

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE MEDIA AND HUMAN RIGHTS IN GHANA

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

**3.0.1** It is commonly said in reference to media performance that a country gets the type of media it deserves. With particular reference to the media in Ghana, one often hears it said that they notoriously change with the times. In other words, the Ghanaian media have the tendency to respond as quickly to the political and ideological coloration of different governments, as the political environment changes.<sup>1</sup>

**3.0.2** The propensity to adapt and bend to the will of governments underpins media complicity in some of the human rights violations and abuses that have taken place under various regimes in Ghana. Experience shows that the first action of most military juntas is to take over media organisations, because they see the media as perfect tools to propagate the political and ideological objectives of their new regime. Thus as an institution, the media have played a legitimacy role in helping various Ghanaian administrations perpetuate their rule, however unpopular.<sup>2</sup> George Agyekum, who chaired the National Public Tribunals from 1984-1993, underscores this point when he notes:

Even though the avowed aim of the adventurer is to stifle media and free speech generally, incidentally the media is exploited to hype popular support either knowingly or unknowingly. It is used to create fertile conditions to justify the action. Media sensationalism or excessive publicity to coup prone characters or events has always been a contributory factor. Media practitioners have argued defending excessive publicity or sensationalism that to do otherwise would not safeguard the reporting of uncensored information from the public. But the real factor is the commercial objectives of private media in the face of competition and the rising cost of media production, a survival instinct. In all this it should be borne in mind that the coup maker does not tolerate free speech or democratic instincts. In fact the facts and figures have shown

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<sup>1</sup> See J.C. Merrill, *Global Journalism: A Survey of the World's Mass Media* New York, NY, Longman, 1983, W. Hachten, *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa*. Ames, IA, Iowa State University Press, 1971. J. Smith, "The Press and Elite Values in Ghana, 1962-1970," *Journalism Quarterly*, (Winter), no. 49, 1972, pp.670-683; O Stokke, (ed.), *Reporting Africa*, New York: Africana 1971; Y. Twumasi, "The Newspaper Press and Political Leadership in Developing Nations: The Case of Ghana, 1964 to 1978," *Gazette*, (26) No.1, 1980, p.7; K. Bofo, "Ghana Press Under the PNDC: Performance under Confinement," *Gazette*, (35), No.2, 1985, pp.73-82; C. Asante, *The Press in Ghana: Problems and Prospects*. Lanham, New York, London: University Press of America, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> Asante, *supra*.

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that coup makers have managed to use free speech and democratic culture and environment to strike and replace with fear, terror and intimidation of the populace...<sup>3</sup>

This assertion is quite clearly supported in the contents of the Ghanaian press during periods of unconstitutional rule, as well as from anecdotal evidence from media practitioners.

**3.0.3** The sources of information for this report were: newspapers of the mandate period, memoranda from media practitioners, focus group discussions with journalists, published literature and other secondary sources. These have been helpful in illuminating the various ways in which media were complicit in, or resisted human rights abuses and repression throughout much of Ghana's post independence history.

**3.0.4** It is important to note that generally, during the periods of unconstitutional rule in Ghana, there was little room or tolerance for private media, particularly when newspaper licensing laws were promulgated and enforced. Even during periods of constitutional rule, the Press did not operate as independent entities. State-owned dailies, the *Daily Graphic*, which was acquired by the State under the CPP government in 1964, and the *Ghanaian Times*, established by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah in 1958, as well as the state-owned Ghana Broadcasting Corporation (GBC) were the principal vehicles through which successive governments prosecuted their agenda, propagated their messages and coalesced public support for their regimes.

**3.0.5** The history of radio and television as state-owned monopolies provides a critical background to understanding the peculiar role every government of Ghana exacted from GBC employees. Indeed, until the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Decree, 1968 (NLCD 226), was passed to turn the Ghana Broadcasting Service into a public corporation in 1968, the Civil Service Act governed the GBC. Accordingly, the men and women who worked at the GBC as journalists perceived themselves as civil servants, serving the government of the day. It was not until 1996, three years after the restoration of democratic governance under the Fourth Republic, that the airwaves were liberalized, allowing for private participation in radio and television broadcast in Ghana. This state of affairs meant that it was largely, but not exclusively, government-controlled GBC and their press counterparts which were complicit and/or resistant to the illegitimate actions of unconstitutional governments.

**3.0.6** This report examines print and broadcast media from 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1957 to 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1993. It is arranged in chronological order under sub-headings denoting the various governments: the CPP administration, the National Liberation Council (NLC), the Second Republic, the National Redemption Council (NRC) and its related regimes of the Supreme Military Councils (SMC) I and II, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Third Republic and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

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<sup>3</sup> George Agyekum, *The Treason Trial of 1986: Torture and Revolutionary Justice*. Accra: Justice Trust Publication, 2001, p.17.

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**3.0.7** The discussion of the media under the post-independence government of Dr. Nkrumah and the CPP is significant, particularly for a proper understanding and appreciation of the pattern of coercion, co-optation and resistance to government that has characterized the entire history of the media during the mandate period. As noted by a former employee of GBC, there were “stressful conditions imposed on the people who worked at the GBC from the First Republic to the end of the PNDC regime.”<sup>4</sup> According to him, harassment, intimidation and interference in the work of professional broadcasters have been common violations of human rights by both military and civilian governments in Ghana.

### **3.1 16<sup>TH</sup> MARCH, 1957 -- 23<sup>RD</sup> FEBRUARY, 1966: THE CONVENTION PEOPLE’S PARTY (CPP) GOVERNMENT**

**3.1.1** The history of media repression, co-optation and resistance began with the colonial authorities. This precedent was crystallized during the regime of the CPP and became an established pattern by successive regimes throughout the country’s history. The first press laws to be introduced in the country were by the British colonial government. The Book and Newspaper Registration Ordinance was passed in 1887, requiring newspaper editors to send returns of their circulation as well as the title of their newspapers, the location of their offices, printers, and publishers to the Colonial Secretary. Printers were expected to print their names and addresses on the first and last pages of the newspaper. In 1893 the Newspaper Registration Ordinance established a register of newspaper proprietors in order to help the authorities identify offending publishers.<sup>5</sup> The British also passed the Criminal Code (Amendment) Ordinance in 1934, to curb the “unruly” behaviour and attitude of the Ghanaian nationalist press toward the colonial government. The Criminal Libel law and other draconian press laws from the colonial period, remained on the books and were used against errant journalists from time to time.

**3.1.2** The CPP Government turned Ghana into a one-party state, and the state-owned media into its mouthpiece. The government pursued an unfriendly media policy, where the media in Ghana were made to see themselves as an arm of government, even to the extent of taking direct instructions from ministers of state and the presidency. Ainslie observed that during the CPP regime “the official conception of the role of the press was a ‘revolutionary’ one with journalists on the Guinea Press papers seeing themselves as political activists committed to the building of a new society.”<sup>6</sup> Dr. Nkrumah himself sums up his media policy as follows:

Just as in the capitalist countries the press represents and carries out the purpose of capitalism, so in revolutionary Africa, our revolutionary Press must present and carry forward our revolutionary purpose.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.

<sup>5</sup> Fred Omu, *Press and Politics in Nigeria 1880-1937*, Longman, London, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> R. Ainslie *The Press in Africa: Communications Past and Present*. Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1966, p. 61.

<sup>7</sup> K. Nkrumah, *The African Journalist* Dar-es-Salem, Tanzania, 1965.

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**3.1.3** In that vein, on the inauguration of television broadcasting in Ghana, Nkrumah urged the new service to “reflect and promote the highest national and social ideals of our ideology and society.”<sup>8</sup> Asante aptly sums up Nkrumah’s media policy as “developmental dictatorship.”<sup>9</sup> Nkrumah enforced tough censorship on the media and enacted several repressive laws in addition to what he had inherited, including the infamous Preventive Detention Act (PDA) of 1958, to stifle dissent and crash political opponents. Among other things, the PDA was designed to suppress and discourage open criticism of government policies and decisions. The privately-owned *Ashanti Pioneer* had several run-ins with the government until it was ultimately banned under new powers granted the government by a pre-publication censorship law of August, 1960. Before it was banned, a government-appointed censor was installed at the offices of the newspaper to vet any material before its publication.

**3.1.4** In 1962, individual dispatches of foreign correspondents were subjected to prior censorship under the Press Correspondents’ Instrument.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, in June, 1963, Nkrumah passed the Newspaper Licensing Act, which required “newspaper editors and publishers to obtain license, renewable annually, from the government of the day before they could begin publication.”<sup>11</sup> The new law gave President Nkrumah additional powers to control and muzzle the press, particularly the private ones.

