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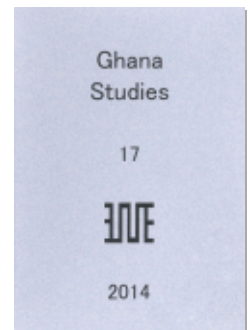
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BLACK BOARD STRUGGLES: TEACHER UNIONISM UNDER THE 'DEMOCRATIC' RAWLINGS REGIME 1992-2000

Samuel Amoako

Introduction

Ghana's return to liberal democratic rule formed part of what has been generally accepted as the third wave of democratisation in Africa, when internal frustrations with growing corruption, repression and unemployment in most African countries, conjoined with the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989, triggered waves of democratic protests, which eventually led to the birth or rebirth of new democracies across Africa (see Bratton & Van de Walle 1997).¹ In Ghana, by December 1991, when the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), the quasi-military regime that was formed after the 1981 coup, observed its tenth anniversary, the move towards constitutional rule had taken firm roots. Two significant developments in 1992 sealed the rebirth of a democratic Ghana. The first was a

¹ Aside his primary affiliation, the author is also a Research Fellow of the South African Research Chair in Social Change, hosted by the Faculty of Humanities, University of Johannesburg. This paper draws hugely on data collected for my Master's dissertation, which related to teachers' unions and politics in Ghana and South Africa. I acknowledge the support of the South African Research chair in Social Change, funded by the Department of Science and Technology and hosted by the faculty of humanities, University of Johannesburg, which offered me a generous bursary towards the completion of my degree. I am also indebted to the Department of Historical Studies, University of Johannesburg, which provided me an academic home and a stimulating intellectual environment to develop my ideas.

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referendum conducted in April to determine the future political arrangement, and second, the conduct of presidential and parliamentary elections in November and December. Rawlings's party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), and its allies won 198 of the 200 seats in parliament.² Rawlings's success was due partly to the benefit of incumbency and partly to the disorganised nature of the opposition. The democratic transition was sealed on 7 January 1993, when the first government of the Fourth Republic was inaugurated. After this period, space continued to open for oppositional activities and a relatively liberalised political and human rights atmosphere.

The political change had implications for labour. The 1992 constitution enshrined the rights of workers not only to form and join unions of their choice, but to march, assemble, and engage in demonstrations to demand improved conditions, and to protest against or in support of public policy (Republic of Ghana, 2005: 21-25). Furthermore, the passage of the Public Service Negotiating Committee Law, (PNDC Law 309) in 1992, for the first time, granted bargaining rights to state employees like teachers and nurses to negotiate directly with the state (Kwamina, 2001: 22-25).³ The political liberalisation, thus, opened the space for organised teachers in Ghana, as in other African countries to mobilise and defend their interests vis-à-vis the state.

Even though teachers in Africa appear to occupy a strategic place in society, they seem to exemplify, with the possible exception of students, the most contradictory dimension in post-

²The result of the election was highly contested by the opposition party, the New Patriotic Party and the parliamentary election was subsequently boycotted by the NPP (Adu-Boahen 1995).

³ Until the promulgation of this law, only the TUC had a legally recognised collective bargaining certificate. Consequently, the GNAT and other non-affiliates of the TUC had to join the TUC in a consultative labour forum for the purposes of bargaining and setting the minimum wage (Fritz & Vormawor 2004).

colonial politics and society (Woods, 1996). On the one hand, they are regarded as professionals entrusted with the significant task of shaping the minds of the future generation. On the other hand, the teaching profession is regarded as one with minimal entry requirements, low pay and benefits and located amongst the bottom rank of the civil service ladder (see Torres *et. al.* 2000). Teachers are thus often caught between the conflicting pressures of living up to the moral obligation placed on them by the state (forming the minds of the future generation) and demanding from the state rewards befitting of their call – demands to which the state seldom accedes. Consequently, educational labour has often appeared to be an arena of contestation between organised teachers and the state. An examination of this contestation is relevant to sharpening our understanding of state-labour relations in the education sector, since labour relations are at the heart of teachers' salaries, benefits, rights and responsibilities (see Cooper 1998).

Excepting Konings' (2005) insightful study of organised teachers in Cameroon, existing literature on teachers in Africa have hardly paid any attention to the internal feuds of organised teachers and teacher union-state relations after Africa's third wave of democratisation (see Chisholm *et. al* 1999; Osei 2006; Welmond 2002; Woods 1996). Examining the grievances of organised teachers, and the responses of the Rawlings led NDC regime to these grievances from 1992 to 2000 along with the factors that resulted in the breakaway of graduate teachers to form a second teacher union, the NAGRAT, after the democratic transition and its implication for organised teachers is therefore revealing. The breakaway of some graduate teachers to form a second teachers union, NAGRAT, did not immediately pose any significant threat to the organisational ability of GNAT, at least, until the end of the Rawlings administration. The challenge to the GNAT, however, remained the government's insensitivity to its demands - the government subjected GNAT to a kind of bureaucratic maze and

procedural wrangling, which eventually pushed the GNAT to resort to strike actions. These strike actions often occurred on the heels of a faltering economy that had a deteriorating impact on teachers' work and living conditions. In most cases, teacher grievances centred on the need for improvement in their salaries and general working conditions. This struggle for improved salaries and conditions of work was however, not limited to teachers only, as other public sector employees embarked on strikes for similar reasons – probably as a riposte to the gruelling impact of structural adjustment policies on their economic fortunes. However, beyond the fight for improved salaries and related work conditions, GNAT had, once more, to fight against what seemed like a return to the arbitrary dismissals of key actors in the education sector during the PNDC rule in the 1980s.⁴

