

**The Ghana National Association of Teachers under the Provisional National Defence Council, 1982-1991: Caught in a Warp of Cooperation and Unresolved Grievances?<sup>1</sup>**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article examines the relationship between the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime from 1982 to 1991. It pays attention to grievances of teachers pursued by GNAT, methods employed to seek redress and what results it achieved. Faced with government insensitivity, GNAT was unable to militantly agitate for its demands. Situating the analysis in the socio-political and economic milieu of the 1980s, the paper argues that the relationship between the PNDC regime and GNAT remained frosty and jolty, throughout the duration of the existence of the regime, even though, GNAT did not see itself as antagonistic to the PNDC government. The PNDC government on the other hand, in addition to dissolving the political hub of the education sector, the Ghana Education Service (GES) Council, engaged actively in subjecting some key personalities in the education sector, who were members of GNAT, to one form of repression or another, even as it accepted memoranda, and engaged in round table discussions with GNAT over its grievances; the regime failed to actively resolve grievances of teachers presented through GNAT. Thus the PNDC government seemed to have employed simultaneously cooperative and repressive tactics in dealing with GNAT.

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**Key Words:** Teacher Unions, Provisional National Defence Council, Ghana National Association of Teachers, Ghana Education Service, Teachers, Ghana.

## RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine la relation entre l'Association Nationale des Enseignants du Ghana (GNAT) et le régime du Conseil National Provisoire de Défense (PNDC) de 1982 à 1991. Il accorde une attention particulière aux griefs des enseignants poursuivis par le GNAT, aux méthodes utilisées pour obtenir réparation, et aux résultats que le GNAT a atteint. Face à l'insensibilité du gouvernement, le GNAT n'a pas pu revendiquer ses exigences. En situant l'analyse du milieu socio-politique et économique des années 1980, le document affirme que la relation entre le régime du PNDC et le GNAT est resté glaciale et cahoteuse pendant toute la durée de l'existence du régime, et ce même si le GNAT ne se considérait pas comme antagonistes au gouvernement PNDC. En revanche, le gouvernement PNDC, en plus de dissoudre le centre politique du secteur de l'éducation, le Conseil du Service d'éducation du Ghana (GES), s'est activement engagé à commettre des actes de répression sous une forme ou sous une autre à certaines personnalités clés du secteur de l'éducation, qui étaient membres du GNAT, et ce même si le PNDC avait accepté des protocoles et s'était engagé dans des tables-rondes avec le GNAT sur ses griefs. Le régime n'a pas réussi à résoudre les griefs des enseignants présentés par le GNAT. Ainsi, le gouvernement PNDC donnait l'impression d'avoir simultanément utilisé des tactiques de coopération et de répression dans les négociations avec le GNAT.

## Introduction

By 31 December 1981, when the PNDC seized power, Ghana had been in a state of economic decline. Inflation averaged 50% per annum during 1976-81, government minimum wage had dropped by 80% between 1975 and 1981, the real wages of lower ranking government workers had dropped by 74%, and senior managers wage by 90% (Kraus, 1991:22). This development sparked student demonstrations and convulsive workers strike actions. It was on the heels of these

socially destructive developments that Rawlings and his cohort of military 'revolutionaries' and civilian accomplices appeared as the next line of military saviours in Ghana, committing their government to so-called revolutionary change. Rawlings and his group of "revolutionary messiahs" pledged to improve the living and working conditions of workers and other vulnerable social groups. He vowed to cleanse the nation of corrupt practices, eliminate waste in public corporations and purge the economy of what he termed as 'neo-colonialist orientations' (Kwamina 2001:13). The PNDC promised that its economic policies were geared towards the mobilization of state power for the benefit of the poor.

Nevertheless, influenced by international pressures and growing economic deprivation of the poor, which the PNDC appeared not to be able to solve with its populist rhetoric, the regime made a quick turnabout, abandoned its idealist rhetoric and turned to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank for financial support. This support was rolled out in the form of economic recovery and adjustment policies whose implementation was nothing short of austere, repressive and a disincentive to the working class (Kwamina 2001:14–15). Even so, the PNDC sustained its political clout by courting the support of influential individuals and organisations (see Nugent, 1996). In its early stages, it co-opted left-wing elites and notable figures who commanded popular constituencies into its administration in order to widen its support base. At the same time, however, the regime engaged in blatant repression and human right abuses, punctuated by political murders, detentions without trial and 'detentions in-communicado' of both perceived and real opponents of the regime in order to discourage popular opposition (see Oquaye, 1995; Bofo-Arthur, 2006).

