting that 'political' strikes have been the exception rather than the rule in both pre- and post-Independence Africa.<sup>1</sup> Infrequent as they may have been, however, such political strikes as have occurred appear significant enough within this general context of popular passivity to merit serious consideration. This they have not received with few exceptions, and for two main reasons. Firstly, there is the tendency of Berg & Butler and several other commentators to treat of trade unionism in Africa at a high (arguably too high) level of generality.<sup>2</sup> This naturally leads to a focussing of attention on the organisational weaknesses and narrowly economic orientation of the majority of unions. Secondly, as was earlier remarked, many writers do not

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1. Berg and Butler, op.cit., p.350.
  2. Another commentary which, although highly perceptive in parts, might be criticised on these grounds is that of Michael F. Lofchie and Carl G. Rosberg, Jr., "The Political status of African Trade Unions", in W. A. Beling (ed.), The Role of Labor in African Nation-Building, (New York: Praeger, 1968), pp.130-62.

consider the unionised workers as part of the 'masses', properly speaking, but rather a sub-section of the middle-class, fundamentally allied with the political elite. Saul and Arrighi, following Fanon, regard instances of labour opposition to ruling regimes as mere "reformist opportunism", which the peasantry rightly view with cynicism..<sup>1</sup> Considering rural political passivity to be a temporary phenomenon, they look forward to the development of truly revolutionary peasant-based movements. Other writers would no doubt wish to avoid association with any such speculation but are generally equally sceptical as to the political potential and orientation of (any group of) unionised workers.

There are a number of reasons for considering this formulation seriously misjudged. Firstly, in the case of Ghana, as more generally, there would appear to be little justification for the assumption, central to the whole labour aristocracy thesis, of the independent revolutionary potential of the 'peasantry'. In the light of historical experience, this idea must appear sociologically and politically naive in the extreme. Instances of active peasant participation in revolutions, which have not also and primarily been nationalist revolutions, are extremely rare. In those few instances to which one might point, it is apparent that the leadership has generally been provided by other groups (urban activists), and that only certain sections, communal or economic, of the peasantry have participated at all actively. The reasons for this have been outlined by Eric Wolf with admirable lucidity:

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1. Frantz Fanon, op.cit., p.98.



"The peasant is especially handicapped in passing from passive recognition of wrongs to political participation as a means of setting them right. First, a peasant's work is most often done alone, on his own land, than in conjunction with his fellows. Moreover, all peasants are to some extent competitors for available resources within the community as well as for sources of credit from without. Second, the tyranny of work weighs heavily upon a peasant: his life is geared to an annual routine and to planning for the year to come. Momentary alterations of routine threaten his ability to take up the routine later. Third, control of land enables him more often than not to retreat into subsistence production should adverse conditions affect his market crop. Fourth, ties of extended kinship and mutual aid within the community may cushion the shocks of dislocation. Fifth, peasant interests - especially among poor peasants - often cross-cut class alignments. Rich and poor peasants may be kinfolk, or a peasant may at the same time be owner, renter, sharecropper, laborer for his neighbours, and seasonal hand on a nearby plantation. Each different involvement aligns him differently with his fellows and with the outside world. Finally, past exclusion of the peasant from participation in decision-making beyond the bamboo hedge of his village deprives him all too often of the knowledge needed to articulate his interests with appropriate forms of action. Hence, peasants are often merely passive spectators of political struggles or long for the sudden advent of a millenium, without specifying for themselves and their neighbours the many rungs on the staircase to heaven." 1

In addition, one has to take into account the generally weak power position of peasants relative to the suppressive forces of the landlord class and/or the officials of the state machine.

This is of course a somewhat extreme statement of the obstacles to peasant rebellion, and Wolf qualifies it by noting

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1. Eric Wolf, Peasant Wars of the Twentieth Century, (London: Faber and Faber, 1971), pp.289-90.

that the 'tactical mobility' possessed by 'middle peasants' does sometimes enable them to engage in effective oppositional movements.<sup>1</sup> But this raises another consideration. Who do Saul and Arrighi wish to signify by 'the peasantry'? An undifferentiated concept of peasantry clearly will not do for the case of Ghana. Evidence was presented in the previous chapter to indicate the very considerable differences in size and wealth of farmers both within the main cocoa-growing areas and between the different regions. Of these two dimensions of differentiation, the first is probably least important as an obstacle to concerted rural opposition, (though it does of course raise doubts as to whether such opposition can appropriately be described as 'class-conflict'). Both wealthy and relatively poor farmers within a particular locality are likely to unite in defence of communal economic interests whatever the differences between them. It would appear that even the hired agricultural labourers, working on the cocoa-farms of Ashanti and Brong/Ahafo, have exhibited little inclination or ability to organise in pressing demands against their farmer-employers. This is partly, no doubt, because, mostly illiterate, and widely scattered on numerous farms, they have been unable to develop the efficient communications network essential to effective organisation.<sup>2</sup> But it is also due to the nature of their relations with employers. These are generally personalised, 'patron-client' rather than impersonal 'employer-employee' types of relationship, and the so-called 'hired'

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1. Ibid., p.293.

2. The institution of the Agricultural Workers' Union in 1958 did little to alter this situation since, in spite of the Union's large nominal membership (over 300,000 in 1961), genuine participation was limited to technical and clerical workers in the government's Agricultural Research Department. Personal correspondence with Benjamin Bentum, 14th August 1973.

labourers are often working for the right of usufruct over part of the land they clear, or for a third share of the crop they cultivate, rather than simply for wage-payment. This is not to say that farmer-labourer relations on the large cocoa-farms have been entirely free from friction. During the 1937-38 cocoa hold-up, for example, many labourers, resentful at the failure of their employers to pay them on time, or in full, for their season's work, 'stole' part of their employers' cocoa and sold it to the expatriate buying firms, thus unwittingly conniving in the attempt to break the cocoa-farmers' united front.<sup>1</sup> But there do not seem to have been any similar instances of wide-scale farmer-labourer conflict in the post-Independence period.

Horizontal cleavages between the farmers of different regions of Ghana impose more serious limits on the extent to which concerted 'peasant' opposition can be expected to materialise. In consequence of the uneven spread of cocoa-production, the majority of farmers in the Western Region, for example, do not share the dominant economic interest of the Ashanti producers in the level of the cocoa-price. Their primary relationship is one of conflict over the regional distribution of rural development finance. Such regional jealousies and communal sentiments can, moreover, undermine the solidarity of cocoa-producers located in different areas of the country, as they have indeed done in the past. Before turning to a consideration of cocoa-farmer politics, however, it is worth remarking on the marked political passivity displayed by the generally poor, small-scale cultivators of the non-cocoa-growing areas. With the partial exception of essentially communalistic movements, such as the support provided the Northern People's Party in 1954-56 and the secessionist movement among Ewe farmers in the Volta Region, these small

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1. This analysis is based on evidence presented in A. B. Holmes IV, op.cit., pp.49-53.

farmers have presented no overt or organised opposition to post-Independence ruling elites. Even where a pool of outside (but locally-connected) leadership has been available, as in the case of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers and the farmers of the Central and Western Regions, support for such leadership has not been forthcoming.<sup>1</sup> Part of the explanation for this, perhaps, is that, being relatively poor and lying outside the aegis of state or state-sponsored buying organisations, they have suffered less in the way of direct governmental exploitation. Wolf might also have a point in suggesting that 'small peasantry', if threatened by governmental expropriation of their surplus produce, can more easily retreat into subsistence cultivation.<sup>2</sup> But, in addition, Marx's emphasis on the geographical dispersal of the peasantry is certainly relevant here:

"In so far as there is merely a loose inter-connection among these small peasants, and the identity of their interests begets no unity and no political organisation, they do not form a class."<sup>3</sup>

This is, however, too simple an assessment for unqualified application to the Ghanaian cocoa-farmers. In spite of the very considerable income differences between them, the cocoa-farmers do constitute a form of class, even if this is not nation-wide. They not only occupy essentially the same position

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1. Most of the Sekondi-Takoradi lower-paid workers retain strong links with their home-towns and villages, visiting relatives there approximately once a month on average. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, that no organised support for the strikes of 1961 and 1971 appears to have materialised from beyond the boundaries of Sekondi-Takoradi itself. This question awaits further research.
  2. Wolf, op.cit., p.291.
  3. Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte, (New York: International Publishers, 1932), p.19.

in the structure of economic production and appropriation, but have proven themselves capable of creating autonomous political organisation for the protection of their (keenly appreciated) common interests. The contemporary weakness of such organisation relative to that of the railway workers is nevertheless strikingly apparent.