Historical Context of Teacher Unionism in Ghana

The development of teacher unionism in Ghana dates as far back as 1926 when the colonial government initiated the formation of the Government School Teachers Association (GSTA). The GSTA was primarily a professional organisation and was concerned with the professional development of Gold Coast teachers rather than championing the demands for improved salaries and work conditions. The GSTA, which started in Cape Coast, soon expanded to other areas and by 1927 had about 62 branches across the country (Amoako 2012; Aseidu-Akrofi 1971). In spite of this impressive beginning, very little is known about the development of the GSTA in later years. It remained defunct throughout the 1930s. Perhaps the emergence of the relatively militant Assisted School Teachers Union (ASTU) in the 1930s overshadowed the existence of the GSTA (Amoako, 2012).

⁴ For a comprehensive discussion of teacher unionism during the 1980s, see Amoako 2011.

The deteriorating impact of the stock market crash of 1929 on Ghanaian teachers and the education sector generally, spurred the formation of the ASTU, (renamed Gold Coast Teachers Union in 1937) to defend mission school teachers whose interests were most affected by a 25% cut in educational budget. Formed in 1932, the ASTU was a loose grouping of disgruntled mission school teachers who were concentrated mainly in Accra and its surrounding communities. The ASTU was the earliest attempt by Ghanaian teachers to organise along the lines of trade unions. The ASTU used the protest ethos of the 1930s, which was exemplified in petitions, deputations and lobbying to make demands on the colonial government. Its major achievement was pressuring the colonial government to reduce the 25% cut in educational budget first to 5% and its total withdrawal later (Bame 1973: 115; Amoako 2012: 50). The pre-occupation of the ASTU/GCTU in the 1940s remained an intense agitation for parity of treatment between government teachers and mission school teachers. Its efforts paid off when in 1951 the Erzuah Committee, which was set up to revise the salaries of non-government teachers recommended the abolition of the grade of government teachers and the placement of mission school teachers on the same salary scale as government teachers (Amoako 2012: 52).

After 1940, other teacher organisations emerged. These teacher organisations were products of the educational expansion in the Gold Coast and represented the fragmentation of the education system during the period. By 1950, various associations based on church affiliations, levels of education, subjects and qualification had been formed. Among these organisations were the Methodist, Presbyterian and Catholic schools teachers unions as well as the African Graduate Teachers association, the Mathematics Teachers Association and the Training College Teachers' Association. During this same period, the defunct GSTA was revived and renamed the National Union of Teachers (NUT)

in 1947. The existence of these diverse groups of teacher organisations, and an acute rivalry between the NUT and the GCTU, frustrated attempts to form a single union for all teachers in the Gold Coast. Disagreements concerned fundamentally the organisational structure of a unified teachers' union. While the GCUT advocated for a professional teachers' organisation, the NUT favoured the formation of a teachers' union on trade union principles. Eventually, government legislation in 1958 compelled all the different unions 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) (Amoako 2012: 58-61). In 1962, the teachers opted out of the GTUC, reorganised independent of the other education workers, and formed the GNAT. The GNAT had the mandate to represent all teachers in pre-tertiary educational institutions and remained so until the breakaway of some graduate teachers to form the National Association of Graduate Teachers (NAGRAT) in 1998.

GNAT-State Relations before Transition

Throughout its existence, GNAT has remained cooperative with most governments and political regimes in Ghana except the PNDC regime whose relationship with the GNAT appeared strained, even jolty. This cooperative relation however, has been conditioned by the ability of the state to improve teachers' conditions of service, salaries and education delivery generally. For instance, the relationship between GNAT and the CPP government seemed almost paternalistic. This kind of relationship followed the tremendous attention the CPP government gave to teachers, culminating in enormous salary increases. For example in 1961, the CPP government, in attempt to minimise attrition in the teaching profession, announced a 'new deal' for teachers that saw the salary of the teacher appreciate considerably. The 'Pupil'

teacher who was the lowest paid, was put on a salary scale of £G 114 to £G180 and certificate 'B' and 'A' received increments that varied between £G 35 and £G85.⁵ In addition, about 12 percent of certificate 'A' teachers were promoted to senior teachers with a corresponding salary increase of between £G500 to £G700 and a new grade, Principal teacher was created with a corresponding salary scale of £G900 (Bame 1973: 114). These salary increases and the attention paid to the teaching profession generally pleased the GNAT, who committed to fully cooperate with the CPP government and even made direct policy statements supporting the CPP and its government. For example, in 1964, GNAT stated in its programme line-up to "continue its unceasing support for the party and to promote Nkrumaism throughout its district and regional associations." The GNAT noted further that, "As earnest of its conviction in this matter, it will seek close liaison with the party education officers and to invite them to their seminars and meetings" (GNAT, 1964). This position was reinforced in 1965, when its general secretary, C. K. Penrose, stated that the main aim of GNAT was "to raise the status of the teaching profession, to improve teaching methods, educational, academic and professional preparation for teachers so that they can better serve the interests of youth and promote Nkrumaism" (cited in Osae 1981: 23).