It must be emphasised that Ghanaians did not greet the 1981 coup with the same euphoria that accompanied previous coups (see Nugent, 1996). This informed Rawlings's concerted effort to galvanise support from organisations with large following. GNAT was one such organisation that the PNDC turned to for support. In early 1982, the PNDC made overtures towards GNAT which was the largest public sector union outside the Trade Union Congress (TUC). The attempt was however less successful in the initial stages as the leadership proved difficult to co-opted. For instance, GNAT's general secretary then, Thomas Amponsah Bediako, refused an offer to serve in the PNDC government. As a result the government saw the GNAT, especially, its leadership, as opposed to the regime

and for that matter the revolution (Bediako, 7 January 2011. Interview).<sup>2</sup> After threats on his life, Bediako resigned in early 1983, and went into voluntary exile (Ibid). Perhaps because of threats to ban the Association and the pressure put on the leadership of the Association by the PNDC, the National Executive of GNAT, in two separate meetings, held on 7 January and 11 February 1982 respectively, resolved to cooperate with the regime. Consequently, It declared its intention to support sound educational and other national policies that the PNDC would undertake (GNAT 1982). The GNAT thus, eventually, joined the cohort of workers organisations that acquiesced to PNDC rule between 1981 and 1991 (see Herbst, 1991).

The limited opposition from labour to the PNDC's repressive rule and austere economic policies, given the relative militant history of Ghana's labour movement (see Jefferies, 1978; Crisp, 1984) has intrigued scholars who have studied labour-government relations during the PNDC rule. It has been argued that labour's acquiescence to PNDC rule was conditioned by the ability of the regime to employ repression and intimidation to counteract social unrest (see Gyimah-Boadi & Essuman-Johnson 1993; Herbst 1991). Notwithstanding the astuteness of this observation, it belies the complexity of the PNDC's dealing with social groups generally and organised labour in particular. For even as Rawlings cracked down on union leaders, he simultaneously sought rapprochement with professionals and other elites (see Boafo-Arthur, 2006). PNDC's dealing with GNAT, as this study will demonstrate, was characterised by both repression and cooperation. The regime readily accommodated GNAT's formalistic approach – which involved writing petitions, letters and demands for round-table discussions. However, the government also employed repressive and high-handed tactics in dealing with the GNAT and in negotiating teachers' grievances. The shrewd combination of repression and cooperation stifled popular discontent and worked to stem the tide of acute labour unrest that could have emanated from the education sector.

The unique role of teachers as state employees responsible for shaping hegemonic or alternative discourses that can entrench or delegitimise state power makes their organisation's interaction with the state compelling to study. The remarkable ability to organise teachers living and working in both the rural and urban areas into paralysing the educational system, make teachers' unions a source of worry to many governments (see Konings, 2006). Studies have shown that

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<sup>2</sup> Thomas Bediako trained as a teacher and joined the GNAT executive in the late 1960s. He acted as general secretary from 1971 to 1972 and later as full-time general secretary from 1977 until he resigned in 1983. He later served as the general secretary to the All-African Teachers' Organisation.

teachers' role in transmitting society's dominant values and norms, puts them in a position of considerable influence if they choose to act as agents of social change. Nevertheless, their desire to be closely connected to the ruling elite may render them reluctant to challenge a system that offers them higher status and a channel for social mobility (see Cook 1995; Torres et al. 2000). It has been observed that teachers in Africa may be connected to the ruling class if those in power turn to them to legitimise their rule. To this end, teachers in Africa, it is argued, may be in a position to influence not only educational, but also political developments while at the same time pushing for *upward mobility in the society* [my emphasis] (see Woods, 1996). However, because of the fragile economies of African states, which inhibit their ability to sustain patronage to the large mass of teachers, who in most African countries, constitute the largest public sector employees, teachers' unions and their membership may become the greatest adversaries to African governments, challenging austerity measures and posing as alternative to the ruling elites (see Woods, 1996; Welmond, 2002; Konings, 2006). While I agree with the foregoing analysis that the social role of teachers combined with changes in their economic position (improving or deteriorating) may condition their unions' relationship with the state, the case of GNAT poses some questions. I show through this study that the nature of a political regime and the general political environment also play a key role in determining teachers unions' ability to utilise their political potential to the benefit of their members.

The political factor – that is, the nature of a country's government and its overall strategies – overt and covert, in dealing with social groups is an important factor that may condition teacher activism. The evidence from Ghana suggest that even amidst deplorable conditions of service for teachers, poor salaries<sup>3</sup> and general economic decline, as well as dismissals of its members, the GNAT was

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<sup>3</sup> While it is true that the salaries and conditions of service of teachers, just like those of other workers, started to deteriorate in the 1970s, it is equally true that the PNDC government's attempt to salvage the economic downturn through the implementation of the World Bank inspired Economic Recovery Programme (ERP) and Structural Adjustment Policies (SAP) only resulted in improving the macro-economy to a limited degree. The characteristically draconian approach to implementing the policies which underscored thorough liberalisation of the economy, cut-back on public employment, and unhindered operation of private capital did not please many, at least, at the local scene. While the austere implementation of the policies pleased the West, even the radical elements in the PNDC, deplored the IMF and World Bank inspired adjustment policies and perceived it as a betrayal of the revolution (See Boafo-Arthur, 2006: 260). The SAP and ERP impoverished the working class, including teachers, and pushed several workers' organisations into the offensive mode.