**3.1.5** Nkrumah supervised a constitutional government under which the media was completely state-controlled, where a culture of fanaticism reigned, and where the imprisonment of Ghanaian journalists or deportation of foreign journalists were not uncommon. As an example of interference and control in the editorial work of journalists at the GBC during the First Republic, the Ministry of Information or the Office of the President also sometimes exercised direct editorial control at the GBC. For example, it would often give written instructions, determining the use of the titles of the President, as well as the type of prominence to be accorded it during newscasts. Thus, shortly after 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1960, the Ministry of Information ordered the GBC newsroom to use the title, “Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, President of the Republic of Ghana”, in all subsequent news bulletins. It further directed that the one o’clock and the six o’clock news bulletins be submitted for vetting at the President’s office.

**3.1.6** News was censored, and to this end, certain people, sometimes with no knowledge of news production, were employed to censor news. An instance of this practice was the posting to the GBC, of Kodwo Addison (later to be appointed Director of the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute), as a censor in 1961, under the guise of a “news consultant.”

**3.1.7** News censoring sometimes involved falsification of facts, such as the reported massacre of 11 Belgian civilians by Congolese civilians during the Congo crisis in the

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<sup>8</sup> Kwame Nkrumah, as quoted in the *Daily Graphic*, vol. 4616 Monday, 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1965, p.5.

<sup>9</sup> Asante supra.

<sup>10</sup> See William B. Harvey *Law and Social Change in Ghana* Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1966, p. 319.

<sup>11</sup> See Twumasi, supra., p. 17.

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1960s.<sup>12</sup> Publication of such false news had implications for the credibility of the media organisations.

**3.1.8** A more insidious form of control was the planting of spies among GBC workers. The example is given of one Sgt Sedziafa, an official driver assigned to the newsroom of the GBC, who also doubled as an informant between 1960 and 1963.

**3.1.9** During the CPP administration, it was not uncommon for the GBC to engage in personal vendetta, often against perceived political opponents. In the period following the failed Kulungugu bomb attempt on the life of Nkrumah, a former broadcaster, Alex “Chappie” Hutton-Mills, was engaged to write and present news commentaries that attacked Tawia Adamafio, who had been accused of complicity.<sup>13</sup>

**3.1.10** Occasionally, broadcasters were victimised for their perceived political beliefs through arbitrary transfers. Such was the case of Eric Adjorlolo, then Head of News and Current Affairs, who, in 1963, was removed to the newly created position of “Head of Common Services.”

**3.1.11** So hostile was government to dissenting voices that few private newspapers survived. Those that did, such as the *Pioneer*, came under severe government censorship and harassment.

## **3.2 24<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY, 1966 - 30<sup>TH</sup> SEPTEMBER, THE NATIONAL LIBERATION COUNCIL (NLC)**

**3.2.1** The first coup d’état in Ghana occurred on 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, and was prosecuted by a police cum military junta, who constituted themselves into the National Liberation Council (NLC). The media legacy of the NLC, which overthrew Nkrumah and ruled Ghana until 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1969, is best described as mixed.

**3.2.2** One of the first acts of the NLC regime was to imprison (place under “protective custody”) editors of the state-owned newspapers and CPP publications. The Guinea Press, set up by Nkrumah shortly after Independence, published the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Evening News*, as well as the *Daily Gazette*, the *Sunday Punch* and the *Spark*, which were ideological journals of the CPP. The arrests sent a powerful message to journalists across the country and set the stage for compliance.

### **3.2.3 Media Support**

**3.2.3.1** Until 24<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, there was what has been referred to as a “cipipification” of newspapers. Immediately following the coup, however, not only were all CPP journals discontinued, overnight newspapers were “published as supporters of the

<sup>12</sup> Memorandum to National Reconciliation Commission.

<sup>13</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.

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new Government”.<sup>14</sup> The *Evening News*, President Nkrumah’s own newspaper joined the chorus of supporters of the new regime. Thus, on 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, a day after the coup, banner headlines began to confer legitimacy on the new government, to delegitimise the old, and to garner public support for the NLC.

**3.2.3.2** “Army Takes Over Government In Ghana,” proclaimed the *Daily Graphic*<sup>15</sup>, “Kwame’s myth is broken.” The editorial for that day was titled “the voice of the people” and noted:

Yesterday, the armed forces and the police took over the government of Ghana and dismissed Kwame Nkrumah as the President and dissolved Parliament...in putting into effect this bold decision, the members of the NLC have said that ‘this act has been necessitated by the political and economic situation in the country. The concentration of power in the hands of one man, has led to the abuse of individual rights and liberties. Power has been exercised by the former president capriciously.’<sup>16</sup>

**3.2.3.3** Under the sub-heading “Full support,” the editorial went on to pledge its support for the new regime and urged all Ghanaians to do the same:

A commentator of Radio Ghana has said that one had only to walk in the streets of Accra yesterday to see clearly by the expression on people’s faces that this bold revolutionary act has the full support of the man in the street...We of the *Daily Graphic* therefore heartily enjoin all Ghanaians to support the new leaders in their difficult but courageous task of leading the nation to the bright future that it so dearly deserves ...<sup>17</sup>

Subsequent issues of the paper dealt with the release of those detained during Kwame Nkrumah’s term of office, probes into the activities of former ministers of government and the goodwill shown by all Ghanaians to the regime and their “glorious revolution.”

**3.2.3.4** Pre-empting any moves by the military/police junta, national newspapers appointed new editors. The appointments of new editors for the *Daily Graphic* and the *Ghanaian Times*, according to Asante,<sup>18</sup> made it possible for the NLC to use the national newspapers as the “champions of the government cause.” Without much prompting editors and journalists began to practice self-censorship to avoid government reprisals. A mid-level journalist at the time recalls that after the coup soldiers continued to visit newsrooms from time to time. For instance, the journalist, Festus Addae, who had been commissioned into the military as a Major to head the Public Relations Department of the NLC, was a frequent visitor to the studios.<sup>19</sup> These visits were read as being intended to ensure cooperation from journalists.

<sup>14</sup> R. Ainslie, op. cit. supra.

<sup>15</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 4993 Friday, 25<sup>th</sup> February, 1966, p.1.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>18</sup> Asante, op. cit. supra, p.39.

<sup>19</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.

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**3.2.3.5** Government officials, former CPP officials and other authority were often quoted on the rationale behind the coup. “Our Coup Was The World’s Finest” was the headline in the Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> May, 1966, issue of the *Ghanaian Times*, in which it was noted:

The glorious February 24 coup in Ghana was necessitated by the political and economic misadministration of the old regime, Mr. M. A. Ribeiro, Ghana [sic] ambassador in the US, has said in Washington.

The Ambassador, who was addressing the Washington Branch of the Ghana Students Association, was quoted as saying, “there had been no finer coup anywhere in the world than the one that toppled Kwame Nkrumah”.

**3.2.3.6** An opinion piece by Cobbina Kessie, a lawyer and former Ambassador to the Republic of Liberia, To the People’s Republic of China and to the United Arab Emirates under the CPP administration, had this to say about the NLC regime:

No sane Ghanaian can condemn the coup d’état of February 24,1966, not at least from the political point of view...the members of the NLC need not be apologetic for what they have done, they did it in the interest of the country.<sup>20</sup>

**3.2.3.7** One front-page lead article in the *Daily Graphic*, with the headline “Coup: A Good Lesson For Future Politicians”,<sup>21</sup> quoted Brig Akwasi A. Afrifa as saying, “Ghana’s timely coup on February 24 1966 will serve as a good lesson to future political leaders in the country...” The front-page lead article in the same issue of the paper told of the seizure of the property of eleven ex-ministers of state. The paper’s editorial supported the seizure and said:

This operation should be an eye opener for all Ghanaians that henceforth, those charged with the trusteeship of public funds must exercise extreme caution as to how they use such funds ...today, these misguided gapping sycophants know that they must be accountable for their gapping sycophancy. Today, they know that they cannot steal public funds with impunity. Others should learn from the costly lesson.<sup>22</sup>

The “architects” of the coup were referred to as heroes and “gallant men” in the article and the writer proposed that the NLC should continue in office for the time being, performing the duties of executive head while civilian ministers must be appointed to work under the council.

**3.2.3.8** The *Ghanaian Times* was equally effusive in its support. “The Press Will Now Be Free-NLC,”<sup>23</sup> screamed the headline of an article in the paper, which had previously been

<sup>20</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 5119 Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> April, 1967.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol.4,807, Monday, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1966.

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the chief mouthpiece of the Nkrumah Government. In that article, Lt-Gen Joseph A. Ankrah, Chairman of the NLC, was reported as saying “the press would be expected to express any political opinion, to criticize freely, provided they did it constructively and responsibly.” The Chairman also said that it was the intention of the Council to help the press of Ghana, to help raise standards of journalism in the country.