Similarly, a Mills Odoi Commission, which was set up by the National Liberation Council (the regime that was formed after the overthrow of Nkrumah in 1966) to restructure the salary structure of the public service, recommended commendable salary increases for teachers alongside other public sector workers (Osae 1981: 40–41). In similar vein, Acheampong's National Redemption Council regime listened to the concerns of teachers, created a teaching

⁵ Pupil teachers were mostly persons with a Middle School Leaving Certificate (MSLC) or "O" level certificates and, in recent times Senior Secondary School certificates (SSSCE/ WASSCE), but without professional training in teaching. Certificate 'B' teachers were those who had acquired two years of professional training, while certificate 'A' teachers had received four years of training.

service to regulate the teaching profession, and thus placed educational management in a professional, even if nominally independent body subordinated to the Ministry of Education (Ibid, 42). All of these developments created a cordial relationship between the GNAT and the various ruling regimes, both military and civilian, at least until 1979. Pellow and Chazan (1986: 71) reported that in 1979, teachers, just like other public sector workers, became confrontational and embarked on wild-cat strikes and demonstrations. This abrupt discontent was the consequence of the plummeting economic conditions – rising prices of consumer goods, massive devaluation of the cedi and a fall, generally, in the standard of living (Ibid). Thus, a change in the material conditions of teachers in the late 1970s caused them to become confrontational.

The relationship between GNAT and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) regime under Rawlings, from 1981 until the transition to constitutional rule, was problematic, even frosty. Apart from the fact that the regime subjected key personalities in the education sector, who were members of GNAT, to various degrees of repression such as arbitrary dismissals and interdictions, the regime also failed to offer teachers, just like other public sector workers, any significant improvement in their conditions of work and salaries. Most likely, the dire economic hardships with which the regime had to contend partly accounted for its inability to immediately resolve the teachers' demands for higher salaries and improved conditions of service. The regime also relegated the GNAT to the periphery in educational policy formulation (see Cobbe, 1991; Amoako, 2011). Additionally, the regime dissolved the Ghana Education Service Council, the political hub of the education sector – a development that became a sore-point between the regime and the GNAT. The GES Council, established in 1974 by National Redemption Council Decree (NRCD) 247, had been the governing body of the Ghana teaching service. The

Council was charged with the control and management of the Ghana Teaching Service (GTS) on matters of policy. It was also responsible for appointments and discipline of teachers. The GES council functioned as the buffer between the Ghana education service and the government, providing broader and wider source of advice to government on educational issues. The existence of the council reduced undue political interference with the management and running of the education service and ensured that policy implementation was distinctly divorced from policy planning and implementation. Thus, when the council was dissolved in 1983, GNAT feared that the regime would arbitrarily interfere in the running of education – making its dissolution a source of contention between GNAT and the regime until it was re-established in 1995.

The Political Economy of P/NDC-Labour Relations

Apart from his ten-year quasi-military rule from 1981 to 1991, Rawlings and his NDC ruled for two consecutive terms (1992-1996 and 1996-2000), before the party lost power to the opposition New Patriotic Party (NPP). Despite the Rawlings regime's improvements in the human right record and the thaw in the tension between civil society and the state, the spill-over of the austere implementation of structural adjustment policies, which began in the early 1980s, remained unresolved. This continued to plague the country, particularly, government-labour relationship (see Adu-Amankwaa & Tutu, 1997). The consequence of the "belt-tightening liberalisation policies" of the P/NDC was felt most acutely in the social sectors as spending on health and education was drastically cut (Overa, 2007:541). Workers remained the most susceptible to the P/NDC's adjustment policies. A key component of adjustment policy was to restrict pay increases for public sector employees (Nugent, 1995:169). By 1990, when the country was on the verge of a return to constitutional rule, workers' salaries and

general conditions of service were in a sorry state and indeed, by 1995, real wages of public sector workers were half of what they had been in 1970 (Overa, 2007: 541). Touted as the “darling” and “bright pupil” of adjustment - an example for others to emulate – Ghanaians, particularly, formal sector employees, during this period “were more than ever, thrust into the throes of economic hardship” (Hansen, 2003: 201). Mass retrenchment, unemployment and the removal of subsidies on petroleum products and electrification tariffs impoverished many (see Overa, 2007; Nugent, 1995; Kwamina, 2001). The austere implementation of adjustment policies turned labour from friends of the PNDC in the early years to its adversaries, especially, after 1983 – and this fouled relationship would continue into the 1990s.

In spite of labour’s opposition to adjustment policies, unions were unable to pose any concerted challenge to the PNDC (see Nugent, 1995). Some scholars have attributed this relative quiescence of labour during the period to the PNDC government’s ability to employ intimidation and oppression in dealing with social unrest (Gyimah-Boadi & Essuman-Johnson, 1993; Herbst, 1993). However, to Haynes (1995), it was both labour and the PNDC government’s understanding of the defeatist nature of constant conflict and their resolve to negotiate in the tripartite consultative forum, which is important in explaining the relative limited organised protests from labour. Either way, workers began to be wary of this arrangement as it failed to bring any palpable improvement in their salaries. Indeed, between 1986 and 1990, the minimum wage lost its value by 20% and suffered yet another 13% drop between 1991 and 1993 (Haynes, 1995: 111). Thus, the continuing atrophy in the conditions of workers combined with the opening of the political space, which allowed for increased dissent, propelled workers into action and they staged protests to demand

for improvement in their wages and conditions of work.⁶ Indeed, the first year of the Rawlings' regime was marked with labour unrest because of inadequate wage levels, high fuel prices and the rising cost of living. Haynes (1995: 111-113) has argued that many workers felt that the government was reluctant, rather than unable to increase minimum wage to assuage their difficulties. However, the pivotal issue was that the government was under intense pressure from the World Bank to reduce wage levels in order to cut the wage bill and attract foreign investment. Thus, the government was faced with a political conundrum to either bow to the pressures of its expectant electorates or listen to its World Bank advisors. Certainly, the government adopted the latter. Consequently, after 1993, economic issues, rather than democracy were the focal point of popular discontent (Ibid).