reluctant to employ militant alternatives to fight its cause. Rather it only resorted to mild forms of protest, characterised with formalistic approaches such as petitioning, memoranda, and meetings with the regime elites, which largely proved ineffective. The only time GNAT could adopt and sustain a strike to push its demands was in 1991 – a period when the political space had opened for such actions. In addition, even though the leadership of the PNDC needed the support of the teachers union and its membership to legitimise its rule, GNAT's declaration of formal support for the PNDC, could not be described as an alliance with the ruling elite. GNAT's relationship with the PNDC remained jolty and suspect. The actions of the GNAT should be understood within the logic of the character of the PNDC regime and the general political environment. While the regime's elites readily met with the GNAT to negotiate its grievances, the government did not hesitate to employ intimidating and repressive strategies against key figures in the education sector who were members of the GNAT. Beyond this, generally, the PNDC government "...remained as unwilling as ever to countenance a generalised state of labour unrest, especially within the state sector" (Nugent, 1996:184). This posturing of the PNDC government appeared to have stifled any militant discontent that could have emanated from the front of organised teachers. Thus, in describing the actions of GNAT under the PNDC rule, I extrapolate into the existing debate how the character of the PNDC government and the general political environment conditioned GNAT's relationship with the government from 1982 to 1991. Before we delve into the crux of the article, a brief history of the GNAT is instructive.

### **GNAT: The Early Years**

GNAT is the single largest public sector union in Ghana with a total membership of 200,000.<sup>4</sup> The development of teacher unionism in Ghana can be traced to the formation of the Government School Teachers Association (GSTA) in 1926.<sup>5</sup> The formation of GSTA was inspired by the colonial education department, which sought to use a teachers' organisation as a platform to improve professional practice (see Bame, 1973). The GSTA, was therefore, concerned with the professional development of Gold Coast teachers rather than leading the demands for improved salaries and work conditions. It could therefore not be a good

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<sup>4</sup> GNAT, [www.ghanateachers.org](http://www.ghanateachers.org). Retrieved on 10 January 2014.

<sup>5</sup> For detailed history, see Asiedu-Akrofi, 1971; Osae, 1981; Amoako, 2014.

pedigree for future teacher unions. By 1927, the GSTA had 62 branches and had expanded to other areas of the country beyond its nucleus in Cape Coast. The GSTA lapsed into a period of dormancy in the 1930s. It appeared that the emergence of the relatively militant Assisted School Teachers Union (ASTU) in the 1930s suppressed the existence of the GSTA.

The blistering impacts of the economic recession of 1929 on Ghanaian teachers, and the education sector generally, stimulated the formation of the ASTU, (renamed Gold Coast Teachers' Union in 1937) to defend mission school teachers whose conditions were affected by a 25% cut in educational budget by the colonial administration. The ASTU was formed in 1932. It comprised a loose grouping of disgruntled mission school teachers who were concentrated mainly in Accra and its surrounding communities. The ASTU represented the earliest attempt by Ghanaian teachers to organise along the lines of trade unions. The ASTU used the protest strategies of the 1930s, which were exemplified in petitions, deputations and lobbying, to present their grievances to the colonial government.

Other teacher organisations emerged after 1940. These teacher organisations were products of the educational expansion in the Gold Coast. Most of these teachers' organisations during the period represented the fragmentation of the education system (see Amoako, 2014). They were formed based on church affiliations, subject areas and levels of educational qualifications. Prominent amongst these unions were the Methodist, Presbyterian and Catholic schools teachers unions. Other teachers' associations were the African Graduate Teachers Association, the Mathematics Teachers Association and Training College Teachers' Association. In 1955, the defunct GSTA was also revived and renamed the National Union of Teachers (NUT). The emergence of these diverse groups of teacher organisations and an acute rivalry that developed between the NUT and the GCTU delayed attempts at forming a single union for all teachers in the Gold Coast. The unions disagreed fundamentally on the organisational structure of a unified teachers' union. The GCTU advocated for the formation of a professional teachers' organisation, while the NUT favoured the formation of a teachers' union based on trade union principles (Amoako, 2014). Eventually, when the CPP government promulgated the Industrial Relations Act of 1958, all existing teacher associations were compelled to merge with other education workers to form the Union of Teachers and Education Institution Workers (UTEIW) as an affiliate of the Ghana Trade Union Congress (GTUC). In 1962, however, the teachers opted

out of the GTUC, reorganised independently of the other education workers, and formed the GNAT.

GNAT, until 1975, remained more or less a federation that comprised of sectoral teacher organisations, which represented the interests of teachers in different educational units, subject areas, and qualification levels. These associations were organised into two major blocs in GNAT. These were the Elementary School Teachers Association (ESTA) and the Association of Secondary School Teachers (ASST). The ESTA drew its membership from all the associations of the elementary mission and local authority schools. The ASST also comprised of teacher associations in the training colleges, technical institutions and secondary schools (Asiedu-Akrofi 1971:60). Nonetheless, when the Ghana Education Service Act, 1975, was passed all constituent associations of the GNAT were dissolved and incorporated into the GNAT. After this period, GNAT became the only recognised Association that represented the interests of all teachers in pre-tertiary educational institutions (Asiedu-Akrofi 1971:42). Until recent reforms in GNAT concerning its membership composition, the membership of the GNAT included teachers who occupied top management positions in the Ghana Education Service, with the exception of the Director General of Education.