The cocoa hold-ups of the 1930's well illustrate the requisites and limits of concerted independent political action on the part of Ghana's cocoa-farmers. Small, middle, and large producers all participated (most voluntarily, some through coercion), but the 'hold-ups' were organised and led by the wealthier farmers in conjunction with the chiefs (themselves often wealthy farmers). The chiefs were clearly in a tricky position, and generally avoided any open display or support for the hold-ups, projecting themselves (to the colonial authorities at least) as mediators between the farmers, on the one hand, and the expatriate companies and the government on the other. But, secretly, they lent their full support to the hold-ups in those areas in which the latter were effective, delegating their power to swear fetish oaths and arraign defaulters to the head-farmers in their districts in order to enforce general compliance. That the support and solidarity of the chiefs was crucial to united action was clearly revealed by the relative degrees of success of the various hold-ups. Those of 1931-32, and 1933-34, were effective only in a minority of localities. It was only with the restoration of the Ashanti Confederancy Council in 1935 and the forging of an alliance between this body and the Provincial Councils of the Colony, that it proved possible to enforce a nation-wide hold-up - that of 1937-38.<sup>1</sup>

The alliance of middle and wealthy cocoa-farmers

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1. This analysis is based on evidence presented in A. B. Holmes IV, op.cit., pp.264-65.

persisted into the early years of the C.P.P. regime, and became more overtly political. But it also began to split along regional lines. Under the C.P.P. regime no more than under the colonial regime did the large-scale farmers necessarily see themselves as allied with the governing elite. On the contrary, they, as much as the middle peasantry, had serious cause for grievance at the extortion of state officials and the level of taxation imposed on them in order to finance urban development projects. However, under the C.P.P. regime, those who would engage in oppositional activity had more reason to fear subsequent government reprisals. In 1954-56, there appeared to be a good chance of displacing the C.P.P. regime and replacing it with a government less inimical to their (and Ashanti) interests. This discontent (and optimism) furnished the main material basis of mass support for the National Liberation Movement (1954-56) which succeeded in presenting a serious challenge to the C.P.P.'s continuation in power.<sup>1</sup> Yet the majority of cocoa farmers in the Colony ultimately determined not to support it in the 1956 General Elections, thereby illustrating the persisting strength of communal divisions. According to Dennis Austin,

"As they (the southern farmers) listened to the propaganda coming out of the Ashanti capital, and saw the preparations being made for the extension of the party into the Colony, they saw the NLM not as the farmer's friend but as the spearhead of a new Ashanti invasion of the south." 2

With the failure of the NLM, the cocoa-farmers appear to have become more wary of engaging in oppositional activity. Certainly, the United Party's attempt to resuscitate the movement in 1958-60 met with a far more limited response, and the

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1. For further details, see D. Austin, op.cit., pp.250-316.

2. Ibid., p.344.

understandable caution of chiefs and wealthy farmers may well have been crucial here.<sup>1</sup> With the subsequent detention of the United Party leadership, and the smashing of its organisation, the cocoa farmers proved unable to maintain or create any independent organisation, however informal, to assert their interests in concerted fashion. Essentially, this was due to the tightness and ruthlessness of C.P.P. control, which involved suppressing or co-opting any elements which might have been able to organise and lead opposition - most notably, the farmer-chiefs.<sup>2</sup> The period of C.P.P. tyranny had relatively permanent effects on the power of chieftaincy (which, having once been so thoroughly undermined, could not be expected ever to fully recover) and consequently on the ability of farmers to organise in protection of their interests.

Admittedly, this hypothesis was not seriously tested under the N.L.C. and Progress Party regimes, since relations between the farmers and the governing elite markedly improved. It is oversimple to imagine that peasantry (wealthy, middle or poor) conceive their interests as being consistently at odds (or identified) with those of the politico-administrative elite. Under the N.L.C. and Progress Party regimes, many farmers, and especially those in the Ashanti and Brong/Ahafo Regions, benefited substantially from the Rural Development programme. Unlike the urban lower class, these farmers remained enthusiastic supporters of the P.P. Government right to the end, (though large-scale fraud on the part of government-sponsored cocoa-buying agents gave rise to rumblings of disillusionment even among the Ashanti farmers

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1. Ibid., pp.384-95.

2. This assertion is based on evidence presented in Maxwell Owusu, Uses and Abuses of Political Power, (London: University of Chicago Press, 1970), pp.195-241; and conversations with Richard Crook, who is at present preparing a thesis on Politics in the Offinso District of Ashanti.

in late-1971).

In September 1971, the Sekondi-Takoradi strikers found themselves in a situation of direct (and consciously perceived) conflict of interests with these cocoa-farmers. It would be absurd to suggest that the cocoa-farmers thereby showed themselves to be fundamentally allied with the politico-administrative elite while the railway workers represented the forces of radicalism. It is unnecessary to reverse Saul and Arrighi's formulation in order to refute it. Both sides to this conflict consisted of mass groupings defined partly along class and partly communal lines. Instances of conflict between them can be expected to recur, since it is an obvious (though not necessarily wise) political strategy for ruling regimes to play off the most highly politicised section of the peasantry - the farmers of Ashanti and Brong/Ahafo - against the workers and urban masses of the southern coastal towns. One might simply point out that the Sekondi-Takoradi workers represent (in a Burkean sense at least) a mass grouping most of whose members are, if anything, poorer than the majority of the Ashanti and Brong/Ahafo farmers; that they would appear to have a broader and more coherent conception of their reformist aims; and that they retain a strength of independent organisation (if not of electoral influence) which it is doubtful that the cocoa-farmers now possess.

Saul and Arrighi's blindness to the importance of organisation as a factor in political action is even more apparent in their view of the unemployed and unskilled workers as the (potential) urban spearhead of a peasant-based revolutionary movement. In Ghana, as in other societies, the unskilled have generally depended on the skilled workers for organisation and leadership. The unemployed have proved unable to unite on any



large scale in pursuit of the most basic of common interest.<sup>1</sup> Lacking a common meeting-ground (apart, possibly, from the employment exchange), and characterised by intense competition among themselves for any source of sustenance, they have rather proved the most politically promiscuous of all socio-economic strata, in the African or any other political arena, constantly at the beck and call of the highest bidder. In those few instances where they have been incorporated as active participants in revolutionary movements (e.g. in "Frelimo"), it is precisely the depth of organisation, led by others, which is remarkable and deserving of admiration.

Conversely, it is the railway workers' strength of organisation, independent and democratic, their ability to resist suppression, division, or control by ruling regimes, which accounts for their quite singular significance in the Ghanaian political arena. No other group which might in the vaguest sense be termed a section of the 'masses' has succeeded in maintaining its ability to protest government policies, and even threaten the stability of ruling regimes, to anything like the same degree. What are the main sources of the railway workers singular political strength?

#### The Sources of Political Strength: Corporate Solidarity.

The power of the railway workers derives essentially from the strength of their corporate solidarity. Through united strike action they are able to exploit their strategic position in the national economy, disrupting the flow of imports and

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1. This is not of course to deny that many unemployed display impressive skill and initiative in organising themselves on a small-scale for criminal or semi-criminal activities; or that such activities might be seen as carrying political implications.

exports along the national transport system. This is an especially powerful weapon in a country such as Ghana, where a temporary halt in the flow of exports, and the consequent loss of much needed foreign exchange, can have disastrous repercussions for the economy as a whole. The power of the Sekondi-Takoradi workers has declined in this respect with the construction of a new and larger harbour at Accra-Tema and the failure, thus far, to coordinate collective action between workers in the two cities, but it remains very considerable.

Corporate solidarity tends to be self-reinforcing. So long as they maintain their solidarity, the rank-and-file know that they are relatively secure from threats of victimisation or dismissal for participation in strike actions, and their leaders from intolerable periods of detention. (Strike leaders frequently have been detained, but they have always been able to rely on their successors in Union Office to exert pressure for their early release). In turn, this knowledge makes junior officials the more ready to step into the positions of leadership vacated by those arrested and so maintain the organisation essential to unity in the course of major strike actions.

This sense of corporate solidarity further enables the railway workers to maintain a quite exceptional degree of control over the election and behaviour of their officials. Where ruling regimes have sought to impose officials on the Union, or induce them to co-operate with the government against the wishes of the rank-and-file, they have generally succeeded only in the case of top-level officialdom, whose control over the membership and their middle-level representatives has consequently been tenuous in the extreme. Due largely to the (traditional) strength of the ethic of solidarity and accountability, and the vigour (and occasional violence) with which the rank-and-file have been

accustomed to assert it, these middle-level representatives have proven remarkably resistant to 'buying-off' strategies on the part of government and top-level Union officialdom.<sup>1</sup>

The railway workers' success in maintaining their unity has not been absolute. In 1970-71, in particular, they were deeply and critically divided. Amongst other factors, the very strength as a political force which the railway workers possess through their solidarity has led ruling regimes to make especially vigorous attempts to undermine it. Nevertheless, it is the relative strength of their sense of solidarity exerting a strong pressure to re-unification even in 1970-71 which deserves emphasis and causal analysis here.

(a) Common class interest.

In both narrower and wider senses of the term class, the railway workers have long possessed a keen awareness of common class interest. In the narrower sense with which this sub-section is concerned, this awareness derives from three main considerations. Firstly, all manual workers have shared a common interest in struggling to obtain concessions from government, since wage increases for unskilled workers have generally been accompanied by similar proportionate increases for skilled workers, and vice-versa. Secondly, such concessions have generally had to be forced from government by direct action, or the threat thereof, since successive regimes, both colonial

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1. Behind the moral sanctions operating to maintain the principle of leadership accountability lies, ultimately, of course, the threat of physical force. Instances of individual officials being actually beaten up appear to have been extremely rare in the Union's history. But there have been numerous occasions on which a "mob" from Location has surrounded the Union Headquarters threatening physical violence if their demands were not adopted as official Union policy.

and independent, have refused to institute regular arrangements for collective bargaining with Railway Administration employees. Thirdly, a general and notorious shortage of promotion opportunities for manual employees in the Railway Administration has inclined them to concentrate on securing collective benefits rather than individual advancement.