Teachers' Grievances, 1993 – 2000

It was within this context of plummeting working conditions but a relatively relaxed political atmosphere that organised teachers confronted the state over their grievances. It is intriguing that organised teachers, as far as the evidence bears out, had little desire to contest the P/NDC government's restructuring of the education system, which began in the late 1980s. In fact, there appeared to have been a consensus on the need to restructure the education system even if there remained concerns over certain aspects of the reform package (Cobbe, 1991). Thus, except in few instances, when the GNAT had to confront the government over the dismissals of some of its members, the teachers' grievances during this period were economically driven, geared towards improved wages and conditions of service and reflected in a

⁶ Workers and their organisations during this period made use not only of strike actions but also of the legal system and contested the government over layoffs payment of end of service benefits among others in court (see Kwamina, 2001).

generalised discontent with the macro-economic policies of the NDC government. The first teachers strike after transition erupted in 1994, one year after the NDC assumed office, and lasted for one week. In the wake of this strike the education minister, Harry Sawyerr, insinuated that GNAT had a hidden agenda and that the strike had been for political reasons (*Daily Graphic* 7 May 1994, 7). While the minister's accusation is difficult to substantiate, it is likely that his assertion was influenced by the state of oppositional activities that had been embarked upon during the period by the coalition of opposition parties and other movements that challenged the government, particularly, its economic policies (see Haynes 1995). It is important, however, to note that the GNAT's grievances were not clearly articulated in political terms and did not have clear political motivations. The question of political motivations according to Jefferies (1978:3) "centres on the degree to which the propellants and aims of strike actions (or other forms of oppositional activity) extend beyond immediate occupational interests to disagreement over broad societal issues and goals – to a concern, ultimately, with the legitimacy of the prevailing political socio-economic order."

The GNAT demanded the re-establishment of the Ghana Education Service (GES) council, reversion to the teachers' pension ordinance of 1955, the payment of teachers' legitimate entitlements, payment of ex-gratia awards to retrenched "pupil teachers" who had served in the GES for five years,⁷ higher salaries and the establishment of negotiating machinery for teachers (Iddrisu Seini 1994, 9). Two quick points must be made here: firstly, most of these demands had been the bottom-line of teacher agitations since 1983 (see Amoako, 2012). Secondly, the GNAT's demands fed into popular workers' discontents, which were sparked by the faltering economy and deteriorating wage

⁷ The government had refused to pay full redundancy awards to retrenched workers in the GES since 1986 (Adu-Amankwah & Tutu 1997, 219)

levels of all manner of workers. Writing on developments in the labour front during this period, Ampaw (1995, 25) noted that:

At the heart of the conflict between labour and the state is one basic question: The question of wages and salaries. Government has consistently manipulated its budgetary projections to ensure that working people are eventually the worse off in terms of the real purchasing power.

He noted further that:

What however, must be emphasised about these agitations, especially those on the labour front is that they are not simply the product of the moment. On the contrary, they have social and economic roots; they are direct and largely spontaneous reaction of the people to accumulated effects of the P/NDC's Economic Recovery and Structural Adjustment programme over the last 13 years, a programme which has been forced down on Ghanaians without any serious public debate or examination (Ampaw 1995, 22).

The government's budget announcement in January 1993 alarmed workers. Fuel prices were increased by 60% and the price of petrol shot up from ¢990 to ¢1600 a gallon (Haynes, 1995: 110). The inflationary pressures associated with the rise in fuel prices meant that the increased minimum wage of ¢460 (US\$0.33), could seldom meet the rising cost of living (Ibid, 113). By 1994, the real monthly wage of public sector workers had decreased by 22%, the highest in the first four years after transition (Hutcful 2002, 90-91). Labour was less likely to take this development with equanimity and in fact, this austere economic measures influenced GNAT's agitation. Ampaw (1995: 29-30) wrote that:

Since 1991, the teachers' movement (GNAT) has gone on strike almost every year only to receive empty promises and bureaucratic delay tactics from government. Agitation for these

demands however began in the mid-1980s. However, to date the Rawlings regime has made no meaningful offers to meet the demands of the teachers' movement.

The strike was long time in maturing and the GNAT initiated various non-confrontational steps to get its grievances resolved before it finally resorted to strike action. It thus appears that it was the government's lackadaisical attitude towards resolving the teachers' grievances that prodded the GNAT to call the strike. In April 1993, Sawyerr granted GNAT audience in his office, in which GNAT related its unresolved grievances accruing from the 1980s. Subsequent to this meeting, GNAT presented the Minister with a memorandum on educational issues on 17 May 1993 (GNAT 1993). As a follow-up to this memorandum, GNAT wrote two other letters on payment of pension on consolidated salaries and several other letters on teachers' grievances (*Daily Graphic* 20 July 1994).⁸ In a memorandum signed by its general secretary, Paul Osei-Mensah, GNAT concluded with a stern warning to the minister of education to act on their grievances or face the wrath of the teachers. It read:

The issues raised in this paper are causing great concern and are likely to lead to an industrial action in the teachers' front. We therefore advise the minister to take measures to deal with the issues within a reasonable time to ensure industrial peace (GNAT 1994a).