### **Whither Cooperation?**

By the middle of 1983, strains in the so-called cooperation between the GNAT and the PNDC regime had become evident. Acting on reports of wildcat strikes by teachers throughout the country from Tamale to Koforidua, the Director General of Education, D. V. Owiredu, convened a meeting between himself and the General Secretary of GNAT on 14 June 1983. At the meeting, it was revealed that the main cause of the strikes was PNDC law 42, which abolished the Ghana Education Service (GES) Council (GNAT 1983). The GES Council was established by the National Redemption Council (NRC), the military regime that overthrew Busia's Progress Party government in 1972.<sup>6</sup> The NRC promulgated decree 247 in 1974 which created the GES Council to serve as the governing body of the Ghana Teaching Service. The GES remained a relatively independent body nominally under the ministry of education. It had the responsibility to control the

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<sup>6</sup> The NRC regime was led by Col. I. K. Acheampong. It was later renamed the Supreme Military Council I and II and after a palace coup in 1978, power fell to F.W.K Akuffo, who was also overthrown in 1979 in the June 4<sup>th</sup> uprising which was led by Jerry Rawlings.

allocation of public resources that accrued to the education sector and also implemented government education policies. It was charged with the control and management of the teaching service on matters of policy. It also had the additional mandate to recruit and discipline teachers (Republic of Ghana, 1974).<sup>7</sup> The existence of a GES Council reduced undue political interference with the management and running of the education service, and ensured that policy implementation was distinctly divorced from policy formulation. Thus when the Council was dissolved, GNAT feared that the security of tenure of its members would be compromised, hence, its agitation over the Council's re-establishment. This subject is dealt with in detail in the next section.

The striking teachers resented the compulsory retirement of some directors of education by the PNDC secretary for education. They were also frustrated with the regime's failure to pay legitimate entitlements, and were generally dissatisfied with the prevailing pension scheme (GNAT, 1983). These issues, among several others, became some of the main grievances that the GNAT took up with the regime from this period until the return to constitutional rule in the early 1990s. The reluctance of the regime to address these grievances eventually resulted in a one-week strike in 1991, at which time the political environment was sufficiently relaxed for such an action. Even though GNAT threatened to strike in 1985 and 1986, these threats were never carried out. Evidently, the generally repressive atmosphere under the PNDC regime influenced the GNAT, just like other workers organisations, to exercise caution in executing any radical action such as strikes and protest marches to present its grievances – for the regime did not hesitate to deploy the state's coercive apparatus to avert social unrest. Now, let us turn to a discussion of the contestation over the dissolution of the Ghana Education Service (GES) Council.

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<sup>7</sup> Copies of this Act are available at the Ghana Law School, University of Ghana. The Ghana teaching Service was transformed in 1976 into the Ghana Education Service. The membership of the Council looked favourable to teachers. Of the eleven members of the council, three of them were educationist, and of the two government appointees on the council, one of them was to be an educationist, making teacher membership the highest. Two other members were to be from religious organisations, two eminent citizens, and the Principal Secretary to the Ministry of Education and a chairman who was to be a person of vast and sound academic and administrative experience. The council was thus fairly composed of independent individuals who had vast experience in education management or at least were level-headed enough to administer education in a way that would benefit the entire society and the teaching profession which formed the bedrock of education.

### **The Dissolution of the GES Council**

From 1983, the GNAT locked horns with the PNDC on the re-establishment of the Ghana Education Service Council. Section 33 (2) of PNDC law 42, which was passed in 1982 dissolved the GES Council and transferred its duties to the secretary of education, whose rank was equivalent to a minister of education. The official explanation for the dissolution of the council was that, like other public bureaucracies, corruption had affected the entire GES. To curb its corrupt practices and inefficiencies, the regime argued that there was the need to bring it under its control (Cobbe, 1991: 107). The dissolution of the council however, was strongly protested by GNAT who felt that without the council the teaching service would be exposed to undue political interference and the security of tenure of teachers (GNAT 1983) would be affected.

The GNAT protested the dissolution of the council and demanded its re-establishment. On 18 March 1983, GNAT presented an 11page memorandum to the PNDC on law 42. It stressed the need to retain the GES council and requested the regime to amend section 33 (2) (GNAT, 1983). Following from the memorandum, the PNDC invited the GNAT to the Christiansborg Castle - the seat of government - on two occasions for discussions on the dissolution of the council. In one meeting held on 13 April 1983, the government promised to replace the GES council with an Interim Management Committee (IMC). The regime however reneged on its promise and failed to establish an IMC for the education service (GNAT 1984). This prompted the GNAT to threaten a strike action. The regime responded to this threat in a way that painted a picture that the GNAT was acting in bad faith. The Education secretary stated that:

The foregoing state of affairs leaves us wondering. Because the GNAT executive must be aware that there are moves in government to look into the law apart from the fact that it is now agreed that an interim management for the Ghana education service is to be established to replace the dissolved Ghana education service council-an area of possible legitimate concern to teachers (Quoted in Osei-Mensah, 1994).<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This was a special feature in the *Daily Graphic* that outlined all the grievances of the GNAT since 1982.