The skilled workers, although earning twice as much on average as unskilled workers, have generally been equally dissatisfied with their real wage level. This is related to the question of relative job stability and commitment, but in a less simple manner than most writers suggest. Most of the skilled railway workers are almost totally dependent on their wages to maintain a living, have wives and children to support in the city, and expect to continue in their occupation for some considerable time. But few consider wage-employment a permanent career. Most rather aspire eventually to save enough to set up in business. Even small businesses generally bring better returns than a skilled worker's wage, and involve less work. Moreover, a private business involves work for oneself rather than an employer, and it is considered undignified for an old man to be in wage-employment. However, this aspiration requires considerable capital savings for its fulfillment. Consequently, as Adrian Peace has pointed out for the similar case of the Lagos proletariat, the desire of workers to leave industrial employment and enter the informal economy somewhat paradoxically increases the pressure for higher wages and thereby workers' willingness to engage in collective action.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Adrian Peace, "Towards a Nigerian Working Class: The Lagos Proletariat as a Political Elite", (paper presented to the Toronto Conference on Workers, Unions, and Development, April 1973), p.12.

(b) The relative weakness of ethnic divisions and patronage ties.

The ethnic heterogeneity characteristic of most African work-forces frequently inhibits the development of a sense of solidarity, and, especially where particular categories of worker tend to be recruited from particular tribal groups, gives rise to serious intra-union conflict. In Jos (Nigeria), for example, Billy Dudley has described how, between 1949 and 1958, a single Mineworkers Union gradually split into three separate unions for Hausa, Birom and Ibo workers under the pressure of ethnic-occupational jealousies and their exploitation by politicians.<sup>1</sup> The politics of ethnicity are often closely related to the cultivation of clientele followings by union leaders and personnel management. In her study of the trade union at the Nigerian Tobacco Company in Zaria, for instance, Dorothy Remy describes how the continuing social encapsulation of industrial workers in their ethnic communities encourages the development of a system of sponsorship through which workers exert influence on the personnel management in order to obtain employment for co-ethnics.<sup>2</sup> In return, such sponsorship often entails an obligation on the part of the beneficiary to provide political support for his patron within the structure of both the ethnic community or association, and that of the N.T.C. Union. This results in the division of the union into competing clientele and tribal followings. It also means that both sponsors and clients are obligated to the personnel manager and seek to cultivate his favour, thus undermining union solidarity and militancy.

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1. Billy J. Dudley, Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria, (London: Frank Cass, 1968), pp.238-41.
  2. Dorothy Remy, "Economic Security and Industrial Unionism: a Nigerian Case Study", (paper presented to the Toronto Conference on Workers, Unions, and Development, April 1973).

In the case of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers also, sponsorship by existing employees is crucial to an applicant's chances of gaining employment. The Railway Administration openly admits to giving preferential consideration to the relatives or recommendees of employees of long standing.<sup>1</sup> However, this system of job recruitment does not appear to have been systematically cultivated by personnel management or union leaders for the purpose of controlling workers' behaviour or building up clientele followings. Most probably, this would simply prove impracticable, since, once employed, railway workers are relatively secure in their jobs, and the extra-union dimension of ethnic association participation, which greatly strengthens the sense of reciprocal obligation in the case of Zaria, is almost entirely lacking in Sekondi-Takoradi.

Sekondi-Takoradi, as we have seen, is characterised by a remarkable lack of ethnic prejudice, or residential or associational clusterings. This is reflected in the structure of Railway Union politics, and, in turn, the organisation of the unions in the city on the basis of common recognition of collective, super-tribal interests has contributed to the lack of ethnic prejudice in the surrounding community. One partial exception to this generalisation must, however, be recognised. Workers from the Northern and Upper Regions of Ghana have continued to cluster in separate residential areas, and the majority of unskilled workers in the Railway Administration have been recruited from their ranks. Such a situation, where occupational, ethnic, and cultural, divisions closely coincide, might be expected to give rise to serious inter-ethnic conflict within the Union.

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1. Interview with Mr. J. Amisah, Railway Administration Personnel Manager, 17th June 1971.

In fact, the northerner unskilled workers have participated in Union affairs in a rather different manner from the majority of southerner skilled workers. Their mode of participation in the Union, as in the field of local government, has been through the intermediary leadership of the more experienced and literate amongst them, the rest following the instructions of these leaders as a solid bloc. The intelligence of these leaders in recognising the dependence of the unskilled on the skilled workers for the effective pressing of their grievances largely accounts for the participation of the former in the 1961 strike (where their own interests were not directly at stake), and the continued co-operation of both groups in a single union. It remains the case, however, that the relationship between northerners and southerners in the Union is more accurately described as one of alliance of interests rather than solidarity. This is an increasingly fragile alliance, moreover, as was illustrated by the skilled workers' failure to support the Permanent Waymen's strike of 1967. And it is possible that, as the growing level of unemployment forces more southerners to seek unskilled jobs, southerners and northerners will come into increasing conflict over such issues as the necessity of possessing education for promotion to supervisory positions on the Permanent Way.

The support of the unskilled workers is nevertheless of marginal concern to the skilled workers' power position, since this does not seriously affect the ability of the latter to bring the railway system to a halt. It is the sense of solidarity of this artisan class which is of greatest importance here, and it is this with which the remainder of this chapter is specifically concerned.

(c) The cultural community of skilled railway workers.

Max Weber writes:

"The rise of societal or even of communal action from a common class interest is by no means a universal phenomenon. (Communal action refers to that action which is oriented to the feeling of the actors that they belong together...) The degree in which communal action emerges from the mass actions of the members of a class is linked to general cultural conditions, especially to those of an intellectual sort." 1

The skilled railway workers have developed a sense of "belonging together", of cultural community, through their concentration in large groups in Takoradi harbour and the Location Workshops at Sekondi. A situation where three or four thousand workers are concentrated in approximately four square miles, most of them working at machines just a few yards from each other, makes for regular and easy communication between them, and a strong awareness of common interest. Union mass-meetings are easy to arrange and assemble. The workers sit together at lunchtimes, discussing personal problems, union affairs, and national politics. Union officials are easily contacted, and they and other 'articulates' enlighten the less well-educated or informed workers in the implications of new government policies and developments (or non-developments) in other parts of the country.

Moreover, this close contact and regular communication extends beyond the bounds of the work-place to the residential situation and leisure pastimes of the railway workers. Almost a third of them live in one of the railway villages situated near

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1. Max Weber, Essays in Sociology, (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), p.181.



the centre of Takoradi and at Ketan, on the outskirts of Sekondi (see Map 2). Another concentration is to be found in private accommodation in Essikadu, the home of such famed labour leaders as J. C. Vandyck and Pobee Biney (until his death in 1968). In each of these residential areas, the railway workers are neighbours and regular drinking companions as well as work-mates. Others live in private accommodation scattered throughout the city, but the relatively small size of Sekondi-Takoradi makes for frequent meeting. The Railway Club at Sekondi provides a social centre for some, catering for both sporting and drinking activities. To a large degree, therefore, the skilled railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi constitute a distinct social and cultural community (though, it is important to stress, they are not cut off from the wider urban community).

Within such a community, the ideas of such as Pobee Biney were the more easily communicated, and developed as the basis of a shared ideology or political culture. Moreover, the community's keen sense of its own history ensured that these ideas and stories of heroism were passed on from one generation to another and thus preserved as a living cultural influence.

(d) Ideology and leadership.

Class-consciousness, as several writers have observed, is not simply or necessarily a direct reflection of objective socio-economic position, but rather depends for its emergence on ideological influences and on an organised network of communication.<sup>1</sup> As we have seen, such a network of communication has long existed in the close-knit community of the railway and harbour workers, and within this the influence of such as Biney

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1. See, for example, Max Weber, Ibid.; and Giovanni Sartori, "Sociology of Politics and Politics of Sociology", in Government and Opposition, IV, 2, (1969).

has been great in awakening others to the transparency of inequity in the prevailing economic order. To quote Max Weber again:

"The emergence of communal solidarity ... is especially linked to the transparency of the connections between the causes and the consequences of the 'class situation'. For, however different life chances may be, this fact in itself, according to all experience, by no means gives birth to class action. The fact of being conditioned and the results of the class situation must be distinctly recognisable. For only then the contrast of life chances can be felt not as an absolutely given fact to be accepted, but as a resultant from either (1) the given distribution of property, or (2) the structure of the concrete economic order. It is only then that people may react against the class structure not only through acts of intermittent and irrational protest, but in the form of rational association." 1

In the case of the railway workers, the ideological influence to which they proved receptive was not that of explicit Marxist ideology. They reacted against Nkrumah's Marxism, partly (as we have seen) because it appeared 'alien', partly because it was Marxism of a distinctly Leninist variety with the emphasis on party control. The mode of consciousness they developed is perhaps more accurately described as 'radical populist' than as class-consciousness. Nevertheless, this similarly involved a progressive realisation of the unjustifiability and political source of the growing elite-mass gap in Ghanaian society. And the influence of Biney might properly be described as 'ideological', unless one limits the use of that term to highly sophisticated, 'written' ideologies. Certainly it served the ideological function of providing a group with a sense of its own distinct political identity and historical role.

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1. Max Weber, Ibid., p.182.

The nature of the railway workers' political consciousness will be examined more closely in the following chapter. Here, however, it is worth noting that the unifying power of Biney's ideology inevitably weakened with his personal departure from the Railway Union scene: and that, while Benjamin Bentum's leadership of the TUC provided a (somewhat watered-down, but perhaps more realistic) substitute for many of the railway workers, his influence was limited by the medium of communication he found it necessary to employ. Without the personal contact with the railway workers which Biney maintained, he could not hope to achieve the quasi-charismatic status of the latter. The reports of his policy-pronouncements and attacks on governmental elitism in the national press and TUC organs, reached the illiterate section of the rank-and-file, if at all, only through the translations of educated friends and local union leaders. Some of these, as we have seen, were biased against Bentum for reasons of personal careerism and, to some extent, genuine distrust: and none of the railway unionists of 1966-71 were capable of unifying and 'enlightening' the rank-and-file in the manner of Biney. The Railway Union split of 1970-71 illustrated the crucial contribution of leadership, as distinct from economic grievance or objective class position, to united class action.