Despite these persistent letters and threats, no single reply was received from the government (*Daily Graphic* 20 July 1994, 4&13). It appeared that the education authorities subjected the GNAT to a bureaucratic maze in order to frustrate its demands. Notwithstanding, GNAT decided to meet with the Minister once

⁸ This publication was a comprehensive report written by the GNAT secretary outlining the rationale for the 1994 strike. It thus serves as a very informative document on which I draw in this section.

more. Between 10 February and 31 May 1994, the GNAT held four meetings with the minister on their grievances (Ibid). In one meeting held on 10 February, in which the Deputy Education Minister Kwabena Kyere, a former president of GNAT (1982-1986), represented the Minister, no tacit conclusions were reached (GNAT, 1994). However, it was agreed that the Minister would present the grievances of GNAT to cabinet for consideration.

The response of the Minister did not please GNAT. To express its disappointment, the general secretary wrote to the Minister:

We wish to point out that we were not entirely satisfied with the state of action taken on the various items listed before our meeting on 10th February 1994, because it appeared to us that almost all the issues were then being opened for discussion. We had the impression that we were going to be informed of the state of progress the minister had made in respect of the issues we had brought to his attention as far back as May 1993 (GNAT 1994b).

By the end of May, the Minister had still not acted on GNAT's demands. The GNAT, therefore, wrote him another letter dated 8 April, in which it indicated its intention to strike. In response, the Minister once again, invited the GNAT to a meeting on 25 April, to discuss the grievances (Ministry of Education, 1994). In the meeting, the GNAT was assured that an interim council would be established for the GES, while waiting for a new law to be enacted to reflect the changed situation. Secondly, it was assured that the Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning would issue a circular on the payment of gratuity on consolidated salaries. Thirdly, the government was to issue a white paper on the Gyampo Salary Review Commission's report, to take care of the reversion of some teachers to the old pension scheme. About a month after this meeting (11 May), the minister wrote to inform the GNAT that he had sent a memorandum to the office of the president on the establishment of the GES council and was awaiting response. He

indicated further that the finance ministry was due to issue a circular on the payment of gratuity on teachers consolidated salaries. He again pointed out that a government white paper was to be issued on the reversion of teachers to the old pension scheme. He however said nothing on the payment of teachers' legitimate allowances (*Daily Graphic* 20 July 1994). The Minister's letter looked elusive since he was not definitive on any of the issues the GNAT had raised.

This was unacceptable to the GNAT; hence, it sought the intervention of the caucus of teachers in parliament. In a meeting on 13 May 1994, the GNAT persuaded the caucus to petition the minister on its behalf, which the caucus did. However, it appears the caucus was either satisfied with the response it received from the Minister or did not want to be dragged into this humdrum negotiation. Consequently, when GNAT invited the caucus to send representatives to its meeting with the Minister on 31 May 1994, it refused (*Daily Graphic* 20 July 1994). At this meeting, the Minister responded to the grievances of the GNAT, stating that that the Attorney General was working on a new legislation towards the re-establishment of the GES Council. He however, mentioned that it was the responsibility of the finance ministry to pay gratuity on consolidated salaries not his. Furthermore, he mentioned that district directors of education should rather be responsible for the payment of legitimate allowances. Regarding the reversion to the old pension scheme, he hinted that the government was yet to issue a white paper on the Gyampo committee report (*Daily Graphic* 20 July 1994, 13). It is apparent from the Minister's attitude towards GNAT's demands that he adopted benign procedural wrangling to stall the negotiation process by acting as the legitimate arbiter in the first instance, only to lodge responsibility with other state institutions other than his ministry in order ultimately to frustrate GNAT. Even in the aftermath of the transition to democratic rule, therefore, the

government exercised considerable political muscle, even if in a more benign manner in dealing with labour issues.

The Minister's attitude prodded the GNAT to call a strike on 31 May. Ray Cudjoe, then Deputy General Secretary of GNAT, justified the strike by arguing that the GNAT had struck to make the public aware of its grievances, because the minister had delayed unnecessarily in meeting its demands (Iddrisu Seini 1994, 9). Thus, contrary to the Minister's accusation that GNAT declared the strike for political reasons, it is clear that the strike was a result of concrete grievances which he failed to resolve. It is also evident that the GNAT adopted every possible peaceful means to seek redress, which the minister frustrated. After one week of striking, and after the government had promised to resolve the teachers grievances, GNAT on 8 June ordered its membership to resume work (*Daily Graphic*, 9 June 1994). A significant consequence of the strike was that it forced the government to re-establish the GES council a year later, with the promulgation of the GES Act 506 of 1995. The GNAT was also empowered by the same Act to engage in direct negotiation with employers on behalf of all teachers within the GES.

Apart from the 1994 strike, teachers staged other, albeit less effective, wildcat strikes. For instance in 1999, GNAT declared a six-day strike which involved 50,000 teachers to demand salary increases and the payment of arrears (Ghana Strikes Register n.d., 1995-2004). In 2000, the NAGRAT staged a six-day strike involving about 5,000 graduate teachers to demand separate entry level into the GES to correspond to level 15 of the Ghana Universal Salary Structure. The strike was meant to force the hand of the appellate body of the GES council to which NAGRAT had a made presentation on the need for graduate teachers to be placed at that level. The strike was settled and the entry level for graduate teachers was put on a more favourable scale to correspond to the principal superintendent level (level 14) (see Osei-Mensah 2010).