The secretary's statement appears to suggest that it was the GNAT which was impatient with its demand for the re-establishment of the council, rather than the PNDC not fulfilling its promise. However, a closer look at the evidence suggests that the PNDC government made the promise without any real commitment to fulfilling it.

After waiting until 1986 without any sign that the regime was committed to re-establishing the council or even the IMC it promised, the GNAT wrote again to remind the government and to express its dissatisfaction with the way the government was handling their demand for a governing body for the GES. The content of the letter is instructive:

The PNDC law 42, section 33 paragraph 2 dissolved the council and its functions were transferred to the PNDC Secretary of education. Since then we have made repeated calls for the establishment of a governing body for the service as in the case of all services, which form part of the Ghana public service. We find it extremely difficult to understand why the government has up to now not decided to appoint a governing body of the service. We wish therefore to advise the government to as early as possible appoint a council for the service (GNAT 1986).

The repeated demands of the GNAT for the re-establishment of the council were not unfounded as its fears of undue political interference in the running of education and the threat to the security of tenure of its members were confirmed by later events. The regime resorted to compulsory retirements and periodic interdictions of directors of education, in addition to the mass dismissal of headmasters of senior secondary schools in 1986, and other dismissals in the GES (see GNAT 1984; 1987a).<sup>9</sup> In one memorandum, GNAT remarked that the "Ghana education service has been subjected to undue political manipulations and arbitrary handling of disciplinary matters by the ministry of education and culture" (GNAT, 1987b). It stated further that, "We feel very concerned about this

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<sup>9</sup> The NDC commissioner of Education in 1982 announced on radio the dismissal of 6 directors of education. Again, in 1986, six other directors, namely Sam Aggrey, Agnes Laryea, Osei-Owusu, and A. K. Quarshie were interdicted and accused of embezzlement. In the same year, 1986, 26 headmasters of senior secondary schools including Kwabena Kyere, then regional chairman of GNAT in Brong Ahafo, who later became a Deputy Education Minister during the first or so term of the NDC government were dismissed for allegedly inflating the figures of the number of students in their schools. These latter dismissals however, were later commuted to retirement during the democratic dispensation of the NDC government in the 1990s.

unsatisfactory situation. What is more, our fears about the dissolution of the council are vindicated by the events, which have happened and continue to happen after the demise of the council” (GNAT, 1987b).

The regime’s meddling in the running of education immobilised teachers as they became gripped with fear. The GNAT stated that, “most personnel in the Ghana Education Service are gripped with fears, real fears and not imagined ones indeed, because there is a catalogue of events to vindicate these fears.” (GNAT, 1987b). Most likely, it was this fear, which prevented the GNAT from resorting to a more militant alternative to seek redress, when it became obvious that the government was insensitive to its demands. It does appear then that the motivation for the dissolution of the GES council was not so much about rooting out corruption in the GES, other than to pave way for the regime to place disciplinary matters in the education service under its Ministry of Education. This allowed the regime to easily deal with any teacher or persons within the education service who fell short of the “revolutionary” ideal. Stated differently, the dissolution of the council, gave the regime a *fait accompli* to directly intervene in the education sector by appointing and dismissing key figures who were perceived as obstacle to change.

### **Arbitrary Dismissals**

The PNDC regime also engaged actively in the dismissal of prominent GNAT members who occupied key positions in the GES structure. In most cases, the regime preferred to pick on particular individuals than to resort to arbitrary use of terror (see Nugent 1996:178). For instance, some individual teachers, mostly heads of senior secondary schools and directors of education, who were members of GNAT were sometimes picked up and detained, while others were summarily dismissed. Three of such cases that were pursued by the GNAT — the arrest, detention and interdiction of G. R. Bray, I. T. Nartey and Abedi Asante, all directors in the national education directorate, are worth considering. On 15 May 1986, G.R. Bray was arrested together with Messrs I. T. Nartey, Chief Internal Auditor (GES, headquarters), and S. Aberdie Asante, (Director, GES headquarters) for their alleged involvement in the embezzlement of public funds in four regions, namely Ashanti, Volta, Northern and Upper West Regions. They were subsequently detained at the James Fort Prisons in Accra (Bray, 1992:2). They were not informed of their offence until 9 April 1987. They had been accused by another detainee, Kpegah, an assistant accountant at the regional education office in Kumasi. Kpegah alleged that his boss, H. M. Agyei, gave him

a list of some top personnel in the Ghana Education Service and the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning, which included their names. According to Kpegah, he was instructed to write on empty envelopes certain amounts of money against the names that his boss had given to him (Bray, 1992: 2). They were thus, held in detention to assist in investigating this allegation levelled against them.

Curiously, Bray indicated in one of his petitions that throughout his detention, the various sub-committees he appeared before for interrogation never asked him anything about this allegation. Instead, he was questioned about his stewardship as a regional education director in the Bono Ahafo Region between 1976 and 1979 (Bray, 1992). This raises doubts about the real motive of his arrest and detention, particularly so, when he was interdicted from exercising his duty after his release from detention on 18 July 1986. Curiously, Aberdie-Asante and Nartey, his two other accomplices, walked back to their jobs without any interdiction and until now, the outcome of the investigations into their allegation was never publicised (GNAT, 1991). GNAT suspected that it was a calculated intention of the regime to subject him to humiliation (Ibid). It is not clear why the regime refused to reinstate Bray. But it seemed that his position as the director for manpower and administration, which entailed the recruitment and training of personnel, as well as human resource management in the education sector, might have been a source of concern to the regime, which was given to dismissing and recruiting personnel at will, without recourse to laid down procedures. This reinforces Kraus' (2007:107) assertion that the regime used intimidation against various levels of leadership and arrested those whose politics it feared, in order to work its will.