**3.2.3.9** Like the *Daily Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times* was at pains to portray the regime as having massive support from the public. In an article with the headline: “Support For The NLC Is Real”, the paper reported that A. B. B. Kofi, Ghana’s new Ambassador to the US, addressed a crowded press conference to explain the regimes’ press policies to the American people. According to the Ambassador, the tremendous support for the regime was “a genuine expression of joy by the people who have been freed from bondage and ushered into a new world of freedom.”<sup>24</sup> “Nkrumah Regime Toppled By Public Opinion” was the headline of another article in which it was reported that J. M. Kporvie, Chairman of the Northern Regional Committee of Administration, said that public opinion toppled Nkrumah. He was speaking to the chiefs and people of East Gonja and appealed to them to stand by the NLC to build a better Ghana.<sup>25</sup>

**3.2.3.10** Some articles were particularly damning of the former regime. One such article carried in the *Ghanaian Times*, and written by Mabel Dove, a former CPP Parliamentarian, described the coup as a healing tonic. Dove, who had once edited Nkrumah’s *Evening News*, sought to vilify, demystify and de-legitimise the CPP government by chronicling a list of wrongdoing:

The coup of February 24, 1966 has destroyed tyranny in Ghana but it cannot change the mental attitude of Ghanaians over night. Let Ghanaians examine themselves critically and find out the reason for the sufferings inflicted on them before deliverance came.

If we are true to ourselves, we can say frankly that we failed to stem the downward march of the deposed tyrant (Kwame Nkrumah) and his henchmen because we, too wanted to enjoy some of the fruits of their rascality. Many bowed the knee to corrupt politicians because they wanted promotions, position of special responsibility or to be included on delegations or scholarships awarded to their friends and relatives.

Others became touts for certain Ministers and some gave presents of hard cash to see the “big men,” thus men and women threw away “righteousness which exalted a nation” and became the slaves of evil men.

Ghanaians bowed the knee and fawned on men and women who had political power, and even government departments feared to ask those political aristocrats to pay their bills.

<sup>24</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 2,629 Thursday, 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1966, p.5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 2,614 Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1966, p.3.



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Naturally, those of no influence, the hardworking men and women had to carry the burden of the politicians and their accomplices on their shoulders; and so the smiles and laughter of Ghanaians fled and workers went about their daily work with unsmiling faces.

Kwame Nkrumah, his gang, and his followers, taught people that the best type of citizen in the community was the man who lives in luxurious surroundings, owned long expensive cars, whose palaces or flats so furnished that the visitor feared to walk on the soft carpet or sit on the comfortable chair.

Those were the Nkrumaist socialists, the consciencists [Nkrumah advocated the idea of consciencism. With its socialist underpinnings the consciencism philosophy promoted an end of exploitation, end of class divisions, and a planned egalitarian development and social justice.] Whose consciences were safely kept by their master, the despot, in the tunnel under Flagstaff House.

Today, awakening Ghanaians know that the tyrant and his followers are not the best type of people in the community. Their greed, cruelty, cowardice and callous indifference to pain and suffering show them to be what they really are – ignoble despicable contemptible, men and women totally unfit for public service. Their sole motive in pushing themselves into political power was gain and profit.

Now stripped of their masks of office and reduced to their own natural size what a poor specimen of manhood and womanhood, they are a disgrace to Ghana, no wonder they connived with their master the arch-criminal to kill the man who, through his research, named them Ghanaians [J.B. Danquah conducted lengthy research to establish that the main Gold Coast ethnic groups were descendants of ancient Ghana, the medieval empire which flourished between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. Though inaccurate it influenced the change of the name to Ghana]. Ingratitude, thy name is disbanded C.P.P.

A coup had to take place. Everyone felt it coming only the criminals were in complete darkness, but the signs were everywhere.

Now that this coup is here no Ghanaians should allow himself to be corrupted by relatives or friends so that he deliberately deceives members of the National Liberation Council and afterwards confess that he was afraid of his life.

**VIGILANCE**

The normal adult who is matured enough to live in an independent sovereign state, knows that he has to live with danger. Those who wish to stand in the hall of Freedom and Justice have to be ever vigilant, for in Ghana today we are at WAR against the moral diseases of the deposed Nkrumah and his evil gang and the exhilarating tonic of courage,

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patriotism dedication and self-sacrifice which we have imbibed from the glorious revolution of February 24, 1966.<sup>26</sup>

**3.2.3.11** Like the state press, private newspapers were equally supportive of the coup and the personalities involved. An editorial in the February 1967 issue of *The Standard*, a publication of the Catholic Church, described the coup as an act of God:

Indeed, we cannot let slip this glorious opportunity without singing praise to the armed forces and the police...who displayed extraordinary gallantry during the coup. To them, we say 'blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called the sons of God. Matt. 5:7.

Similarly *The Standard* noted that:

The declaration of the NLC that it does not seek political power, is proof of its undiluted honesty to put the nation back on the right track of restoration. God has heard our prayers, he has liberated us.<sup>27</sup>

In a June 1968 article, the paper termed the era under the NLC as a "new era", the "rebirth of Ghana"<sup>28</sup>

**3.2.3.12** Like *The Standard*, the *Christian Messenger* also described the coup-makers as "gallant men who led the revolution".<sup>29</sup> Generally, however, *The Standard* was more reticent than the *Christian Messenger* was. While the *Christian Messenger* was consistent in heaping praise upon the regime, *The Standard* sometimes offered criticisms.

### **3.2.4 The Abortive Coup Of 1967**

**3.2.4.1** The press was particularly supportive of the government immediately after the unsuccessful coup attempt on 17<sup>th</sup> April, 1967, during which Lt-Gen Kotoka, a member of the NLC had been killed. The *Daily Graphic* was very condemnatory of the coup attempt, noting:

Those who felt that the glorious revolution of February 24 1966 had taken their bread out of their mouths would do anything to come back into positions of power where they could continue to lord it over humble Ghanaians... The failure of the attempted coup also teaches some lessons. The jubilation with which Ghanaians not only in Accra, but also throughout the country greeted the failure of the coup is clear testimony, if any is still needed, of the country wide support which the NLC enjoys<sup>30</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> *The Ghanaian Times* vol. 2,516 Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> April, 1966, p.5.

<sup>27</sup> *The Standard*, March 6, 1966.

<sup>28</sup> *The Standard*, June, 1968.

<sup>29</sup> *The Standard*, March, 1968.

<sup>30</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 5146 Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1967.

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**3.2.4.2** From 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1967, the *Daily Graphic* gave elaborate coverage to the late Lt-Gen Kotoka. There were pictures and articles, poetry and tributes of his valour. Pictures also featured various bodies, throughout the country mourning him. The *Graphic* covered in great detail donations to the Kotoka Fund, which had been set up, and the trial of nine soldiers who had led the abortive coup d'état.

**3.2.4.3** The *Ghanaian Times* went overboard. For example, it reported on its front-page that two army officers Lt Samuel B. Arthur and Lt Moses Yeboah, had been sentenced to death by firing squad for attempting to subvert the regime, and were to be executed by firing squad “*IN PUBLIC*” at the Teshie Firing Range. With the banner headline “*THE END OF THE TRAITORS*” the paper pictorially and graphically showed where the executions took place, how the executions took place and the masses that waited patiently and climbed electric poles to see the executions of the two Army Officers.<sup>31</sup>

The *Ghanaian Times* editorial titled “Death Without Glory” noted:

There has been country wide demand that those who were responsible for the treasonable act should be made to suffer the same fate which they had schemed for the violent and speedy liquidation of our leaders...” “We have had numerous correspondence from all sections of the society, imploring the NLC to stop acting like a doctor who, having diagnosed a desperate disease which can only be cured by applying equally desperate remedies, perfunctorily put the patient to bed with one consoling tablet”<sup>32</sup>

**3.2.4.4** The newspaper called for a thorough investigation to fish out

those who prompted and promised the three conspirators and assassins. The country is of the opinion that there were vested political interests behind the insurrection. The country therefore demands that the NLC should go all out and ferret out from their conspiratorial liars those members and bring them out into the open and make them dance to the music, which they have themselves chosen.<sup>33</sup>

**3.2.4.5** The NLC government started an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the 17<sup>th</sup> April 1967 insurrection and all those connected with it were to be brought to trial and punished severely. The *Ghanaian Times*' insistent editorials spurred on the regime, commending it for initiating the investigations and urged it to “go the whole hog and do a lot of purges and pruning.”<sup>34</sup>

**3.2.4.6** The government subsequently placed about 500 persons, including journalists, in protective custody,<sup>35</sup> under the ten Protective Custody Decrees, the NLC enacted in 1967 alone. The paper duly published the names of all the people affected in the same issue

<sup>31</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,846, Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> May, 1967; *Ghanaian Times*, vol.2,847, Wednesday, 10<sup>th</sup> May, 1967.

<sup>32</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, 10th May, 1967, supra.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,850, Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> May, 1967.

<sup>35</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 2,856, Saturday, 20<sup>th</sup> May, 1967.