(e) Community support.

The railway workers' ability to maintain a united front in the strike of September 1961 was greatly facilitated by the material and moral support they received from other sections of the community. (In 1971, also, some such support was forthcoming, but the community, like the body of railway-workers itself, was more divided in its allegiance.) Most crucial, clearly, was the essential physical support provided by the

market women's donation of food to the strikers. The alliance of market women and striking workers is not an unusual phenomenon in Ghanaian politics. In 1956, for example, the provision of food by the market women appears to have been a major factor enabling the mineworkers to stay out on strike for over two months.<sup>1</sup> Wherever there are large concentrations of workers, the local market-women clearly have a direct personal interest in the financial fortunes of their major customers. In many cases, family ties also serve to unite the two groups. In the 1961 Sekondi-Takoradi strike, however, and, to a lesser extent, that of 1971, rather more than this was involved. Moral support was expressed by other non-elite sections of the community, either verbally, or, as in the case of the 'tro-tro' drivers' work stoppage, in more active and visible forms. The railway workers gave the lead for the expression of a widespread sense of grievance among the common people of Sekondi-Takoradi, incorporating many particular grievances, and conceived along both communal and class dimensions. Accurately or not, the railway workers could convince themselves, on the basis of these demonstrations of support, that they were expressing a sense of grievance shared by the 'common people' of the country as a whole. People in other towns were regarded as being inhibited from engaging in similar protest actions simply because they lacked so courageous and solid a vanguard as the railway workers, capable of providing a lead and protective covering.

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1. The question remains, of course: How were the market-women able to do this without external financial assistance? It would seem likely that either the National Liberation Movement, (whom Nkrumah suspected), the International Federation of Mineworkers' Unions, or possibly even the Ashanti Goldfields Corporation itself was indirectly involved in financing the strike. However, this does not in any way alter the fact that the market-women were ready to support the strike, given any means to do so.

There was perhaps some truth to this, as other groups of workers were happy to admit once the Nkrumah regime had been displaced. But the fact remains that the Sekondi-Takoradi workers were (and still are) unique in Ghana in being able to count on this kind of widespread community support. This derives from the peculiar composition and structure of the Sekondi-Takoradi community. More than an isolated workers' township, the city of Sekondi-Takoradi is nevertheless numerically and economically dominated by the railway and harbour workers. Sections of the community lacking so direct an interest as the market-women in the workers' financial fortunes are nevertheless inclined to lend the latter support out of a more vague and general sense of common interest. In turn, the railway workers take on the function, wittingly or no, of representing communal rather than specifically worker discontent.

CHAPTER TEN.THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE RAILWAY WORKERS.

It is clear from the foregoing historical analysis that the Sekondi-Takoradi railway strikes of 1950, 1961 and 1971, were all highly political in conception. That is to say, they were consciously directed against government, rather than management, and were concerned to protest general policies and characteristics of the regimes in question rather than to express narrowly occupational grievances. It would further appear that they all exhibited a certain ideological consistency or continuity. The 1950 strike, though openly staged in support of Nkrumah's "Positive Action" campaign, was designed to articulate a particular, radical form of nationalism, rather than to indicate unconditional support for the Convention People's Party as such. The strike of 1961 expressed the railway workers' disillusionment with the C.P.P. regime, and, more particularly, its failure to live up to the radical expectations and promises of the early nationalist campaign. That of 1971 was a further protest against the elitist and authoritarian conduct of government. In hindsight, Pobee Biney's exhortation to beware too close an association with ruling parties, and to prepare to struggle for a minimal realisation of original nationalist aims, appears to run as a continuous thread linking all these strike actions. While such an interpretation might exaggerate Biney's personal influence, it is nevertheless clear that the railway workers' political behaviour has been consistently informed by intense resentment of the inequities of the prevailing socio-economic order; by the assumption that responsibility for such inequities must be laid at the door of government itself; and by a sense of their own responsibility to lead reformist protest. The precise nature of these attitudes is the main concern of this chapter,

the initial problem being why the railway workers have come to hold them with such exceptional strength and conviction. Later it is worth asking whether or not such attitudes may appropriately be described as a form of class-consciousness.

It is well to point out first, however, that those writers on African labour who have concerned themselves with the issue of 'consciousness' have mainly focussed on the particular issue of 'class-consciousness', and this in so pedantic, preconceived a manner as to obscure a more basic yet extremely important question.<sup>1</sup> Have African workers, or particular groups of workers, developed a distinct, radical ideology or political sub-culture (relative, that is, to the dominant culture of the national political elite), and, if so, what is its nature? There can be no doubt that the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi have developed a distinct sub-culture, even if this is not properly described as class-consciousness. This must, in any case, be considered an important intervening variable in the translation of their economic interests into political action.

Whether this inter-related set of attitudes and values is best described as an ideology or, alternatively, a political culture, is a more difficult question and one which it is not proposed to discuss at any great length here. The extremely restricted sense in which Berg and Butler (together with many American scholars) use the term 'ideology' has already been noted. Clearly, this does not exhaust its possible valid uses. In the wider sense which Joseph La Palombara (for example) gives the term, Pobee Biney's leadership of the railway workers was clearly ideological in character. That is to say, it involved "a philosophy of history, a view of man's (or a particular group's) place in it, some estimate of probable lines of future development,

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1. See, for example, P. C. Lloyd, Classes, Crises and Coups, (London: Macgibbon and Kee, 1971), pp.122-27; and Ioan Davies, op.cit., pp.131-32.

and a set of prescriptions regarding how to hasten, retard, and/or modify that developmental direction." <sup>1</sup> Although relatively unsophisticated, the main outlines of Biney's ideology were clear enough: all ruling classes, including the leaders of the Convention People's Party, tended to become elitist and authoritarian; it was the special responsibility of the railway workers, and, ideally, the labour movement, to challenge such tendencies and fight for the original, egalitarian aims of the nationalist movement. They could only do so by maintaining their solidarity and strict independence of the ruling party.

Yet it would be exaggerating Biney's influence somewhat to suggest that, even during the period of his leadership, the majority of the rank-and-file saw things so clearly or subscribed to these views in so committed and aggressive a fashion as Biney himself. On his departure from the Railway Union, moreover, and particularly after 1961, the influence of his prescriptions inevitably declined in intensity and immediacy, so that by 1971, the railway workers, critically divided amongst themselves, could hardly be said to subscribe to a unifying ideology. For both sets of workers (i.e. the memberships of both mother- and splinter-unions) memories of the Biney era and the 1961 strike exerted a significant influence on their attitudes and behaviour, in the one case fuelling anti-government feeling, in the other creating obstacles to too close or sympathetic a relationship to the Progress Party regime. But by this time, as indeed for the whole period after 1961, it is more appropriate to conceive of the railway workers as possessing a distinctive political culture, in which one very major element was the 'myth' of Biney and his

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1. Joseph La Palombara, "Decline of Ideology: A Dissent and an Interpretation", American Political Science Review, Vol. LX, No. 1, (March 1966).



revolutionary unionism.<sup>1</sup>

The use of the term 'political culture' is especially germane in this context in serving to emphasise two main characteristics of railway worker attitudes. Firstly, it is important to stress the mutual interrelation of the various attitudes, norms, and goals of railway unionism - in brief, militancy, the norms of solidarity and independence of government, radical discontent with the prevailing socio-economic order, and the impulse to oppositional political participation. In terms of Philip Converse's definition of political culture, the various elements "are bound together by some form of constraint or functional interdependence."<sup>2</sup> This interdependence might be held to reinforce the strength of each of the various constituent elements, especially since it is quite consciously perceived by at least the more articulate and influential members of the rank-and-file. This is not to say that any one element necessarily produces or presupposes all the others. For example, militancy, narrowly defined as an especial predisposition to strike activity, might in some cases be interpreted as merely a product of immaturity on the part of unionists or of the refusal of management to institute regular mechanisms for the resolution of grievances. It certainly does not necessarily imply a radically critical attitude toward the prevailing economic order, or a strong impulse to political participation (even where government is

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1. This is to use the term 'political culture' in a similar sense to that of most American political scientists. Roy Macridis, for example, defines a political culture as "a set of commonly shared goals and commonly accepted rules". R. Macridis, "Interest Groups in Comparative Analysis", Journal of Politics, Vol XXIII, (1961), p.40. Here, however, it is important to add to this definition the extremely significant element of 'a common set of historical traditions'.
  2. P. Converse, "The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics", in David Apter (ed.), Ideology and Discontent, (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1964), p.207.

inclined to interpret any major strike action as a 'political strike'). As Hobsbawm remarks, with his customary lucidity, "A willingness to raise barricades does not necessarily indicate an extremist programme."<sup>1</sup>

Nevertheless, where a radical critique of the existing social order is vigorously articulated, then labour militancy will obviously be strengthened by the addition of a moral dimension and sanction. In the particular case of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers, militancy might be held to result, in part, from particular characteristics of the labour force (to be discussed more fully below), and from a lack of adequate institutionalised channels for negotiating wage demands. But, it is argued here, the exceptional strength of railway union militancy, as of other elements of the culture can only be fully understood in relation to the radically critical attitudes held by the railway workers toward the existing socio-economic order and the role conceived for the strike weapon within the context of a wide-fronted political struggle. In this sense, railway worker militancy is certainly a constituent element, and, in some instances, a direct expression, of an integrated political culture at the centre of which lies a particular form of anti-elite consciousness.