Other arbitrary acts included the interdictions of Sam Aggrey (Director, Technical Education), Agnes Laryea (Director, Supplies), E Osei-Wusu (Director, Teacher Education), A. K. Quarshie (Director, Budget), all in March 1986. These persons were interdicted for their alleged involvement in the embezzlement of public funds. These arrests and detentions were done without warrant and in all instances charges were not preferred against the detainees before their detention (GNAT, 1987c). GNAT indicated its frustration with this arbitrariness in a letter to the PNDC noting that "a situation where an employee will be held in custody for months without being told the grounds of his confinement is deplorable and intolerable" (Ibid).

The reluctance of the regime to release the detainees in spite of persistent demands from GNAT, compelled the GNAT to petition the PNDC Chairman of the Secretaries of Committees. The GNAT lamented that "nobody has taken any action to deal with the issue related to their interdiction despite repeated calls from

us for action in that direction. This state of affairs is not satisfactory and we call for redress” (GNAT 1987b).

In the absence of any response to the petition, the GNAT wrote directly to the PNDC Chairman, Rawlings, and requested him to intervene to resolve the matter relating to the arrest and interdiction of the directors (GNAT 1988). Rawlings replied promptly and directed that the directors involved should be re-instated (Republic of Ghana, 1988). Subsequent to this directive, the Director General of education, B. C. F. Lokko wrote letters to the affected individuals and directed them to assume their duties. One of such letters copied to Osei-Wusu is instructive:

As you know, on 25<sup>th</sup> March 1986, the PNDC interdicted you and your assets and bank accounts were frozen. I am happy to inform you that investigations so far conducted have not revealed anything adverse against you. In the circumstances, you are therefore, hereby recalled to duty without loss of benefits or seniority. At a later date, your assets and bank accounts will be defrozen as required by law.... (Lokko, 1988)

It is intriguing that these directors remained interdicted, even though there were no adverse findings against them as the letter purports. It is obvious that this was one of those strategies the regime adopted to destabilize principal sources of opposition. As noted by Nugent (1996:178) notwithstanding the regimes promises in creating avenues for popular participation, its security wing engaged actively in destabilizing popular sources of dissent through arrests and intimidation *of the kind meted out to these directors* [mine emphasis].

### **Dissatisfaction with Wage Levels and Conditions of Service**

The PNDC government inherited a very fragile economy that was the result of gross mismanagement of the Ghanaian economy by previous governments since the 1970s. The acute economic hardships were also compounded by the 1983 fire out-breaks and the consequent famine, which plagued Ghana, as well as the return of over 2 million Ghanaian immigrants from Nigeria; these daunting economic and social problems pushed the PNDC regime to a tight corner and made it difficult, if not impossible, for the regime to readily consent to the demands of the working population. In an attempt to salvage the situation, the PNDC regime ruthlessly implemented IMF and World Bank prescribed austere economic measures which further impoverished the working class in the short term, even if

it did succeed in the long run in overturning Ghana's ailing economy. The difficulties associated with this daunting economic situation added another dynamic to GNAT's struggles, compelling it to agitate for higher wages and improved conditions of service for teachers. Indeed, the financing for education fell sharply in real terms and as a proportion of the GDP from 6.4% in 1976 to 1.4% in 1983. In fact, the economic decline and its concomitant hardships for teachers, which seemed to have reached unbearable limits for most teachers during the late 1970s, had resulted in the mass exodus of most qualified teachers, mostly graduates, to Nigeria to seek better prospects (Jackson, 2001: 64-65). Before the PNDC took power in December 1981, it was recorded that, of about the 72,726 teachers in 1980, 14000 mostly trained, had left the country for Nigeria and neighbouring countries (Haynes, 1995: 81). Kwasi Nyaogbe confirmed that "those were very difficult times in Ghana. Cost of living was high and many professionals including teachers had fled the country" (Nyaogbe, 2 December 2010, Interview).

Continued faltering output growth in the economy resulted in sharp declines in real wages particularly between 1980 and 1984 when the index of real minimum wages fell by 18% (Boateng, 2001: 27-28). Between 1980 and 1982 teachers' salaries declined in real terms as they suffered a 25% cut; teachers were not paid promptly and working conditions generally deteriorated — a situation that compelled most teachers to pick up additional jobs (Lambert, 2004). Cobbe summed up the condition of the Ghanaian teacher in the following words.

Rapid inflation had eroded teachers' real salaries...to a point in the early 1980s where they were derisory that it was both essential for the teacher's survival to have some other source of income in addition to their salaries, and also questionable whether it was worth bothering to show up at work other than to collect their salaries (Cobbe 1991:106).