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and in subsequent ones.<sup>36</sup> The reason for putting all the 489 into protective custody was explained in a front-page banner article with the headline “Attempt To Overthrow The Government: NCOs Will Be Tried Soon...”<sup>37</sup> The paper reported Lt-Gen Ankrah as saying”

The people concerned have shown by their conduct that true freedom meant very little to them, when, on hearing the news of the so-called dismissal of members of the NLC they started jubilating...their provocative attitude incensed and angered thousands of individuals in the communities in which these people lived and plans were hatched by the freedom loving citizens...to attack these individuals and kill them if necessary...the government therefore had to act quickly to foil these plans and therefore place them into protective custody”<sup>38</sup>

While Lt-Gen J.A. Ankrah, Chairman of the NLC, emphasised that the press “could serve as an effective watchdog of a newly regained liberty” when questioned on why some journalists had been detained, the General said that their arrest had nothing to do with their work as journalists and that investigations were going on in their case. This appeared to have satisfied journalists and nothing more was said on the arrest of their colleagues.

**3.2.4.7** The editorial commenting on that issue reiterated the same points, in previous editorials. The regime was once again commended for bringing to book collaborators of the 17<sup>th</sup> April insurrection:

There has been persistent clamour from all parts of the country that the accomplices of the murderers should be brought to trial. The chairman’s announcement, should therefore not only reassure the nation, that the culprits will be brought to book, but also that action will be swift and thorough<sup>39</sup>

**3.2.4.8** The Tuesday, 30<sup>th</sup> May, 1967 issue of the paper reported that three persons, an Army Officer and two civilians, Lt Augustus Owusu-Gyimah, Sampson Sasu Baffour-Awuah and John Osei Poku had been sentenced to death by firing squad for an earlier plot to overthrow the regime between November, 1966 and January, 1967. A fourth person, who was a student of Konongo Odumasi Secondary School, Kofi Owusu, was sentenced to 25years imprisonment. They had been charged with six counts of conspiracy to commit subversion and subversion. No one asked any questions as to why their arrest and trial had not been made public earlier, nor why civilians were being tried by a Military Tribunal

<sup>36</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,857, Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> May, 1967.

<sup>37</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 2,862 Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

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**3.2.4.9** The regime continued to “ferret out” collaborators in the 17<sup>th</sup> April abortive coup, and the state press continued in its unquestioned support for the regime’s actions. By the National Liberation Council (Protective Custody) (Consolidated) (Amendment) (No 9) Decree, 1967(NLCD 172), Army Officers were placed in protective custody. The press reported that no reasons had been given, yet typically they did not press for any either.<sup>40</sup> Far from condemning the detentions without trial, the *Ghanaian Times* maintained in its editorial in the same issue that the Army in its view had to be “purged and purged drastically.”

**3.2.5 Discussions On Return To Constitutional Rule**

**3.2.5.1** The year 1968 was a year of intense political discussions on the form of governance appropriate for the country. The tone appeared to have been set at the end of the previous year, when the *Daily Graphic* reported that at the launch of the press week at the Ghana Institute of Journalism, Brig Afrifa, member of the NLC responsible for Finance, had said that the country had reached a stage where the press and the people of Ghana must start thinking seriously about a return to civilian rule. “Our revolution has lost its momentum. This I believe as a soldier is an indication that our military regime must come to an end. I do not suppose that we can bluff our way through,” Brig Afrifa was quoted to have said.<sup>41</sup> The article stated that Brig Afrifa claimed he did not share the view of some Ghanaians that the military regime should remain in power for as long as possible because Ghanaians could not tolerate a parliamentary government.

**3.2.5.2** In a move that was undoubtedly aimed at pleasing government, however, the *Ghanaian Times* urged the NLC in an editorial to “avoid rushing”<sup>42</sup> into civilian rule. In a sequel to this editorial, the paper wrote a six part editorial captioned “Return to Civil Rule.”<sup>43</sup> that purported to discuss the pros and cons of the return to civilian rule. The paper, however, was only seeking to push the idea that whilst the NLC was anxious to return the country to civilian rule, it was rather the citizenry that wanted the military government to remain in power. Among other arguments, the paper was of the view that the regime had the wishes of the people for a return to civilian rule at heart, and that the delay in giving a firm date was not because the regime wanted to perpetuate itself, for “after all...if they collectively refused to approve a return to civil rule, they would be within their legal and constitutional right to do so.” The paper added that coups d’état or revolutions establish in a country a new order of things entirely dependent on the “whims and caprices” of the regime, thus Ghanaians were fortunate to have a regime, which, although having limitless power and authority, exercises it, judiciously and prudently. According to the editorial, a return to civilian rule was no magic panacea for curing all the problems of the country. The *Ghanaian Times* therefore suggested a delay in the return to civil rule, proposing that April, 1970, or even later, would be a feasible date for the regime to handover power

<sup>40</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 2,866 Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> June, 1967.

<sup>41</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol 5308 Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, p.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 2,950 Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1967, p.6.

<sup>43</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,291 Wednesday, 25<sup>th</sup> October, 1967; *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,292 Thursday, 26<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,293 Friday, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,294 Saturday, 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,295 Monday, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, and *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,296 Tuesday, 31<sup>st</sup> October, 1967.

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because “it would not be fair for the NLC to start a revolution and not carry it to its logical conclusion” and that the regime’s restoration programme for the country was not complete for it to hand over power. Another interesting point made by the paper was that the trial of former members of the Nkrumah Government could be continued after the installation of a another government, but it was better for a national non-political party government like the NLC, which had done much of the work, to bring it to its conclusion.

**3.2.5.3** The *Ghanaian Times* also put forward a strong suggestion that the “post coup civilian government in its first constitutional act must legislate to grant appropriate pensions to the military regime for its ‘historic services’ to the nation in its hour of need.” In all the six editorials there was a play on the word “civil,” with the focus being that the most essential thing was a “civil government” not necessarily a civilian government, and not an “uncivil civilian government.”<sup>44</sup>

**3.2.5.4** To buttress its view that Ghanaians preferred to live under the NLC for a longer period of time, the newspaper published a letter with the caption “*Times* Praised” that extolled the paper for its editorials on “Return To Civil Rule”. The writer stated that he had changed the name of the *Ghanaian Times* to the “*Ghanaian Hope*” since it had always been the hope of Ghanaians to have a truly free paper, such as the *Times* to educate them on national issues.<sup>45</sup> It is unlikely that the paper did not receive any letters expressing opposition to the views put forth in the editorials. In other editorials the paper captured and magnified what most government officials seemed to be hammering on.<sup>46</sup> For the regime, a return to civilian rule was only possible when “an acceptable constitution, drawn up which will be approved by the people through a referendum” was complete. In the words of the *Ghanaian Times*, “until and unless there is cumulative evidence to the effect, it would be rash and foolhardy for the country to be catapulted into civilian government per se.”<sup>47</sup>

**3.2.5.5** Even during the elections that were eventually held in August, 1969, the *Ghanaian Times* half-heartedly joined in the public education, but insistently cautioned Ghanaians to use their votes well.<sup>48</sup>

**3.2.5.6** Similarly supportive of the “delay the return to civilian rule” view point was the *Christian Messenger* which urged Ghanaians to go slowly and be wary of the proposed return to civilian rule:

From that morning of the glorious revolution in February 1966, people of this nation have lived in freedom and have known what freedom means... And now that the ban on political activities is lifted, what are

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 2,304 Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1967.

<sup>46</sup> “Before a return to civil rule” *Ghanaian Times* Vol. 3,024 Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1967, p 6; “Civil rule must come gradually- Editor, “ Vol. 3,025 Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1967, p.3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ghanaian Times* Vol. 2,307 Monday, 13<sup>th</sup> November, 1967.

<sup>48</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, Vol 3,663 Friday, 29<sup>th</sup> August, 1969.

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politicians going to do? What have they to offer us? Countrymen, fellow Ghanaians, let's go slowly this time. Once bitten, twice shy.

**3.2.5.7** Such articles raised the question of the commitment of the press to democratic ideals. While civil society was calling for the return to civilian rule,<sup>49</sup> the *Ghanaian Times*, was echoing on its pages the reservations of the government of the day. Clearly, as demonstrated in the cited examples, the media lent legitimacy to the regime of the NLC and to its human rights violations through their reportage. In their editorial columns, they rationalised the actions of the government, no matter how questionable, and offered very little criticism of, and resistance to, the regime.

**3.2.6 Government Support For The Media**

**3.2.6.1** Some researchers have characterised the media as governed largely by libertarian principles during the NLC period, even if expected to be faithful watchdogs, guarding the newly instituted status quo jealously.<sup>50</sup> Lt-Gen. Ankrah, was quoted as saying that “the Ghanaian Press will now be free to express any political opinion and make criticisms – provided they do it constructively and responsibly.”<sup>51</sup> It was a position that was endorsed by the press. An editorial on the speech in the *Christian Messenger* noted:

After so many years of ideological parroting, when journalist had to look over their shoulders before they dared to suggest something original, this announcement by Lt. Gen. Ankrah ushers in a new spring of professional journalism in Ghana. It is certain that the NLC by this democratic move has ensured the co-operation and gratitude of all those for whom responsible and constructive journalism has become a way of life.