Secondly, the term 'political culture' is used to emphasise the influence of tradition, of past historical experiences, selectively glorified and institutionalised as 'myths', on subsequent attitudes and behaviour.<sup>2</sup> The subjective moral

1. E. J. Hobsbawm, Labouring Men, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1968), p.374.
2. The use of the term, 'myths', is not intended to suggest that the historical events to which they refer are, necessarily, fictionalised or falsely interpreted in any way. Rather, Hobsbawm's comment seems particularly applicable to the railway workers: "A political or ideological tradition, especially if it sums up genuine patterns of practical activity in the past, or is embodied in stable institutions, ..... must affect political behaviour." Hobsbawm, op.cit., p.377.

legitimacy provided for the 1961 strike by the railway workers' 'Positive Action' involvement has already been remarked upon. Similarly, in the summer of 1971, when discussing union-government relations and the legitimacy of alternative courses of action, the railway workers frequently referred back to the experience and aims of the 1961 strike. No observer could doubt that they were highly aware, and equally proud, of the lead they had given in the early development of Ghanaian trade unionism and in resistance against government oppression ever since. Admittedly, this tradition was amenable to various, selective interpretations and contemporary applications. But it was not merely a lump of clay, capable of being moulded to fit any temporarily desired course of action.

Estimating the real part which tradition plays in the determination of subsequent attitudes and behaviour is, generally, one of the most difficult tasks confronting the historian or social scientist. This instance is no exception. At least one point may nevertheless be legitimately suggested. On one common interpretation of Marxian theory (supported, most notably, by Lenin<sup>1</sup>), the growth of class-consciousness is not a spontaneous or automatic corollary of developing socio-economic conditions, but rather requires some sort of ideological break-through. The highly uneven development of class-consciousness amongst workers is largely to be explained by the more or less successful educative activity of Marxist intellectuals, or by a particular group's possession of historical 'myths' supporting a revolutionary stance. The consciousness of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers is not, perhaps, 'revolutionary'. They do nevertheless exhibit an intense

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1. V. I. Lenin, What is to be Done?, (New York: International Publishers, 1929).

anti-elitism and a readiness for radical political action which, perhaps somewhat surprisingly given the nature of socio-economic change in post-Independence Ghana, are far from general amongst Ghanaian workers. In accounting for this distinctiveness, one important factor is clearly the belief in the legitimacy (under certain conditions) of political strikes lent them by Biney's ideological influence and so singular a set of historical traditions.

#### Distinctive Characteristics of the Railway Workers.

At the same time, however, certain special characteristics of the railway workers help account for their receptivity to Biney's views. In this regard, it is worth noting that railway workers were among the first groups to unionise in virtually all of the African territories, developing a militant style of unionism which frequently brought them into sharp confrontation with the colonial authorities, and, in many instances, with the new ruling regimes soon after Independence.<sup>1</sup> It would therefore appear that African railway workers in general, or, to be more precise, the skilled workers who provide the main driving force and source of leadership in railway unionism, possess distinctive characteristics which mark them out as an exceptionally militant and political group. These are not difficult to discern.

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1. See, for example, the references to railway unionism in Ioan Davies, op.cit., especially pp.141-42; and R. D. Grillo, African Railwaymen: Solidarity and Opposition in an East African Labour Force, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); also, for interesting accounts of particular railway strikes, see H. E. Conway, "Labour Protest Activity in Sierra Leone", Labour History, Vol.15, (1968), pp.49-63; and C. Allen, "Union-Party Relationships in Francophone West Africa", (paper presented to the Toronto Conference on "Workers, Unions, and Development in Africa", April 1973).

In the first place, a relatively high proportion of skilled railway workers possess at least some education, which provides them with requisite organisational skills and access to political news and ideas, as communicated through newspapers and pamphlets.<sup>1</sup> This however is equally true of skilled workers in other industries. What is particularly distinctive about skilled railway workers is their exceptionally high skill level, their intimate association with the pioneering technological force in under-developed societies, and their correspondingly high sense of their own status and importance. Many so-called 'skilled' workers in Africa are, in reality, but semi-skilled by international standards. The railway artisans and enginemen, however, are a genuinely skilled group, who have undergone many years of training, and who, as will be obvious to any observer of a railway workshop, take a great deal of pride in their work and abilities. They are, in consequence, extremely sensitive to disrespectful treatment on the part of management or government, and especially inclined to resent the low economic status accorded them relative to clerical and executive staff of no greater training or practical responsibility for the efficient operation of the railway system. It was this sense of status incongruity, and accompanying resentment, which, as we have seen, originally led to the formation of the Ghanaian Railway Union, and which might still be held to lie at the root of the railway workers' generalised sense of social injustice.

The railway system, moreover, is the arterial system of the underdeveloped economy. The strategic economic importance of the railway engine together with its technological qualities,

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1. Such literature includes Marxist pamphlets, of course, but these do not seem to have made much impact on the African rank-and-file, except perhaps in the Sudan. For information on the Sudanese labour movement I am indebted to conversations with Bill Warren.

tend to imbue those working with it with a corresponding sense of their own importance and power. A steam-engine in motion is an impressive sight for the most detached observer. For the engine-driver, or those artisans responsible for keeping it in running order, it reflects strength and glory on themselves. Through their intimate association with the railway engine, skilled railway workers come to see themselves as the powerful motor and driving force of national economic development, the harbingers of technological, and, in turn, of political, modernisation. They are not alone in seeing themselves thus. In the eyes of the local populace more generally, the railwaymen possess something of an heroic status as pioneering masters of the 'magical' modern technology. Herein lie significant psychological bases of railway worker militancy, solidarity, and political self-assertion.

Thirdly, the development of a shared political culture clearly requires some (formal or informal) organised network of communication. The railway workers possess such a network in the engine drivers travelling up and down the railway system. On the most superficial level, their mobility would appear to facilitate the co-ordination of strike action (though, as we have seen, 'up-country' railway workers have not always been ready to support the Sekondi-Takoradi workers). More important, the geographical mobility of the enginemen serves to engender a highly concrete sense of the nation, and a keen awareness of economic and political developments. This awareness is in turn easily, and almost inevitably, transmitted to the close-knit concentration of artisans at the Sekondi Workshops and Takoradi Harbour. The potential significance of this network is vividly summed up in the image of Pobee Biney arriving in Sekondi, standing on the footplate of his engine surrounded by Workshop artisans, whom he informs as

to the latest news of nationalist awakening up-country.

Finally, the railway workers' network of communication is at its most dense within Sekondi-Takoradi. The skilled railway workers of that city constitute a close-knit, and relatively stable, social and cultural community. Moreover, the fact that this railway worker community is not cut off from the surrounding urban community, but rather provides its social, economic, and cultural centre (at least for other non-elite groups), has a number of important consequences. The radical perspective of the railway workers tends to infuse the general ethos of the city. The railway workers take an interest in the fortunes of the urban masses - drastically declining fortunes, like those of the railway workers themselves, since Independence - which influences their view of government's performance. One thus finds a sense of shared social injustice, of belonging and suffering together, which helps account for the railway workers' conviction of acting as 'the spokesmen of the people', and of the legitimacy (even duty) of using the strike weapon as a form of political protest.

Biney's ideas have been outlined in some detail in an earlier chapter, and there is no point in repeating them here.<sup>1</sup> It might be useful however to delineate, at a more general level, the interdependence of the various attitudes, principles, and goals of Railway Union political culture. This is bound to exaggerate a little the degree of clarity and sophistication with which the majority of railway workers perceive, or can systematically enunciate this interdependence. But it is implicit in their attitudes, vocabulary, and behaviour, and was quite clearly outlined for the present writer's benefit by several of the more articulate and influential amongst them. It is the

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1. See Chapter Two, pp.72-79.

'consciousness' of this group, of course, which matters most. In reality, the political culture of the railway workers, as of any group, is differentially determined by individuals according to their political weight, the intensity of their views, and their relative articulateness.

#### Characteristics of the Railway Workers' Political Culture.

The culture of the Railway Union has been described by Drake and Lacy as one of "conventional trade union practice".<sup>1</sup> In so far as this is intended to emphasise the representative ethic of the Union, in distinction from the control-orientated, or productionist, ethic sometimes alleged to be characteristic of most African unions, the point is no doubt worth making. But such a description, even if one adds that this is a highly militant form of conventional union practice, clearly does not go far enough in delineating the distinctive character of railway unionism. The culture of the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers is both highly militant and highly political, and it is in the inter-relationship of these two characteristics that its distinctive character should be seen to lie.

The railway workers have tended to become centrally involved in national politics, not simply as a by-product of their militancy for improved economic status and the political importance attached by government to resisting such pressure. The railway workers might equally well be said to derive their militancy from their concern with general issues of government policy and conduct, and the frustration of their drive to effective political participation. In terms of Almond and Verba's typology of political cultures - "participant", "subject", and "parochial"<sup>2</sup> - the railway workers possess a highly "participant"

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1. St. Clair Drake and Lacy, op.cit., p.115.

2. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, The Civic Culture, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.17.



culture. Opinions as to government's policy decisions and general performance are openly expressed and discussed at mass-meetings of the Union, and frequently concluded with the phrase, "We must make our voice heard on this matter".<sup>1</sup>

The tenor of such discussions is generally critical and non-deferent. The reverse side of the railway workers' high opinion of their own rightful political status is a corresponding irreverence and suspicion toward government. Governments are expected to misrule in the interests of a select elite. But, rather than accepting this, the railwaymen seek to criticise government whenever possible and express scorn for those who resign themselves to such misrule: "The trouble with most of our workers here in Ghana is that they are too timid. They are too frightened to speak up."<sup>2</sup> The ideal political system should be open and responsive. The automatic tendency of the ruling class to seek to close up the system has to be checked by the forceful assertion of the popular will - most notably, by the use of the strike weapon. The workers have to act as "the eyes and ears of society" - and also its arm. The strikes of 1961 and 1971 both partook of this subjective significance: the stage had been reached where the strike weapon had to be used to maintain some semblance of the ethic of popular accountability in Ghanaian political life. Seen in this perspective, the use of the strike weapon is, on occasions at least, a political duty, not merely a right.

But while the railway workers' culture is highly political in this sense, it is at the same time determinedly non-partisan, or, to be more accurate, supra-partisan. The Union

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1. This was perhaps the most commonly used phrase at mass-meetings of the two Railway Unions which the writer attended in June-September 1971.

2. Interview with A. E. Forson, 3rd September 1971.

is not to be bound by too close an association with a political party. A temporary, informal alliance with a political party might be accepted, by some members at least, for the purpose of helping finance a major strike action, though even this is likely to attract the disapproval of most members as undermining the credibility of their claim to speak simply for 'the people'. Alternatively, union leaders might seek to cultivate their ties with government leaders in order to gain concessions. But the railway workers have a sufficiently clear sense of their own political goals, and of the distance between these and those of any party bandwagon, to willingly compromise their independence. The working assumption of Railway Union political culture is that untrustworthiness and oligarchic self-interest are to be expected of all party politicians and of any union leader who associates too closely with them:

"There are two things the railway workers will not stand for. An untruthful leader, someone who changes his mind to suit his interest. And a leader who sides too strongly with a political party. They know he will sell them out." 1

What are the railway workers' political goals? The liberal-reformist ideal of an open and responsive political system, certainly; and it might be argued that this ideal derives from socialisation in the processes and ethics of internal Railway Union politics. There is certainly something to this, (even though the theory of small-group socialisation operates, generally, on somewhat unsure foundations). But the railway workers clearly have more specific, socio-economic goals which inform their striving to participate as an effective, independent

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1. Interview with J. K. Baaku, 12th September 1971.

force in national politics. While the discussions of political issues at union mass-meetings cover a wide range of areas, they have one consistent theme: the desirability and urgency of a more equitable distribution of the national income (or in local terminology "the national cake").

Since the railway workers have generally been in an essentially defensive position, both politically and economically, since Independence, they often express this social ideal in somewhat defensive a manner: for example, "We are telling all those big men that they should shoulder their fair share of the national burden".<sup>1</sup> However, it is clear from the applause accorded the more positive and aggressive statements of reformist aims made by Pobee Biney in 1947 - 56, and by rank-and-file leaders in the course of the 1961 and 1971 strikes, that a more radical ideal is implicit in such negative formulations. This is also borne witness by the perfectly explicit manner in which, in the summer of 1971, many railway workers talked privately of "wanting to make all those big men to leave the country alone", and "taking away half their salaries so that we poor can eat and live like men".<sup>2</sup>

It is in any case clear that, far from according legitimacy to the existing pattern of socio-economic stratification, the railway workers deeply resent the failure to reform the pattern inherited at Independence, and the development since then of an ever-widening elite-mass gap. It is important, however, to be more precise as to just which forms, and degrees, of socio-economic differentiation are especially resented. The

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1. Speech by Kofi Imbeah at a Union mass-meeting, 14th August 1971.
  2. Interviews with Isaac Aygepong and Francis Dadzie, 26th August 1971.

railway workers are not, strictly speaking, social egalitarians. They are generally prepared to acknowledge the legitimacy of considerable differences in income levels so long as these correspond in some reasonable way - it is impossible to be very precise about this - to differences in skill-level, initiative, and contribution to the community. More particularly, (and very significantly from the perspective of the class-consciousness issue) they do not generally condemn the wealth of self-made businessmen. This is largely, no doubt, because the latter constitute the aspirational reference-group for many skilled workers. Hoping one day to save enough capital to start up in business themselves, the skilled workers tend to emphasise the hard work and intelligence required for entrepreneurial success. Many successful businessmen are held in high esteem, particularly those who (as a fair number do) continue to live in the poorer quarters of town, displaying generosity to those with some claim on their assistance or hospitality. Only those wealthy capitalists are seriously criticised who are believed to be ungenerous, who are suspected of gaining the capital for the establishment of their businesses through embezzlement of public funds, or (which is not very different) whose business success appears to stem primarily from their political contacts.

The principal objects of railway worker resentment, the foci of their sense of social injustice, are two-fold. First is the fact that middle- and senior-level clerical and executive staff receive so much higher salaries than skilled or unskilled manual workers. Such income disparities, (where the ratio between lowest and highest salaries of government employees had reached 1:39 by 1971), do not appear to be justified by the criteria of training, experience, or responsibility for the efficient operation of the public service. Most railway worker interviewees,

when questioned as to their view of Bentum's demand that the above ratio should be reduced to 1:10, thought that this was about right, (though they also felt that this was too radical a demand to meet with any response from government).<sup>1</sup> Resentment at these income disparities is generally directed not so much against the holders of senior executive positions as against the political class which is seen as responsible for maintaining them. This is not, however, to deny that the social snobbery and exclusiveness of many individual members of the salaried classes certainly do arouse much anger.

The second, and most acute source of grievance, is provided by the wealth, high-living, and indifference to socio-economic reform of the political class itself. It is considered quite intolerable that those who owe their positions, in theory at least, to the votes and/or confidence of 'the people', should proceed to "sell them out", award themselves vast salaries, treat public property as though it were their own, and rush with such offensive haste to sever their social ties with those they claim to represent. The railway workers clearly feel they have especial cause for indignation in this respect, since they played so prominent a role in achieving Independence. This focussing of resentment on the expropriation of public as private wealth helps to explain what might otherwise appear as an inconsistency. Although the Progress Party elite were, if anything, more wealthy, more obviously wealthy, and more detached than the leaders of the C.P.P. regime, they were extended a greater degree of tolerance than the latter by many railway workers. It was possible to argue that the majority of Progress Party leaders were wealthy men before they came to power, and could therefore less readily be suspected of having enriched themselves through the abuse of

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1. This demand was put forward in the "Proposals Submitted by the Trades Union Congress to the (Campbell) Salary Review Commission, 1971", (mimeo).

political office. On the other hand, some railway workers were far more concerned with the fact that the introduction of fee-paying for post-primary education, together with the P.P. regime's award of such high salaries to M.P.'s, and pensions to judges, were tending to make the social structure more closed and inegalitarian than ever before.

### Class, Mass, Community, and Political Consciousness.

In so far as the railway workers' political culture is highly antagonistic to the inequities of the prevailing socio-economic order, and stresses their specially designated political role in striving to change this pattern, it might perhaps be described as a form of class-consciousness. In at least four major respects, it deviates, however, from the classical Marxist model of class-consciousness. In the first place, it is liberal-reformist in orientation rather than truly revolutionary. The idea of forming a Labour Party, or seeking to take over control of the state in some other manner (though occasionally voiced) has never been taken very seriously.<sup>1</sup> The legend of Pobe Biney certainly endows railway worker political culture with something of a revolutionary strain; and there can be no doubting the radicalism of the changes the railway workers would (ideally) like to see in Ghanaian society. But this revolutionary impulse has, until now at least, been firmly held in check by a keen sense of political realism involving, most importantly, a pessimistic assessment of the support likely to be forthcoming from other groups.

Accordingly, they have come to resign themselves, and this with growing defensiveness, to playing a pressurising and

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1. The idea of forming a Labour Party was briefly discussed by the railway workers in 1949, 1969, and again in November 1971. RUA, Railway Union Executive Council Minutes, 3rd April 1949 and 7th March 1969. Interviews with various railway workers, November 1971.

checking role within a political system controlled by others.

Secondly, the 'exploiting' class is identified not as the indigenous capitalist class, nor clearly even as the foreign, neo-colonial capitalist class, but rather as the domestic class of politicians and senior civil servants. Given the Ghanaian situation of business' high degree of dependence on the politics of access to state machinery, the failure to develop a strong independent capitalist class, and the predominance of public over private employment, such an emphasis is readily understandable. The distinctive characteristic of railway worker culture lies in the deep conviction of the essentially exploitative character of all ruling regimes. Different as these might be in ideology, in the particular clientele networks they seek to benefit, or even, within a certain range, in general policies, they all become, and are expected to become from the railway workers' point of view, mere variants or sections of a single political class.