These latter strikes were all staged on the heels of a faltering economy that had serious implications for teachers and the entire labour force. The Ghanaian economy had, since 1996, been saddled with chronic inflation, steady decline in the cedi/dollar rate and a diminishing value of workers' salaries. Kumado and Gockel (2006, 3) commenting on economic development between 1996 and 2001 observed that:

The inadequacy of incomes was compounded by intractable high rates of inflation and exchange rate depreciation so that those on fixed incomes, particularly pensioners, have become worse off. For example, although inflation was brought down from its highest ever level of 123% in 1983 to 10% by end of 1992, it nevertheless remained intractable. Indeed, inflation, coupled with the steady decline of the cedi/dollar rate, which reverberates through the economy, has ever since been the bane of workers.

Without doubt, the effects of these faltering economic developments in part fuelled the teachers' agitations, culminating in the often-sporadic strikes that characterised the teachers' front from 1993 to 2000.

Beyond the struggle for improved salaries and conditions of service, the GNAT had to fight against what appeared to be arbitrary dismissals in the GES. On this point, it was evident that government used considerable political muscle rather than sticking to the established procedures. A case in point was the interdiction of the Director-General of Education, Alhaji Rahim Gbadamosi and six others. In a letter referenced SCR. 38, dated 19 January 1994, Sawyerr directed the Director-General of the Education Service, Alhaji Gbadamosi, to proceed on interdiction and hand over his duties and all government properties in his possession to the Deputy Director-General, John Atta Quayson. Additionally, Gbadamosi was requested to hand over his passport to the special coordinator, Castle Annex (Ministry of Education, 1994). Three

other directors, Mrs S. Aberdie Asante, Director of Administration, Mr C. L. Laryea, Accountant, and Mrs Georgina Amua Sakyi, head Central Stores, were also interdicted. The remaining interdicted officials were John Peter Yaw Tetteh, Chief Security Officer, Emmanuel Lartey, Internal Auditor, and Bossman Dampare, all workers at the Ministry of Education. The officials were interdicted for their alleged involvement in mismanagement of public funds in the procurement of goods for the GES and the Ministry of Education (*Daily Graphic*, 20 January 1994).

Acting in accordance with its aim to protect the security of tenure and the general welfare of its members, GNAT moved quickly to intercede and seek due process for its interdicted members. In a letter written on 24 January 1994, referenced 0884/vol.111/229/94, and copied to the Minister of Education, the GNAT leadership sought to meet the Minister, to ascertain the reasons for the interdiction of the Director-General and the six other officials (GNAT, 1994a). In a rather quick response to the letter, dated 25 January 1994, the Minister stated that since the case was under investigation, it would be prejudicial to discuss anything pertaining to the issue (Ministry of Education, 1994). The GNAT however, insisted on meeting the Minister, stating, “our members look up to us to defend and protect them. But we cannot defend in ignorance. Therefore we need to know the reasons leading to the interdiction of the Director-General and others so that we could offer advice both to the Minister and those affected.” The GNAT thus concluded, “the Minister must agree to let us meet him to learn more about the circumstances leading to the interdiction of the Director-General and the six others” (GNAT, 1994c). In spite of these persistent efforts to meet the Minister, the Minister remained adamant.

Following the failure of the Minister to meet with GNAT, GNAT on 7 February 1994, referred the matter to a team of legal experts, Sam Okudzeto and Associates (GNAT, 1994d). The

GNAT averred that the interdiction of the Director-General and the others seemed irregular and contradicted conditions of service of personnel in the GES (Ibid). The GNAT proceeded to court to seek redress when, in 1995, the government appointed a new Director-General of Education to replace Mr Gbadamosi, even though technically the appointment of Gbadamosi had not being terminated. This latter action now forced the government to attempt to address the issue. The government prevailed on the GNAT to withdraw the court action in 1996 with an agreement the interdiction of Alhaji Gbadamosi would be commuted to retirement while the case of the three other Directors was referred to the GES council for advice. It thus took GNAT two years to resolve this particular matter. The above narration suggests that in the early stages of the transition, the Rawlings led regime had not been able to wean itself altogether from its authoritarian past in dealing with labour issues. In a democratic dispensation, such high-handed approach by the government, in dealing with the interdictions of the Director-General and the others, would seem to the teachers as improper and was reminiscent of the repressive and authoritarian quasi-military reign of the PNDC in the 1980s. Yet, government insensitivity to teachers' demands was not the only challenge of organised teachers during this period; GNAT faced internal problems, which eventually led to the emergence of a second union for teachers.