**3.2.6.2** The *Ghanaian Times* expressed its views on what it believed to be the role of the Ghanaian press when, writing under the caption “Role of the Press”, it proclaimed the press as a “vital adjunct of the public service”, and so encouraged the regime to “take the Press into their confidence”. It also affirmed the press’ role as a watchdog, but its understanding of this was to portray both the press and the government as being on the same side, in the task of national reconstruction. It therefore pleaded with all Ghanaians for co-operation “in this great task of nation-building to come together in the spirit of understanding, tolerance and co-operation to enable the press to get the news without the suspicion and hedging, and sometimes open antagonism which has hitherto characterized relations between those organisations (i.e. the public service) and the press.”<sup>52</sup>

**3.2.6.3** On its part, the *Daily Graphic* quoted Brig Afrifa as saying that the NLC had endeavoured to restore in the country the high ideals of press freedom because it knew that “a free press is a pre-requisite for building of a truly democratic society” to which

<sup>49</sup> See for example *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,303 Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> November, 1967.

<sup>50</sup> Asante, supra, p. 42.

<sup>51</sup> *The Standard*, 13<sup>th</sup> March, 1966.

<sup>52</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,896 Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1967, p.1.

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Ghanaians were entitled.<sup>53</sup> The newspaper failed to point out that respect for press freedom was not limited to tolerating views that accorded with one's own. Certainly the banning of the CPP and its symbols was a clear indication that no one could have extolled the virtues of the CPP without incurring the wrath of the political establishment.

**3.2.6.4** The government sought to offer support to the media, ironically, by curtailing the rights of citizens who believed their reputations had been unjustly soiled by the media. In May, 1966, a law was promulgated, effectively protecting the regime, the State Publishing Corporation and eight newspapers.<sup>54</sup> The newspapers were: the *Daily Graphic*, the *Ghanaian Times*, the *Evening News*, the *Weekly Spectator*, the *Sunday Punch*, the *Daily Gazette*, the *Spark*, and *L'Etincelle*. The Decree further stipulated that no one could sue the owners, publishers, or editors of the government-owned newspapers for defamation without the authorization of the Attorney-General, an appointee of the NLC government.<sup>55</sup> This particular legislation paradoxically was the government's direct response to a lawsuit brought by Nkrumah's former Minister of Finance, Komla A. Gbedemah during the NLC rule. He was demanding an apology from the state-owned press for libellous publications at the time of his removal as Finance Minister by Nkrumah. The Decree revoked any action pending in court against the national media, and consequently, all actions for defamation pending against the owners, publishers, or editors of the newspapers ceased.

**3.2.6.5** On the positive side, the NLC can be credited for revoking the ban on several foreign correspondents and individuals, and lifting Nkrumah's censorship on outgoing press messages. On Monday, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1966, the *Ghanaian Times* carried a front-page story that the NLC had lifted a ban imposed by the CPP government on twelve (12) foreign journalists against their re-entry into Ghana. These included Ian Colvin of the *Daily Telegraph* of London, who challenged the ban and was deported while the case was pending in court. Some of the others were: Richard Beeston and John Bulluck, also of the London *Daily Telegraph*, Gunter F. Crabbe, Collin Legum, Dr. George F. Weber, Joseph Wilson, Terrence Spencer, Arthur Helliwell and R. S. Burns. The NLC had earlier, in April, 1966, revoked Nkrumah's ban and allowed Christopher Shawcross, a British lawyer to re-enter Ghana. Shawcross successfully defended Sam Arthur, a former editor of the *Ashanti Pioneer* on contempt charges. On 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1966, the NLC outlawed a censorship order placed on outgoing press messages, as well as the ban against foreign correspondents from operating in the country. This move allowed for the re-publication of banned papers or the establishment of new ones, for example, the *Ashanti Pioneer*, banned under Nkrumah, resumed publication. The *Echo*, the *Legon Observer* and the *Western Tribune*, started as new publications under the NLC.

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<sup>53</sup> *Daily Graphic*, 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1967, supra.

<sup>54</sup> National Liberation Council (Defamation by CPP Newspapers) Decree, 1966 (NLCD 50) as amended by the National Liberation Council (Defamation by CPP Newspapers) (Amendment) Decree, 1966 (NLCD 51).

<sup>55</sup> Newspaper Decree, 1966 (NLCD 107); K. Anokwa and O. Aborampah, "The Mass Media, Political Attitudes and Behaviour in Ghana," *Gazette*, (37) No.3, pp.39-154 at p. 148.



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**3.2.6.6** To the credit again of the NLC, the military regime on 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, established the Ghana Press Council, a professional body of peers designed to protect the public against the media, as well as to protect press freedom. The Press Council was supposed to be an independent body that would champion the cause of a free press in the country. Commenting on the setting up of the Press Council, the first in Ghana, the *Ghanaian Times* noted that it marked an effort on a national scale to regulate judiciously and properly the relations between the press and other mass media on the one hand, and the people and the government on the other. According to the editorial, the government and the Commissioner for Information, K. G. Osei Bonsu, deserve the nation's thanks for their foresight and liberalism, which helped to bring the Press Council into existence.<sup>56</sup> The Commissioner's speech delivered at the inauguration and carried in both the *Daily Graphic* and *Ghanaian Times* stressed that the Press Council was free from governmental direction and control.<sup>57</sup>

**3.2.6.7** In 1968, the government passed the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation Decree, 1968, which defined the mandate of the electronic media.<sup>58</sup>

**3.2.6.8** In 1968, a Constituent Assembly was set up to frame an appropriate Constitution for the country. At the same time Ghanaian journalists started to demand better conditions of service. At a function organised by the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ), a panel of journalists called on the regime to look into the service conditions of journalists<sup>59</sup> before a return to civilian rule. The *Ghanaian Times* reported that a delegation of journalists was to meet Lt-Gen Afrifa to discuss the rejection by the Assembly of a motion seeking to establish a Press Trust. There was also a call by one O. B. Amankwah for a clause guaranteeing the inviolability of press freedom to be inserted in the Constitution.<sup>60</sup> Lt-Gen Afrifa on his part called for a draft instrument to be prepared jointly by the Press Council and the Ghana Journalists Association (GJA) on the Press Trust. According to him, the government was seriously considering the Press Trust to take over the running of the government-owned press.

**3.2.7 Media Intimidation**

**3.2.7.1** The accommodating attitude sometimes displayed to the press was, contradicted by actions that undermined the liberal credential the regime had been credited with. It has already been noted that editors of state media and CPP journals were arrested immediately following the coup. The intimidating nature of the arrests was recalled by one of the journalists of the time.<sup>61</sup> According to this source, soldiers besieged the premises of the Graphic Corporation for days on end in an attempt to arrest the editors of the *Sunday Mirror* and the *Daily Graphic*, withdrawing only after the editors reported themselves to the police and were placed in protective custody.

<sup>56</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 3,056 Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, p.6.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> NLCD 226.

<sup>59</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 5664 Saturday, 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1968, p1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 3,613, Wednesday, 2<sup>nd</sup> July, 1969.

<sup>61</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.

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**3.2.7.2** Nowhere was the NLC regime's self-proclaimed liberal policy more severely contradicted than when in October, 1966, the regime passed the Prohibition of Rumours Decree, 1966 (NLC D 92), aimed at checking freedom of expression and preventing the media from being critical of the government. This legislation made it a crime to air any statement, even if true, that might cause "disaffection" against the NLC, the Police or the Armed Forces. In yet another move to control freedom of expression, the government passed the National Liberation Council (Proclamation) (Amendment) (No.2) Decree, 1966 (NLCD 104), that made it punishable if anyone:

with intent to bring the National Liberation Council into hatred, ridicule or contempt publishes any defamatory or insulting matter whether by writing, print, word of mouth or in any other manner whatsoever concerning the National Liberation Council.

**3.2.7.3** The NLC insisted that these Decrees were not really aimed at the media but at preventing the dissemination of defamatory pamphlets in the country. In the same year, the regime passed also the Criminal Code (Amendment) Decree, which stated that a person taken into custody without a warrant could be held in custody for a period of not more than 28 days without bail, with the consent of the Attorney-General.<sup>62</sup> This law evoked sharp criticism from the Ghana Bar Association, as it created the possibility of one month's detention for any offence, including the publication of information that turned out to be false.

**3.2.7.4** In spite of the passage of these hostile press decrees, the NLC regime still enjoyed the goodwill of both the state-owned and private press such as the *Christian Messenger* and the *The Standard*. An editorial on the passage of the Prohibition of Rumours Decree in the *Standard*, for example, noted:

We sense the reluctance which the NLC must have felt in publishing this decree. With recent statements about freedom of the press, and the value of sound criticism fresh in our minds, we can hardly believe this measure is meant to hamper freedom of thought or expression.

The paper urged the government to be less mysterious and more efficient in communicating its purposes to the governed.

**3.2.7.5** By the middle of 1967, friction was developing between the regime and media. The Chairman of the NLC was not only critical of the media but also warned the media on their anti-government critical posture. The *Daily Graphic* of 27<sup>th</sup> May, 1967, reported Lt-Gen Ankrah as having "criticised the Ghanaian press and warned that if the press did not refrain from cheap sensationalism and over-dramatising trivial events, then "one who pays the piper will have to call the tune." True to the prediction of the Chairman of the NLC, journalists began to be victimised. For instance, in May, 1967, Rans Vigah of the

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<sup>62</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,664 Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> October, 1966, p.6.