In the third place, the railway workers do not normally conceive or project themselves as acting simply as a section of the national working-class (i.e. unionised labour), but rather as the spokesmen of the people. This is perhaps more appropriately described as mass- than as class-consciousness. During Bentum's leadership of the TUC, considerable progress was made in the development of a nation-wide sense of working-class identity, but here, too, there was a tendency to rationalise the TUC's political self-assertion in terms of acting as 'the eyes and ears of society' rather than merely the voice of the working-class narrowly defined. Such terms are clearly intended to imply a large measure of common interest between unionised labour and other sections of the masses vis-a-vis the political class. The cynical observer might view this simply as a device to rationalise

union leadership's political ambitions, and rank-and-file economic demands, by laying claim to the representation of a wider constituency than the unionised workers alone, themselves very much a minority group within the national society. There is undoubtedly something to this, and the claim to mass representation is, of course, strictly speaking illusory. Nevertheless, the important point is that the railway workers believe in the idea of an essential unity of interest of the common people. In their view, it is lent confirmation by the supporting activity of other sections of the urban masses in such major strike actions as those of 1961 and 1971. It should also be recognised that there is some truth to the railway workers' self-image, and that this sense of identity and responsibility imbues the railway workers' political culture with a very real element of idealism. The idea of mass spokespersonship also, however, reflects the fact that the railway workers look to the common people of Sekondi-Takoradi, rather than to the unionised workers of other towns or cities, for moral and material support. This brings us to the fourth, and perhaps most important respect, in which railway worker political culture deviates from a Marxist model of class-consciousness. It has seemed justified, till now, to emphasise the relatively generalised nature of railway worker attitudes, and so highlight their distinctiveness. Generally speaking, political attitudes and behaviour in Ghana are most realistically described in terms of identification with the people of particular localities or particular personalities and patrons. The contrast in the case of the railway workers is indeed striking and deserves emphasis. Nevertheless, as the foregoing historical analysis will have made clear, the relatively general, principled nature of railway worker political attitudes is in practice qualified by the influence of local identifications. One important element



in the popularity of Biney, Woode and Ocran, for instance, was undoubtedly the fact that they were local men as well as 'radicals'. More important from the point of view of our concern here, it seems clear that when the railway workers talk of acting as the spokesmen of the people, they have primarily in mind the people of the Central and Western Regions of Ghana, and, even more particularly, the people of Sekondi-Takoradi. These are the people by whose welfare the performance of government tends to be judged, and to whom the railway workers look for support in times of confrontation with government.

It is of course far from unusual, in the 'advanced' countries as well as the underdeveloped, to find a pronounced communal dimension and sense of identity informing militant forms of working class action; forms which some historians, at least, would classify as manifestations of class-consciousness. One might point for example to the traditional militancy of South Wales steel-workers and the Northumberland-Durham miners.<sup>1</sup> The Marxist notion of a self-conscious national working-class, if not entirely mythical, is perhaps misleading as to the real nature of many historical examples of (so-called) class-action. But, in any case, this term does not seem properly applicable to an instance in which the notion of (national) class identification is so weakly developed relative to that of mass spokespersonship, and the communal element in this 'mass-consciousness' is so salient. If one seeks a single term to depict the distinctive nature of railway worker political culture as a reformist and communally refined form of mass-ism, then the most appropriate would appear to be that of 'radical populism'.

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1. See, for example, E. Welbourne, The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923); and E. W. Evans, The Mines of South Wales, (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961).

This is admittedly a somewhat vague concept which has been used by different writers to describe diverse social and ideological phenomena, and therefore far from entirely satisfactory.<sup>1</sup> Yet one of the harshest critics of its usage in the literature on African politics has conceded that it is employed in an illuminating sense by Martin Kilson to denote certain kinds of movement which challenge authority from a democratic perspective.<sup>2</sup> In Kilson's words:

"In describing political pressures as 'populist', I do not suggest that they were part of a systematic egalitarian ideology. I simply mean that they represent (or claim to represent) the lower reaches of provincial society, they come nearest to reflecting the political feelings of what we call the masses - the little people."<sup>3</sup>

In this sense 'Populism' provides an appropriate description of the consciousness of the railway workers, even if they are a somewhat less 'provincial' group than those Kilson has in mind. At least it serves to highlight a major reality of their social situation of which they are acutely aware, which will most probably influence their thinking for some time to come, and differentiate them in an important way from workers in the developed countries. However much progress is made in the development of a sense of working-class unity, Ghanaian workers will, by all indications continue to be a minority group within their national

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1. See for example, G. Ionescu and E. Gellner (ed.), Populism: its meanings and national characteristics, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970).
  2. John Saul, "Africa", in Ionescu and Gellner, op.cit.
  3. Martin Kilson, Political change in a West African State, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1966).

society, and one whose demands are liable to be presented (to considerable effect) by ruling elites as mere sectional selfishness. The success of their attempt to develop a major and socially meaningful role for themselves will depend in large part, on the credibility of their claim to embrace the interests of other, even more under-privileged groups; in short, to speak up for the 'little people'.

### CONCLUSION.

The railway and harbour workers of Sekondi-Takoradi have a quite exceptional political history, and, partly in consequence of this historical legacy, continue to display a union orientation markedly more self-assertive than that of other groups of Ghanaian workers. In spite of the foregoing presentation of one clearly deviant case, therefore, Elliot Berg and Jeffrey Butler's general view of African trade unions as displaying little political inclination or potential might still be considered substantially valid. Yet, there is a pronounced danger in such general perspectives of playing down the significance of deviant cases as though only the normal is to be considered significant, or as though a radical, political form of unionism possesses little national political import unless it becomes part of a national working-class movement of similar character. It is worth noting this danger here, not in order to attack Berg and Butler specifically, but because it is to be found in even more pronounced form in certain more recent writings on the subject.<sup>1</sup> Of course, a General Strike is likely to be more effective in political terms than any strike action staged by a single group of workers, (though this is certainly not always the case). But the railway workers of Sekondi-Takoradi have shown themselves quite capable of presenting serious challenges to the legitimacy and stability of Ghanaian ruling regimes without any such widespread assistance. Indeed, the significance of railway worker unionism in Ghanaian political history, and its interest for the student of Ghanaian politics, might be held to lie precisely in its exceptional character, not only as a

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1. For example, Henry Bretton, Power and Politics in Africa. (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1973).

form of trade unionism, but more generally, as a form of mass organisation and spokespersonship. This point deserves elaboration, and this it will shortly receive.

But, first, it is worth registering a further criticism of the Berg and Butler thesis on the question of general tendencies in African unionism. Accurate as their general characterisation of African trade unions might have proven till now, this study strongly suggests that, as far as Ghana is concerned, they have been right for very largely the wrong reasons. This, of course, matters a great deal. While Berg and Butler correctly identified the skilled workers as the real force to be reckoned with in the African unions, they were quite wrong in suggesting that the economic gains made by these workers in the post-Independence period would necessarily disincline them from radical political activity. In the first place, the prediction that skilled workers would steadily improve their economic position after Independence has, with the temporary exception of the 1957-61 period, proven quite false in the case of Ghana, as it has in Nigeria and a number of other African states. But, equally important, we have seen that the oppositional stance of the Sekondi-Takoradi skilled workers was not to be reversed or weakened by the concessions they did receive during that short period. Their keen aspiration to a more secure and comfortable niche in a more equitable social order, and consequent resentment of a pattern of development which appeared to deny any hope of its attainment, were not to be assuaged by such minor concessions. The railway workers assessed the legitimacy of the C.P.P., as of other regimes, by wider, and more radical criteria than immediate wage benefits.

Indeed, it is clearly invalid to posit any simple correlation between relative economic position and radical labour activity. In our analysis of factors making for the exceptionally

militant, political unionism of the railway workers, as for the growing radicalism of other sections of the Ghanaian labour movement in 1966-71, it became apparent that the workers' "ideology" must be a central concern. It really does matter, in short, not only who the workers are (in terms of their objective socio-economic position), but how they see themselves (in terms of the economic status they believe themselves to deserve, and how they conceive their social role). It will not do to dismiss the role of ideology in African trade unionism simply because it is not specifically Marxist or revolutionary ideology, or some pre-conceived model of class-consciousness, which is involved.

Ideological communication requires an efficient organisational network, as does the ability to co-ordinate and maintain strike actions. Berg and Butler attributed the vulnerability of African unions to governmental control in large part to organisational weakness, and in this they were surely correct. But the sources of union weakness which they emphasised - financial difficulties, and ethnic heterogeneity of membership - have been among the least important in Ghana. The main problem for Ghanaian workers has been that of gaining control of their own unions, or developing an informal corporate solidarity within it. Their main source of weakness, in other words, derived from the opportunistic initiation and subsequent control of embryonic unions by (C.P.P.) party apparatchiks, a kind of pre-empting of their development as genuine workers' organisations. With the exception of the pre-1950 unions, workers were never allowed (that is, under the C.P.P. regime) to participate actively in the running or development of unions of a representative, solidaristic character. They clearly lacked the sense of distinct class identity or the informal organisation to resist the firm hand of C.P.P. control. But the C.P.P. legacy was double-edged. While it

temporarily retarded the growth of representative unionism, it also provided the organisational machinery which, however control-oriented at the time, could later be taken over and moulded by workers to give expression to their own interests and opinions. Within the independent and relatively democratic union movement that developed in 1966-71, it was possible for leadership and rank-and-file to engage in a mutually educative dialogue as to the legitimate socio-economic aspirations and political role of Ghanaian labour.

Berg and Butler's general thesis must be criticised here, in short, as implying a serious under-estimation of the forces making, in the long term, for the growth of an oppositional political orientation and potential amongst Ghanaian labour.