The Emergence of NAGRAT

While the GNAT battled with the NDC government for improved wages and better conditions for its members and against arbitrary dismissal of its members, it also had to contend with internal dissent emanating from its graduate membership. Graduate teachers had been discontented over being lumped together with

their non-graduate counterparts since the formation of GNAT.⁹ Writing in the 1970s, Asiedu Akrofi lamented the non-commitment and the lukewarm attitude of graduate teachers towards the GNAT. He noted that, “they think of themselves more as graduates of the university than as belonging to GNAT; they have their own association called the Graduate Teachers’ Association of Ghana (GRATAG) to which members tend to give more support in terms of leadership....” (Asiedu-Akrofi 1971, 42). The attitude of graduate teachers towards the GNAT had not changed by the 1990s. An attempt to break away from the GNAT in the 1980s had fizzled out when about 3000 of them left the country to find jobs in other neighbouring countries, particularly Nigeria (Haynes 1995, 81; Osei-Mensah Paul¹⁰, Interview 15 December 2010). This lukewarm attitude of the graduate teachers towards the GNAT appears to have been the product of the historical composition of the education sector. For a long time, graduate teachers were confined to secondary schools, while elementary school teaching was reserved for non-graduates. Graduate teachers were not permitted to teach at the elementary school even if they wanted to. Arguably, such a practice fostered a false notion of professional superiority among graduate teachers, hence, their contempt for being in one union with non-graduates.

After the return of most graduate teachers from Nigeria in the mid-1980s, and after transition to democratic rule in the early

⁹ The teaching service in Ghana comprises of graduate professionals who have received university degrees; Graduate non-professionals who have university degrees with no formal training in education; certificate ‘A’ teachers and previously certificate ‘B’ teachers who received training in a teacher training college. There were others regarded as specialist teachers who had received advanced training in one of the advanced teacher training colleges which have now being brought together to constitute the University of Education, Winneba. There are also pupil teachers who have only Senior Secondary School Certificates and previously middle School Leaving Certificates or “O” Level Certificates.

¹⁰ Paul Osei-Mensah was the general secretary of GNAT from 1983 to 2001.

1990s, some graduate teachers took advantage of the new legal and political institutional framework to agitate for a separate association. They argued that the GNAT was not working to improve the deplorable salaries and conditions of service of its graduate members; rather, it concentrated on fighting for benefits for non-graduates who formed the majority of its membership. These graduate teachers also felt betrayed that the GNAT had not being able to negotiate different entry levels for graduate teachers on the career ladder within the Ghana Education Service (GES). They were particularly disappointed that graduate teachers were put on the same grading scale for salary purposes with teachers who had either only a diploma or specialist certificates (Kwami Alorvi¹¹, Interview 20 December 2010; Philemon Tsekpoh, Interview 31 March 2013). The placement of all professional teachers on a single hierarchical structure for grading, promotion and salary purposes had accompanied the setting up of a teaching service for the education sector in 1974. While the structure benefitted the “ordinary” teacher in several ways, it was a great disincentive to graduate teachers. The hierarchy arranged from top to bottom was as follows:

- a. Director General
- b. Deputy Director General
- c. Director
- d. Assistant Director
- e. Principal Superintendent
- f. Senior Superintendent
- g. Superintendent
- h. Assistant Superintendent
- i. Certificate “A” Teacher (Osae, 41-42).

Teachers due for promotion, after having passed the examinations to the grades of Assistant Superintendent and Senior

¹¹ Kwami Alorvi was the President of NAGRAT until 2008.

Superintendent, could serve a certain number of years and earn promotion without having actually to pass the requisite examination. It must also be emphasised that the ordinary classroom teacher (Cert 'A') could, by showing professional competence, rise to the grade of Assistant Director – the grade at which most graduate teachers retired— leaving him only one career post short of the position of a Director, for which a university degree was required (Osae 1981,42). However, the grade of Director was in most cases the preserve of teachers who became headmasters of Senior Secondary Schools while the Deputy Director-General and Director-General positions were appointive. Beyond this, graduate teachers and non-graduate teachers did not, when being examined for promotion, have to answer the same questions. Questions were asked depending on the level of qualification rather than the rank (Philemon Tsekpo¹², Interview 31 March 2013). The implication of the structure for the teaching service was that, even though only graduate teachers could rise to become Directors and Director-Generals, few of them did. When promoting teachers, more emphasis was placed on experience and long service than on one's level of qualification. Thus Cert 'A' teachers or specialist teachers with long years of service were in most cases on the same grade with graduate professional teachers and received the same salary, irrespective of the superior educational qualification of teachers who had obtained a university degree. Some graduate teachers felt this was injustice. Consequently, a group of graduate teachers constituted themselves into Concerned Graduate Teachers, and came together in 1993 to agitate for a restructuring of the salary structure and grading system. Philemon Tsekpo, who at the time was a teacher at the

¹² Philemon Tsekpo worked as a teacher at Yilo Krobo Secondary School in the 1990s and was the leader of the graduate teachers who defected from the GNAT to form NAGRAT.

Yilo Krobo Secondary School in the Eastern Region, led the group (Philemon Tsekpo, Interview 31 March 2013).

Interestingly, around the same period when the graduate teachers started their agitation, a Pay and Grading Committee was commissioned for the GES to investigate the placement and salary structure of personnel in the GES. The committee recommended separate hierarchical structures for graduate professional and non-graduate professional teachers for salary purposes (Christian Addae-Poku¹³, Interview 17 December 2010; Kwami Alorvi, Interview 20 December 2010). Co-incidentally, the government also constituted the Gyampo Salary Review Commission to study the placement and salary structure of the public sector. The Gyampo Commission, having taking due cognisance of, and in consonance with the recommendations of the Pay and Grading Committee, also recommended a separate hierarchical structure for graduate professional and non-graduate professional teachers in the Ghana Education Service for salary purposes (*Daily Graphic* 11 May 1994, 6).¹⁴

The GNAT, however, was uncomfortable with the recommendation for separate hierarchical structures for the teaching corps. When given the opportunity to make presentations to the Pay and Grading Committee, the GNAT expressed its dissatisfaction with the recommendation. This presentation was later published in its official newsletter, *The Teacher*, arguing that if such a policy was implemented, it was likely to divide the teachers' front (*The Teacher* December 1993). What the GNAT suggested instead was for the GES to maintain a single salary structure for all teachers, in which graduate teachers could have

¹³ Addae-Poku, a teacher at Nkawie Secondary/Technical School in the Ashanti region, is the current president of NAGRAT.