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*Evening News* was indicted for breaking the law against rumour mongering, when he reported an alleged arms theft involving soldiers in Ghana Army uniform. Another journalist, Atto-Mensah, received a three-year prison sentence for defaming the Chairman of the NLC when he prepared two articles for typing, in which he referred to the Chairman as “a military cum political renegade”.<sup>63</sup>

**3.2.7.6** Many instances of harassment of journalists recounted by journalists of the time, also served to undermine claims by the NLC that its policies towards the press were liberal, and that it was committed to press independence and press freedom. According to one account, Journalist Ponsford Peregrino-Peters, a journalist found himself in trouble with the regime after reporting a story that the United States of America had delivered food and arms to the government. Peregrino-Peters, along with his editor, Oscar Tsetse, was arrested and put into a military guardroom for several weeks. Another example of media intolerance and intimidation, along with heroism and resistance, is well documented in press histories. On 14<sup>th</sup> December, 1967, the NLC caused the dismissal of four editors, three of whom worked for the state-owned press: John Dumoga (*Daily Graphic*), Moses Danquah (*Ghanaian Times*), Henry Thompson (*Evening News*) and an editor of the *Ashanti Pioneer*. Their crime was criticising the Abbot Laboratory (a U.S. pharmaceutical company) Agreement with the NLC regime. A new editor for the *Daily Graphic*, Cameron Duodu, was appointed to replace the dismissed editor, by the NLC. He was also later to be dismissed, ironically, by the civilian Progress Party Government, for criticising Dr. Busia’s policy of “dialogue with South Africa”.

**3.2.7.7** The dismissal of the four editors prompted a rare, heroic act of resistance to the NLC military regime from the Commissioner of Information, K. G. Osei-Bonsu. On 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1968 Osei-Bonsu resigned his ministerial position, protesting that the NLC’s decision “was irregular and impolitic...it jeopardizes the freedom of the press to which the NLC had irrevocably committed itself.”<sup>64</sup>

**3.2.7.8** In another unfortunate incident, on 8<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, the editor of *the Legon Observer*, Yaw Twumasi, and 28 university lecturers were charged with contempt before an Accra High Court for publishing an article in the 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1967 issue headlined “Justice Delayed is Justice Denied.” The article criticised the court for delays in hearing cases.<sup>65</sup> In reporting on the case on its front pages, the *Ghanaian Times* explained that according to Victor Owusu, the Attorney-General, the offending article was prejudicial to a case in which Henry Kojo Djaba, Chairman of the Ghana Agricultural Machinery Company during the Nkrumah regime and two others, had appealed against their conviction and sentence pending before the Appeals Court.<sup>66</sup> Twumasi and his colleagues pleaded guilty and apologised to the court for publishing the article, but were still given hefty fines. The court also asked them to publish their apology in the *Legon Observer* and in all the local dailies.

<sup>63</sup> Atto-Mensah v. The Republic [1967] GLR 562.

<sup>64</sup> W. A. Hachten, *Muffled Drums: The News Media in Africa*, Ames, IA: Iowa State University Press, 1971. As quoted in Asante, supra, p. 47.

<sup>65</sup> *Republic v. Liberty Press Ltd and Others* [1968] GLR 123.

<sup>66</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 3,054, Tuesday, 9<sup>th</sup> January, 1968.

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**3.2.7.9** The *Ghanaian Times* again reported a case in which a columnist of the *Pioneer* was likely to face charges for contempt of a commission. According to the article, the Attorney-General was contemplating taking legal action against the columnist for a series of articles in the paper under the caption “Ahafo Lands Commission- Is It Necessary?” According to the report, the articles in the *Pioneer* were prejudicial to the Commission and the issue it was dealing with.<sup>67</sup>

**3.2.7.10** Another peculiar media victimisation occurred on 2<sup>nd</sup> May, 1969, and involved the deportation of a controversial character, Francis Nzeribe (of London-based Jeafan Limited).<sup>68</sup> He it was, who in 1968, had published a self-conducted study that accused Ghanaian journalists of receiving “drinks” (bribery) as a condition for publishing newsworthy items in the press, a report he later disclaimed.<sup>69</sup> The same Nzeribe in 1969, had solicited money from foreign companies in Ghana for the purpose of conducting research on Lt-Gen Ankrah’s chances of becoming a civilian president. Nzeribe’s deportation by the NLC was related to his complicity in the scandal that forced the resignation of Lt-Gen Ankrah on 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1969.

**3.2.7.11** The NLC’s hostility was not only against the Ghanaian media but extended to the foreign media as well. In November, 1966, for example, despite having just revoked Nkrumah’s ban on certain foreign journalists, the correspondent of the Democratic Republic of Germany News Agency (AND), Karl Heinz, was deported by the NLC for engaging in acts inimical to the security of Ghana. In June, 1967, the regime also deported three Eastern Bloc correspondents “for committing slanderous propaganda activity against the government and people of Ghana...”. They were Alexei Kazansev (of the Novosti news agency), Valintin Korovikov (of the *Pravda* newspaper) and Jiri Pravda (of CETEKA, Czechoslovak News Agency). These incidents, no doubt contributed to the docility of the press

**3.2.7.12** On 29<sup>th</sup> February, 1968, *The Pioneer* published an article by Attakora Mensah Gyima entitled “Topics Of The Moment: Border Guards Scandal”, in which the author levelled charges of corruption, as well as collusion with smugglers, against the Border Guards, then a branch of the Police. He was prosecuted for intentional libel and seditious libel, and convicted. His appeal against his conviction was upheld in respect of the charge of seditious libel, though the one for intentional libel was dismissed.<sup>70</sup> Ironically, the Unit was reorganised a few years later, for reasons that were substantially the same as the allegations of corruption made by the journalist. It appeared that by their involvement in the coup d’état, the Police had acquired protection from being subjected to scrutiny and criticism.

**3.2.7.13** The press was also not exempt from the probes of the various Commissions of Inquiry that were established by the NLC. The Guinea Press, then owned by Dr.

<sup>67</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, Thursday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1968, supra.

<sup>68</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 3,562 Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1969, p.1.

<sup>69</sup> *The Pioneer*, Editorial, 4<sup>th</sup> November, 1968.

<sup>70</sup> *Mensah Gyima v. The Republic* [1971] 2 GLR 147.

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Nkrumah, was probed. T D Baffoe, the former editor of the *Ghanaian Times*, and a CPP functionary, was summoned to appear before the Sowah Assets Commission to declare his assets. Testifying before the Commission, Baffoe claimed that under the previous regime, editorials castigating some Ghanaian professionals had emanated from the Flagstaff House,<sup>71</sup> the seat of government, an assertion that would continue to be made about editorials of state-owned papers during other periods of unconstitutional rule, notably the regime of the PNDC.

**3.2.8 Media Resistance**

**3.2.8.1** There were instances where the media were able to assert their independence and to write articles that were considered critical of the regime. For instance, on 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1967, the *Daily Graphic* carried an editorial with the heading “Clear Confusion” in which the paper criticised the office of the Director of Public Relations of the Ghana Armed Forces on the role the office was to play vis-à-vis the Ghana press in matters relating to the publication of news items. The editorial described how after being invited by the Public Relations Directorate to cover the trial of the non-commissioned officers (in the 17<sup>th</sup> April abortive coup) and after publishing their reports, the Directorate complained that the story should not have been published without previous clearance from the Armed Forces. According to the paper, the press were invited again to cover the proceedings but were told not to take notes and only a brief summary of the proceedings was given to be published. The *Daily Graphic* argued, “it should be pointed out to the office of the directorate of the Public Relations of the Ghana Armed Forces that such confusion and disguised attempt to muzzle the press will not be tolerated.”<sup>72</sup>

**3.2.8.2** The President of the Military Tribunal, felt compelled to comment on the paper’s editorial, explaining that the press was not prevented from taking notes but to submit notes to the Public Relations Directorate before publishing it. An article with the headline “Press Opinions Not Government Views” also quoted a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs which said that editorial opinions appearing in local daily papers were not necessarily the views of the Ghana Government. The statement rejected any suggestions that the press was subject editorially to government control. According to the statement, the attention of the government had been drawn to an editorial of the 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1967, issue of the *Daily Graphic*, concerning the extradition case of Moise Tshombe (former Congolese Premier), which had been interpreted in certain quarters as representing the official position of the government, on the assumption that the *Daily Graphic* is a government controlled newspaper. The statement said that the government wished to correct any such impression insisting.<sup>73</sup>

The government of Ghana has declared repeatedly by its commitment to uphold the independence and freedom of the press

<sup>71</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 2,897 Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1967, p.1; “Editorials on Judges came from the Flagstaff House.”

<sup>72</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 5236 Thursday, 1<sup>st</sup> August, 1967, p.6.