There is no question that the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers have, in the past, displayed a quite exceptional political radicalism: nor that this past history and experience, together with certain distinctive characteristics of their occupation and of their relationship to the surrounding urban community, continue to engender a quite singular readiness to engage in oppositional political activity. This case-study has naturally tended to emphasise the significance of such particular characteristics and so singular a historical legacy. Nevertheless, in 1966-71, the basic motive force and ideological and organisational prerequisites for the railway workers' style of unionism were increasingly to be found amongst other groups of Ghanaian workers. Granted the continuing obstacles to a further strengthening of the unions' position - most notably, the force of the threat of mass dismissals in a situation of growing unemployment - it is at least unlikely that the Ghanaian labour movement will be treated in future as readily manipulable social matter, possessing little solidity, or, as one railway unionist described the

C.P.P.-TUC "a bit of a political joke".<sup>1</sup>

What might be considered the significance for the national political system of the development of relatively strong, independent, and (in the local ideological context) decidedly radical trade unions? It will be illuminating to approach this question historically, in the first instance, before proceeding to a more general statement. To take, for example, the question of labour's historical role in the African nationalist movements, Henry Bretton has recently elaborated Berg and Butler's basic position in the following terms:

"To be sure, workers, and in some cases trade unions, and certainly individual trade union trained leaders played a part in the march to independence. But it was only an auxiliary and short-lived performance. At best African labour can be credited with providing the spark that kindled the flame of independence in isolated cases - for example, in the 1947 railway strike in French West Africa."<sup>2</sup>

A further 'isolated' instance is surely provided by the railway workers' 1950 "Positive Action" strike in Ghana. If this strike merely provided "the spark that kindled the flame of independence", one might nevertheless point out that, without such a spark, the tinder of militant nationalist feeling may well have lain unignited and unobserved for some considerable time. Moreover, the realisation that the railway workers' constituted the only highly organised (and politically conscious) body of mass support which Nkrumah possessed should serve to emphasise the interest and significance of their organisation and politicisation, as well as to illustrate the somewhat flimsy foundations of the nationalist movement more generally. This, in turn, highlights the seriousness and bitterness of the subsequent process of alienation of the railway workers from Nkrumah's leadership.

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1. Interview with K. Imbeah, 12th June 1971.
  2. H. Bretton, op.cit., p.250.



After Independence, Berg and Butler describe the African unions as passively accepting an even more restricted political role, while Bretton similarly remarks:

"Independence, of course, by itself brought labour no real gains whatsoever. Soon after the new flag had been raised, organised as well as unorganised workers were promptly harnessed to the national chariot and were exhorted relentlessly to strive for goals essentially unrelated to traditional trade union interest. Substantial relief is nowhere in sight." 1

There is, of course, an element of truth to this, but one which is exaggerated and over-generalised.<sup>2</sup> It must be pointed out, on the basis of evidence presented in this thesis, that the description of organised workers being "promptly harnessed to the national chariot" constitutes a gross over-simplification of the political struggle waged within the Ghanaian trade union movement over the period 1950-61: and, further, that the resistance to party incorporation displayed by the railway workers and certain other groups did achieve the granting of concessions which temporarily raised the real level of workers' wages to the highest point of the century. Moreover, this struggle culminated, as we have seen, in the 1961 Sekondi-Takoradi strike, the desperate

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1. Ibid., p.249.

2. The question of the relative influence of union pressures on the level of real wages, in the post-Independence period, is far more complex than Bretton's formulation suggests. The present writer does not feel qualified to enter into the debate on this topic, but the reader might be referred to the following articles: P. Kilby, "Industrial Relations and Wage Determination: Failure of the Anglo-Saxon Model", Journal of Developing Areas, I, 1967, pp.489-520; J.F.Weeks, "A Comment on Peter Kilby: Industrial Relations and Wage Determination", Journal of Developing Areas, III, 1968, pp.7-17; P. Kilby "A Reply to John F. Weeks' Comment", Journal of Developing Areas, III, 1968; J.F.Weeks, "Further Comment on the Kilby/Weeks Debate: An Empirical Rejoinder", Journal of Developing Areas, V, 1971, pp.165-74; W.M.Warren, "Urban Real Wages and the Nigerian Trade Union Movement, 1939-60:

last stand of the railway workers, perhaps, but one which at least lent added momentum to the pressure for reform of the composition and character of the C.P.P. leadership.

It is worth noting Bretton's comment on this strike:

"The 1961 railway and port strike in Ghana, based mainly on Sekondi-Takoradi, graphically illustrates the importance of transport workers as compared to other segments of the labour force, and the limits of that importance if countered by the weight of the state. It demonstrates that even in conditions singularly auspicious for a successful rising the collective strength of rail and port workers is not sufficient to overcome the phalanx aligned against it." 1

Bretton here illustrates the tendency he shares with Berg and Butler to treat all instances of union activity, short of successful revolution, at a similar level of political insignificance, to paint all in the same colour of dull, depressing grey. The general theme is pursued with such deliberate disregard for major exceptions as to become doctrinaire, and even deterministic. Moreover, the criterion of 'political significance' adopted implies a subscription, not the less influential for being unconscious perhaps, to a simplistic Marxist perspective. This is especially clearly the case with Bretton, and it is worth

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Footnote 2 continued from previous page.

..A Comment", Economic Development and Cultural Change, XVII, 1969, pp.604-17; E. J. Berg, "Urban Real Wages and the Nigerian Trade Union Movement, 1939-60: A Comment", Economic Development and Cultural Change, XVII, 1969, pp.604-17; W. M. Warren, "Urban Real Wages and Nigerian Trade Union Movement, 1939-60: Rejoinder", Economic Development and Cultural Change, XVII, 1969, pp.618-33.

1. H. Bretton, op.cit., p.253.

summarising his general argument here since it represents an all too common tendency in the politico-economic approach to the politics of the African states.

Bretton argues that the attainment of formal political independence did virtually nothing to alter the locus of real power and decision - making with respect to the economic and socio-economic structures of the ex-colonial countries. This remained firmly located in London, Paris, and other centres of the industrialised world. Indeed, the vicious circle of growing indebtedness and developing underdevelopment operated, if anything, to increase the dependence of African governments on the advanced countries. If the new political elites in the African states soon discovered that their supposed independence was quite mythical, the various interest-groups comprising "the masses" have been forced to accept the reality of their continuing importance in even harsher fashion, though they have sometimes been slower to distinguish illusion from actuality. The power of the new ruling elites might be severely constrained by external pressures, but for the purposes of domestic containment it is sufficiently formidable to render the relative power of local interest-groups, to all intents and purposes, non-existent. Everything points to an elitist interpretation of African politics. "Why then", Bretton asks, "do we concern ourselves with pressure and interest groups" Because even in an inchoate state they are important instruments of rule".<sup>1</sup> The idea that they might, in certain instances, provide a significant checking mechanism to the exercise of such rule is not deemed worthy of serious consideration.

But it is not realistic to suggest that the ruling regime of these states are insensitive to popular pressure and expressions of protest. Unionised labour and other interest-groups are sometimes able to wield considerable influence, if often only negative or checking influence, over the conduct of government, and thus over the governance of their own destinies.

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1. Ibid., p.196.

Amongst other considerations, African governments do vary greatly, within the external constraints imposed on them, in the relative benevolence and civility of their rule; and this is not entirely independent of the attitudes and influence of local interest-groups, even if the exact connection involved is sometimes impossible to trace with any precision. The point about such protests as the 1961 Sekondi-Takoradi strike is not that a segment of labour, such as the railway workers, can or cannot hope to defeat or displace a ruling regime on their own account. It is simply that they (and they virtually alone) can at least resist the forces of government control, and, on occasion, articulate widespread popular discontent, thereby harrassing ruling regimes into making reformist gestures. Under more favourable circumstances, they might (as in 1966-71) provide the main power base for a national trade union movement, capable of articulating reformist demands on a wide platform and more regular basis. Little positive or tangible might materialise of the promises governments are thus worried into making, depending on the structure of forces within the ruling regime. But at least such challenges might operate as a checking influence on the rapacious self-interest of ruling elites, encourage the development of a more conciliar style of rule, and serve to uphold some semblance of the ethic of popular accountability in Ghanaian political life. Were this source of countervailing power to be completely eliminated from the Ghanaian political system, it might well come, with hindsight, to be viewed in far more positive a light.

ANNEXURE A.

Survey Questionnaire administered to a sample of railway workers at Sekondi Location.

## Face-sheet:

Age

Tribe and Place of Origin

Job Category

Family size (and number of non-nuclear dependents)

Length of time resident in Sekondi-Takoradi

Length of time working in the Railways

Future intentions and aspirations

Father's occupation

Educational level

## Questions:

- (1) Which Union do you belong to? Why do you prefer this to the other Union?
- (2) What do you consider to be the most important qualities of a good trade union leader?
- (3) Have you ever been, or would you like to be a union official? Why, or why not?
- (4) Do you think the present TUC leadership is doing a good job?
- (5) When do you think it is legitimate for workers to strike? What do you think is the main cause of the large number of strikes in Ghana?
- (6) Do you think Ghana's politicians and senior civil servants are (a) mostly fairly honest, (b) setting an example of making sacrifice, (c) capable of improving the country's economic situation?

- (7) Do you generally approve of the recent budget?  
Why, or why not?
- (8) Do you agree that the Government's first priority should be rural development?
- (9) Are you hopeful of gaining any wage increase from the Campbell Commission or the Pay Research Unit?
- (10) Thinking of the next few years, which three of the following goals do you think the unions should concentrate on achieving:
  - (a) Obtaining improved conditions of service and promotion opportunities.
  - (b) Bridging the wages gap between the lower- and higher-paid.
  - (c) Obtaining more influence in the administration of the industry.
  - (d) Developing more union spirit and solidarity among workers.
  - (e) Improving the education and discipline of the workers.
  - (f) Making workers more politically conscious.
  - (g) Establishing a fuller programme of social activities and facilities.
  - (h) Helping to provide employment for the jobless.

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