¹⁴ This publication of the *Daily Graphic* carried the full report of the Gyampo Commission, including the part dealing with the education sector and the teaching service.

different starting and termination points, without necessarily creating separate structures.

Interestingly, when the government released its white paper on the Gyampo Review Commission's report, all the recommendations regarding the teaching service, except the creation of separate hierarchical structures for graduate professional teachers and non-graduate professional teachers, were upheld. The Concerned Graduate Teachers (CGT) suspected that the GNAT had a hand in this development. Coupled with the earlier publication in the *Teacher*, the white paper inflamed the discontent of the disgruntled graduate teachers (Philemon Tsekpoh Interview, 31 March 2013). In a meeting held in Somanya on 12 December 1994, the graduate teachers resolved to write to GNAT to protest its objection to the recommendations for separate hierarchical structure for graduate and non-graduate professional teachers (see www.nagratonline.org, retrieved on 2 January 2011). The GNAT did not respond to this letter until February 1995, when Paul Osei Mensah, GNAT's general secretary, invited the leadership of the graduate teachers to a meeting on 6 February 1995. At the meeting, Osei Mensah was alleged to have urged the graduate teachers to go ahead with the formation of their own association, since another teacher organisation would engender competition and efficiency (Christian Addae-Poku Interview, 17 December 2010).

Consequently, the Concerned Graduate Teachers began to form and inaugurated regional branches between 19 October 1995 and 2 March 1996. In May 1996, the association was registered with the Registrar General's Department (RGD) as NAGRAT. At its first national delegates' conference, held in Kumasi in 1998, Lucas Alagbor, a leading member of the disgruntled group was elected the first President, Kwame Edjah as Vice-President and Nicholas Ahator as secretary. After this period, NAGRAT officially broke away from GNAT to become a fully-fledged

teacher union representing graduate teachers, who were mostly teaching in Senior Secondary Schools (NAGRAT 2002).¹⁵ The breakaway of the NAGRAT was, however, not very consequential as it remained on the side-lines of the labour relations arena in the Ghana Education Service, at least, until the year 2000, when it began to exert its influence in labour relations. This was to be expected as the NAGRAT focused on building its organisational structure to better position it to play a more active role in the education labour terrain as evidenced in its actions after year 2000 (For detailed discussion see Amoako 2012, 93-114). More so, until 2000, the GES had not officially recognised the NAGRAT as a union in the education sector, even though NAGRAT had registered with the Registrar General's Department as a trade union. Therefore, one could not expect NAGRAT to have any legal bargaining clout to engage with the education authorities on behalf of its members. Besides, it had weak organisational structures that could not have enabled it to engage actively in contesting the government, the GES and the Ministry of Education over the issues that would become the bane of teachers, which the better-resourced GNAT was able to battle out with the government and the education authorities as discussed above.

Conclusion

The transition to democratic rule presented both opportunities and challenges to teachers and their unions. The new legal and political institutional framework did permit labour pluralism, allowing some graduate teachers, who found the GNAT unable to fight for their interests, to break off to found their own association. While this seemed to cause a fragmentation in the teachers' front,

¹⁵ Lucas Alagbor indicated in a press conference held in Accra on 16 December 1998 that GNAT's attempt to frustrate the existence of the group and its continual determination to subordinate the interest of the graduate teacher to that of the non-graduate teacher were reasons for their secession. (*Daily Graphic* 17 December 1998).

this development did not in fact cause any immediate set-back for organised teachers. What became the bane of organised teachers was the government's insensitivity to their demands – and in this the GNAT remained at the forefront, lobbying the government and articulating teachers' grievances. The GNAT generally used non-confrontational approaches in presenting its grievances; however, the NDC government's delayed responses and its resort to procedural wrangling pushed the GNAT to resort to strike actions to forcefully push its demands, painting a picture of disharmony in the education sector. The grievances of GNAT reflected a generalised dissatisfaction on the part of organised labour with their economic fortunes and focused fundamentally on demanding increases in teachers' salaries and improvements in related conditions of work as well as seeking due process for its members who were subjected to arbitrarily disciplinary measures by the government.

It must be stressed however, that with the opening of the democratic space, it had become relatively safe, for GNAT and perhaps workers generally, both to rely on the collective bargaining arrangement and to protest unfair treatment through strikes and court actions where negotiation had failed. Hitherto, particularly, in the 1980s, the GNAT would have recoiled to its shelf for fear of recrimination – for it was not uncommon for the PNDC government during the 1980s to suppress labour agitation with severe repression (see Jeong 1995). It is thus reasonable to suggest, that, after the democratic transition, GNAT found in industrial action a possible avenue to articulate its grievances. Thus, the transition to democratic rule offered the teacher unions, just like other public sector workers, more room to manoeuvre, even if the government remained adamant and their economic and working conditions remained fragile and unattractive.

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