<sup>73</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 5238 Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> August, 1967, p.1.

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in Ghana as one of the essential articles of faith upon which it will strive to reconstruct the free society of the new Ghana. In consonance with this policy, the government rejects any suggestions that the press is subject editorially to its official control. It will be appreciated that the climate of liberation, which prevails, now in Ghana provides room for the unimpeded public expression of various kinds of views to which the government of Ghana may not necessarily subscribe.<sup>74</sup>

**3.2.8.3** Subsequently the *Daily Graphic* was again moved to protest what it considered attempts at curbing press freedoms during press week. In an editorial titled “We Will Not Be Gagged,” the paper noted:

We sincerely sympathise with the views expressed by Mr. K. S. Essah, Chairman for the Committee appointed by the NLC to enquire into the supply and distribution of free text books to schools by the State Publishing Corporation and his pleas that news items should not be published on the text book supply situation until February when his Committee shall have submitted its reports to the government. We are however sorry that we cannot oblige him because what Mr. Essah is demanding is censorship of the press, pure and simple. This request cannot be granted because we do not think any body has a right to censor the press without due process of law:<sup>75</sup>

**3.2.8.4** The *Daily Graphic* was also able to criticise the regime in some editorials, articles and opinion pieces, particularly on the agreement with Abbot Laboratory of USA. In an article in the 11<sup>th</sup> November, 1968, issue, the government stated that it had no apologies to make for the agreements it negotiated with Abbot Laboratory. The *Daily Graphic*'s pressure on the regime for giving the company a monopoly and other concessions in the pharmaceutical industry, however, whipped up public interest and debate, leading to the decision of the National Finance Board headed by Mr. Justice Samuel E. Azu Crabbe to examine the agreement.

**3.2.8.5** Similar non-government papers such as *The Standard*, voiced mild protest on some occasions. In October, 1966, when the regime passed the Prohibition of Rumours Decree, for example, *The Standard* termed it a “sad necessity”, and said the government had to be less mysterious and more efficient in its communication policy.<sup>76</sup> On 25<sup>th</sup> November, 1966, when the NLC passed another decree indemnifying the state-owned media against lawsuits, again the editorial in *The Standard* was quite critical:

We would like to know more about this decree. Consequently, we feel this decree needs reconsideration. Freedom of the press must certainly be safeguarded. Newspapers thrive best in a society that allows access and free publicity to all news and opinions...<sup>77</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 5322 Thursday, 9<sup>th</sup> November, 1967, p.1.

<sup>76</sup> *The Standard*, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1966.

<sup>77</sup> *The Standard*, 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1966.

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**3.2.8.6** In 1969, as the nation prepared for a return to civilian rule, and as the ban on party politics was lifted, *The Standard* devoted its editorials to issues relating to party politics and activities of the Constituent Assembly, assessing in an editorial that the NLC regime had shown some lapses in foreign relations, and in how it handled certain riots at Yendi and the Obuasi Goldfields.<sup>78</sup>

### **3.3 1<sup>ST</sup> OCTOBER, 1969 -- 12<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1972: THE SECOND REPUBLIC THE PROGRESS PARTY (PP) GOVERNMENT**

#### **3.3.1 Government – Media Relationship**

**3.3.1.1** The PP Administration under Dr Kofi Abrefa Busia was tolerant of the press. For some observers, the press in Ghana was freest under this administration, than at any time in the history of the media since Independence. Even so, there were occasional run-ins with the government.

**3.3.1.2** In 1970, Dr Busia’s Administration repealed the Newspaper-Licensing Act, promulgated under President Nkrumah’s administration. The act required publishers to obtain licences renewable every year from the Nkrumah Government.

**3.3.1.3** The repeal of the law, enabled the establishment of several new newspapers, such as the *Spokesman*, which was an opposition paper to the Busia administration, the *Palava Tribune* and the *Voice of the People*.

#### **3.3.2 Media Support**

**3.3.2.1** Asante notes that the Busia Administration was least concerned with controlling the media. The Administration pursued a libertarian press policy where anybody could publicly vent their opinions save for obscenities, etc.

#### **3.3.3 Media Intimidation**

**3.3.3.1** Even with his liberal attitude, Dr. Busia along the way got frustrated with the media. In the latter part of 1970, he dismissed Cameron Duodu, the Editor of the *Daily Graphic*, who opposed his foreign policy of dialoguing rather than confrontation with racist South Africa. Cameron Doudu, in a front-page comment<sup>79</sup> subjected the policy to harsh criticism. He paid for that by his dismissal.

**3.3.3.2** Another event of media intimidation was sparked off by the case involving the dismissal of 568 senior public service and civil service officers (dubbed “Apollo 568”). On 22<sup>nd</sup> February, 1970, the government dismissed E.K. Sallah a former manager of the Ghana National Trading Corporation (GNTC) and 567 other public servants. A court

<sup>78</sup> *The Standard*, 28<sup>th</sup> September, 1969.

<sup>79</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 6279 Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> December, 1970, p.2.

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ruling in favour of the dismissed public servants, prompted the Prime Minister to say publicly that no one could compel his government to employ anyone it did not wish to employ. The press took sides in the issue compelling the then Chief Justice, Azu Crabbe to say publicly that the Judiciary would not share its authority with anyone. In a scathing editorial in response to this in the *Daily Graphic*<sup>80</sup> the paper said:

It is the duty of the press, the fourth estate of the realm, to subject to search and relentless criticism the way and manner in which other organs of the state exercise the powers conferred upon them by the constitution of the land. The press will not share its power with anyone.

**3.3.3.3** In 1970, the Editor of the *Spokesman*, Kofi Badu, was charged with an offence for communicating a false statement likely to injure the reputation of the Head of State. He had written an article titled “Krobo Rehabilitation – Is It Really Self-help?” questioning some development projects taking place in the hometown of Lt-Gen Afrifa, then Chairman of the Presidential Commission. He was arrested without warrant and was not permitted a counsel of his choice. The government later withdrew the charges, saying that it did not wish to destroy the seed of democracy it had sown in the country.<sup>81</sup>

**3.3.3.4** In 1971, the editor, Kofi Badu and the printer, Floent Press Ltd, of the *Spokesman* were tried for intentional libel of a High Court Judge who had been the Interim Electoral Commissioner during the 1969 Elections. Under the caption “C.J. SPEAK NOW”, the paper’s editorial sought to suggest that the judge had been appointed to the Supreme Court as his reward for the assistance he gave to the winning party during the elections. During the prosecution, the defence called two members of the Presidential Commission, Lt-Gen Albert Ocran and J.W.K. Harley, but they were not permitted to answer any questions that were likely to disclose the mode of selection of judges for appointment to the Supreme Court. Consequently, the editor was convicted, though the publisher was discharged upon a submission of no case. An appeal against the decision resulted in a quashing of the conviction in 1974.<sup>82</sup> Such prosecutions were likely to create a chilling effect, particularly on printing houses that did not wish to be in dispute with the government, and to affect the ability of “anti-government” newspapers to secure printers, where they did not have printing facilities of their own.

### **3.4 13<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1972 – 3<sup>RD</sup> JUNE, 1979: THE NATIONAL REDEMPTION COUNCIL (NRC)/ SUPREME MILITARY COUNCIL (SMC I & SMC II)**

#### **3.4.1 Government – Media Relationship**

**3.4.1.1** From 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1972 to 3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1979, three different military regimes ruled Ghana successively. These were: the National Redemption Council (13<sup>th</sup> January, 1972-8<sup>th</sup> October, 1975; the Supreme Military Council I (9<sup>th</sup> October, 1975 – 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1978)

<sup>80</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 6103 Monday, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 1970, p.1.

<sup>81</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 6338 Friday, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1971.

<sup>82</sup> *Badu v. The Republic* [1974] 2 GLR 361, per Abban J.



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and the Supreme Military Council II (6<sup>th</sup> July, 1978-3<sup>rd</sup> June, 1979). The overall media policy of these related military regimes tended to favour more the state-owned than the private press.

**3.4.1.2** A love-hate relationship marked the NRC and SMC regimes under Col (later Gen) Ignatius Kutu Acheampong and Gen Frederick William Kwasi Akuffo. Early in the life of the regime, the “Operation Feed Yourself” and “Self Reliance” policies adopted by the government to improve food sufficiency and to encourage reliance on home-made produce, endeared the government to the media. However, later on, the attempt by the government to perpetuate military rule, disguised as a new concept called “Union Government, (UNIGOV)” alienated the government from a section of the same media, particularly the privately-owned press.

**3.4.2 Media Support**

**3.4.2.1** A *Ghanaian Times* editorial immediately following Ghana’s second coup d’état of 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1972, repeated the pattern of media legitimisation of unconstitutional governments that has been noted during the regime of the NLC. A day after the NRC led by Col Acheampong, seized power from the PP Government of the Second Republic, the *Ghanaian Times* switched allegiance, cataloguing a tall list of misdeeds by the Busia Government as justification for the coup.<sup>83</sup> The paper was of the view that the Busia Government had failed economically, socially, politically and in its foreign relations policy. Headlines in that issue gleefully pronounced, “Armed Forces take over Government,” “Busia Dismissed,” “Parliament Dissolved,” “President Dismissed,” “All Parties Disbanded;” “All Is Calm After Coup.”