The teachers condition worsened when in 1984 new import restrictions were imposed in addition to the introduction of three adjustment policies. This development deflated the cedi to \$1 = ¢50.<sup>10</sup> During this time, the minimum wage was raised to a mere ¢40 at a period when the price of yam ranged between ¢150 to ¢200 per average size tuber (Pellow & Chazan 1986:82–83). The implication

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<sup>10</sup> The cedi was devalued by 89% in April 1983, from 2.75 cedis per US dollar to 24.7 cedis to the US dollar. By October 1983, the exchange rate was pegged at 30 cedis to 1 US dollar (Teferra & Khachatryan, 2013: 14)

was that the minimum wage was rarely enough to provide for the basic needs of the Ghanaian worker including teachers.<sup>11</sup>

These unpleasant developments pushed workers unions, including teachers, to seek to fight for better conditions for their members.<sup>12</sup> Some regional branches of GNAT petitioned the PNDC, complaining of delays in the payment of salary arrears, the need to approve and implement conditions of service for teachers and the need for the regime to amend Supreme Military Council Decree (SMCD) 8, which dealt with pensions. Some of these letters were strongly worded and carried threats of strike. One of such petitions by GNAT, Manya Krobo District, read:

We therefore resolve that, if the government does not take urgent measures to effect the payment of the salary arrears, approve, and implement other conditions of service by 31<sup>st</sup> July 1985, we shall advise ourselves (GNAT, 1985).

Apparently, the GNAT in conjunction with the GES, had presented revised terms and conditions of service to the government in 1984. After several follow-ups, the government on 24 January 1985 wrote a letter referenced MOE/PNDC/5A through the ministry of education announcing the approval of the proposals presented by the GNAT and the GES (GNAT, 1985). However, on 11 March 1985, the ministry informed the GNAT that it was only the salary scale contained in the document that had been approved by the Ministry of Finance and that payment was to take retroactive effect from 1 April 1984. Other aspects of the proposal, according to the Ministry were still under consideration. The teachers objected to this latter development, particularly so, when the government had still not paid them their salary arrears accruing from the agreed salary scale in 1984. The Manya Krobo District branch of the GNAT remarked that:

To their utter dismay (teachers), the government has been silent on the issue and to add insult to injury, the government has made no efforts so far to pay the arrears accruing from the new salary scales granted to them since 1<sup>st</sup> April 1984 (GNAT Manya Krobo, 1985:2).

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<sup>11</sup> Teachers were paid on the same salary scales as other public sector workers.

<sup>12</sup> Intense labour agitation during this period was kick-started by the TUC, which argued that the grave economic situation was the result of the PNDC's submission to the dictates of the IMF and the World Bank. It thus warned of labour unrest and impressed upon the PNDC government to revise the minimum wage by 100%; the PNDC did - one of the few victories won by labour since the regime came into power in 1982 (Kraus, 2007:108).

The petition directed an emotional and rhetorical question to the head of state, “Your Excellency, will it be an over-statement to state that the government is not trying to be fair to her teachers who produce all the manpower of the country?” (Ibid, 1985:3). It indicated further that,

“But for the respect they have for you, Your Excellency, the teachers might have taken some actions, which would not have been pleasant because as human beings, their patience has run out. Procrastination it is said is always a dire risk” (Ibid).

It is evident from the petitions that, the mood of the teachers in 1985 was propitious for a strike. As one petition noted:

In fact, the reaction of teachers in the district is unanimously unfavourable especially when they are able to point out boldly that some categories of workers, under the same Ghana education service have been granted the same conditions of service, which have been denied us. Your Excellency, we do not want to have a situation where the impression will be created in the minds of our teachers that it is only industrial action, which compels government to heed their demands (GNAT Techiman Branch, 1985).

However, the decision of GNAT’s leadership to postpone the call by its rank and file for a strike and a coincidental general increment in workers’ salaries during the period might have worked to tame the feud that had developed in the teachers’ front. While it is not clear why the leadership of GNAT postponed the strike called by the membership, a substantial increase in minimum wages in 1985 almost doubled real wages – which was a welcoming development for the entire working class (Kraus, 1991:32).

GNAT’s demand for higher wages was tied-up with agitations for an improved pension scheme. In May 1986, the GNAT wrote to the Chairman of the PNDC appealing to him to ensure that steps were taken to amend SMCD 8, which was passed in 1975; SMCD 8 was an amended version of another decree that was passed in 1972 by the NRC. The original decree placed all workers employed on or after 1 January 1972 under the social security (SSNIT) scheme instead of the “CAP 30” scheme.<sup>13</sup> However, the 1975 amendment provided civil servants,

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<sup>13</sup> The “CAP 30” was a non-contributory pension scheme for civil servants and the Armed Forces. It derives its name from Chapter 30 of the 1946 Pension Ordinance. Among other

covered under “CAP 30” the option to either remain under it or switch to the social security scheme. Refusal to opt for either of the schemes automatically led to coverage by the Social Security Scheme (Tibuahson 2003: 3-4). GNAT contended that the implementation of this scheme was not properly done; since public servants including teachers had not been properly briefed on the two schemes to enable them make informed choices (GNAT 1985). GNAT therefore, appealed to the government to review the scheme and to place teachers who were migrated forcefully onto the new scheme on the old “CAP 30” scheme.

Notwithstanding, the several memoranda GNAT submitted to the regime on this issue, the government remained adamant and maintained its position on the matter. Curiously, the government enacted a series of laws including P.N.D.C.L 126 1985, P.N.D.C.L 165 of 1986, and P.N.D.C.L 168 of 1987, which relieved the police, the legal and the prison services respectively from the liabilities of the S.M.C.D 8. All the acts required that the contributions to the social security fund were to be refunded to the contributors concerned. Why teachers were not included in this provision is a matter that is open to speculation, since we do not have evidence to adduce explanations.

GNAT continued to push its demand for better conditions of service. In 1988, in a letter entitled “elements of frustration in the Ghana education service”, GNAT listed a number of items, which it considered as legitimate entitlements, and which had been denied teachers by the regime. It cautioned the Director General to advise the Ministry of Education to act on these demands or face the wrath of teachers. The Ministry failed to act. Consequently, the GNAT declared a strike in March 1991 in demand for: improvement in basic salaries, the establishment of the GES council, the implementation of existing conditions of service, and the establishment of a joint negotiation committee to regularly determine salaries and other benefits (Ampaw, 1995: 29). The strike lasted two weeks. The government prevailed on the teachers to return to work while it looked for a lasting solution to their grievances. Thus after 8 years of “frustrated cooperation” that left many of its grievances unresolved, the GNAT resorted to the strike weapon.

It is doubtful though that the GNAT would have struck, if the political environment during this period was not relaxed to permit such action. Indeed, by 1991, the transition to constitutional rule had taken firm roots and the PNDC was busily courting popular constituencies for support, since it had reinvented itself

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benefits, CAP 30 offered 70% of final salary, compared to 50% of average of three highest years’ salary at SSNIT. Again, with CAP 30, pension payments were indexed annually to current salary scales, making it more attractive to workers (See Kumado & Gockel, 2006: 13).

into a party machinery to contest elections. Consequently, it had relaxed its repressive tactics and civil society and other organisations could articulate their grievances without fear of intimidation. As explained by Kraus the struggle had become more open during this period and so teachers and nurses could afford a strike (Kraus, 1991: 20).

It is equally true that the executive of GNAT declared the strike in response to pressures that had begun to emanate from regular GNAT members. A letter from one local branch is instructive:

This is to inform you that there is mounting tension rising among teachers in this sector of Ghana which could result in an industrial action in the teachers' front without fail if nothing is urgently done to encourage the teacher for a good deal before the end of this February 1991

(GNAT Kloe-Abutia Branch 1991).

The petition further accused the general secretary of always holding brief and conniving with the government to dictate terms and conditions of service to teachers at will without considering whether those terms were favourable (Ibid). In another instance, teachers from St. Aquinas Secondary School passed a resolution stating that GNAT “dangerously appears to be straying into the position of the employer” (GNAT St. Aquinas 1991) to indicate their frustration with the inability of GNAT to proactively agitate for solutions to their grievances. It is reasonable to suggest that the pressures that had started to emanate from the members of the organisation combined with the relaxed political environment influenced the national executive of GNAT to call the strike.

### **Conclusion**

The character of the PNDC regime impacted on the political potential of GNAT. Under the pressure of the intimidating tactics and threats on the leadership, the GNAT resolved to cooperate with the PNDC regime. The cooperation however did not yield any significant result for GNAT, as the regime continued to intimidate its members through acts such as arrests, detentions and arbitrarily dismissals. In similar vein, the dissolution of the GES council, the political hub of the teaching service, gave the Education Secretaries of the PNDC sweeping powers to intervene unduly in the running of education. Faced with these

repressive tactics of the regime, the GNAT remained passive and was unable to utilise its political potential to militantly agitate for resolutions to its grievances until 1991 when the opening of the political space coupled with incessant pressure emanating from the rank and file membership prodded the leadership into declaring a strike action. It is plausible then, to conclude that, the repressive measures adopted by the PNDC regime in handling labour discontent and societal uproar generally, indirectly dealt a mortal blow to the collective will of most teachers (see Boafo-Arthur, 1999).

The PNDC was, however, less successful in co-opting the leadership of the GNAT. However, the GNAT's own volition to cooperate with the regime trapped it in the ambit of the PNDC and ensured that the many grievances of teachers, which it pursued, remained unresolved. GNAT's formalistic approach in presenting its grievances did not help the cause of most of its members, who became victims of the regime's intimidating acts. The ineffectiveness of GNAT's cooperative strategy, and its inability to resort to a much more militant alternative to push for its demands, was because the PNDC remained simultaneously repressive and cooperative. The PNDC accommodated GNAT by accepting its numerous petitions, and engaged it in "talking shops", where GNAT's influence was minimal. At the same time, however, the PNDC subjected key persons in the education sector who were members of GNAT to repression and intimidation. This pinned GNAT and made its petitions, memoranda and other forms of protest moribund. The problematic relationship between the GNAT and the PNDC regime thus made teachers to keep a low political profile (see Kester and Biritwum, 2007).

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