**3.4.2.2** Another editorial in praise of the coup makers noted “the calm with which the whole country has welcomed the military coup d’état ...is to be expected of a people long exasperated and disappointed by a civilian government.”<sup>84</sup>

**3.4.2.3** The paper congratulated Col Acheampong and “his band of gallant soldiers for conducting a takeover in a peaceful and bloodless military operation” and reported that ex-ministers and top ranking officials of the PP had been “rounded up” and sent into protective custody at the Ussher Fort Prison.<sup>85</sup>

**3.4.2.4** Significantly, as had happened before, editors of the state-owned media were picked up from their offices by plainclothes policemen and sent to the Ussher Fort prison in Accra. Imprisonment of editors had the desired cowering effect on the media. As happened during the previous coup, the state-owned papers for several months covered the declarations of goodwill the coup-makers were receiving from Ghanaians from all walks of life. Headlines in the *Daily Graphic* within the first few days after the coup

<sup>83</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4,396 Friday,14<sup>th</sup> January ,1972, “Army to the Rescue” and *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4,397 Saturday,15<sup>th</sup> January ,1972 – “There’s Peace and Calm”.

<sup>84</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, 15<sup>th</sup> January , 1972, supra.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

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included: “Coup: Army Takes Over, Busia Removed, Madjitey Dismissed”,<sup>86</sup> “Big Support For The Coup”.<sup>87</sup> An editorial likened this coup to the 1966 coup, when soldiers risked their lives to save the country from collapse. The *Graphic* noted:

Certainly it is a supreme sacrifice and there is no better tribute Ghanaians can pay to them than to give them our unstinted support in their Herculean task of resuscitating the economy.<sup>88</sup>

The *Daily Graphic* not only reported, but also portrayed in pictures, popular support for the regime. The paper elaborately covered a victory parade through the principal streets of Accra by members of the Ghana Armed Forces and some members of the NRC in words and pictures.<sup>89</sup>

**3.4.2.5** Characteristically, the *Ghanaian Times* especially played the tune of its new sponsors with issues of the paper reporting the massive support of the people for the takeover: “Nation Expresses Support – as Troops March Past”;<sup>90</sup> “Workers Back Coup”;<sup>91</sup> “Organisations Support Fall of Busia”;<sup>92</sup> “Guinea Hails Coup”;<sup>93</sup> “Workers Support NRC”; “Demonstrations In The Regions; “More Support For The NRC”;<sup>94</sup> “Market Women Back NRC”; “More Declare Support For NRC”;<sup>95</sup> and “Hoteliers Support NRC”.<sup>96</sup>

**3.4.2.6** The press also showed ordinary civilians being “disciplined” by the military and drilled by members of the government, such as Col Bernasko. In this sense they appeared to be overtly supporting the abuse of the human rights of citizens.

**3.4.2.7** When there was an alleged coup plot against the NRC later in the year, the *Ghanaian Times* was quick to defend the government. With a banner headline that read, “Coup To Restore Busia Foiled,” *Ghanaian Times* reported that certain disgruntled men and officials of the disbanded PP, acting on the instructions of Dr. Busia, had tried to subvert and overthrow the NRC on the 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1972.<sup>97</sup> In its editorial, in the same issue captioned “Traacherous Act,” the paper condemned the coup calling supporters of the disbanded PP ‘fanatics.’ The paper pointed out that the NRC had:

shown unparalleled magnanimity to these fanatics, as the regime had already released a 1000 of the Progress Party functionaries, with only a few still remaining behind bars...Quite out of character with military

<sup>86</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol 6617 Wednesday, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>87</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 6618 Thursday, 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>88</sup> *Daily Graphic*, 14<sup>th</sup> January, 1972, supra.

<sup>89</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol 6619 Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>90</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4395 Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> January 1972.

<sup>91</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4400 Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>92</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4399 Tuesday, 18<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>94</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, 19<sup>th</sup> January, 1972, supra.

<sup>95</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4402 Friday, 21<sup>st</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>96</sup> *Ghanaian Times* vol. 4405 Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>97</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4,551 Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1972.

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regimes, the NRC has bent over backwards to preserve fundamental human rights. Sometimes they have been accused of being over cautious; but they themselves have taken the view that it is better to let nine guilty men escape than to incarcerate one innocent man unjustifiably.<sup>98</sup>

**3.4.2.8** The paper urged the regime to be harder on those they thought were against them. According to the paper, “since the NRC assumed the reins of government of this country, a lot of people have been wandering why the Council had adopted a humanitarian attitude towards those they had just overthrown.”<sup>99</sup>

**3.4.2.9** Subsequent to an alleged coup plot of 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1972 the NRC passed the Subversion Decree, 1972 (NRC D 90), making it an offence for anyone to overthrow the NRC by unlawful means. Any person attempting to do this would be triable by a Military Tribunal and upon conviction, would be liable to suffer death penalty by firing squad.<sup>100</sup>

**3.4.2.10** The *Ghanaian Times* backed the passage of the Subversion Decree, saying that the Decree would end the phenomenon of exploitation and corruption by the elite.<sup>101</sup> Under the caption “The Die is Cast” the paper noted in an editorial that:

The cumulative effect of these measures will undoubtedly help to eliminate from the body-social all forms of robbery, embezzlement, damaging government property, smuggling the county’s wealth and other anti-social acts incompatible with the tenets of stability and progress...we entirely agree with the government on these measures aimed at bringing the offenders to book so that the country could be saved from their wicked machinations.<sup>102</sup>

**3.4.2.11** More than any other newspaper, the *Ghanaian Times* gave wide coverage to the trial of the nine persons accused of involvement in the coup plot of 14<sup>th</sup> July, 1972. At the end of the trial, all the nine persons were found guilty of subversion. The first eight accused were sentenced to death by firing squad while the ninth accused was sentenced to 25 years’ imprisonment. The Council however commuted to life imprisonment the death sentences passed by the Military Tribunal.<sup>103</sup> The editorial of the same issue was captioned “Justice Tempered With Mercy” lauded the NRC, noting that, “in taking this magnanimous step, the NRC was animated by the fact that the unity and happiness of the people of Ghana transcend all other considerations.”<sup>104</sup>

**3.4.2.12** On the first anniversary of the regime, Col Acheampong, the Chairman of the NRC, broadcast to the nation on radio and television, reiterating the mission of his

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid

<sup>100</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4553 Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1972 “Death penalty for subversion” .

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4554 Thursday, 20<sup>th</sup> July, 1972.

<sup>103</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 4,687 Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1972 “NRC’s act of clemency – Eight now serve life jail”.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid

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government. The entire front page of the *Ghanaian Times* was devoted to the Chairman's comment. Captioned "The Years Ahead", the paper observed that "now a year old, it is evident that the NRC has demonstrated a remarkable and courageous capability in attacking the root cause of our troubles with commendable success."<sup>105</sup>

**3.4.2.13** The *Ghanaian Times* highlighted the statements and comments of individuals and government officials that pointed out the advantages of the regime's continued stay in power. An article with the headline "Joe Appiah tells seminar - NRC must remain in power," noted:

Any Ghanaian who advocates an early return to civil rule is an enemy of the revolution, Mr. Joe Appiah Ghana's roving ambassador, declared in Accra yesterday." According to him, "military rule for a period is the only way to eliminate the tribalistic phenomenon bequeathed to Ghanaians by the ousted Busia regime."<sup>106</sup>

Another article with the headline "Gyeke Darko declares at symposium – Liberties can exist with army rule" said,

Mr. Gyeke Darko, Director of Public Prosecutions said here last night that civil liberties can coexist with military regimes. Speaking at a symposium on 'Civil Liberties under military regimes' Mr. Gyeke Darko said the exercise of one's civil liberties did not depend in the type of regime in power. It depended on the people constituting the government and the determination of the people to ensure that their liberties were not trampled upon.<sup>107</sup>

**3.4.2.14** Efforts made by Acheampong to mobilise the national media to reinforce national consciousness and to rally public support for his campaigns have been well chronicled in secondary sources. The national press played a major role in propagating, especially the controversial idea of a Union Government (Unigov) which was mooted in 1976. The Unigov concept was an untried and ill-defined political formula to allow for the inclusion of soldiers and police in a future post-NRC government. The military government vigorously promoted it in an attempt to sell the concept to Ghanaians. The campaign ended up dividing the ranks of journalists between those who supported it and those who opposed it, as it did the general population as well.

**3.4.2.15** The private press, notably the *Christian Messenger*, was much more restrained in their support for the new government. Although they did not actually praise the coup or the actors of the coup, they still did not offer any condemnation. The *Christian Messenger*, for example called on Ghanaians to ask for God's guidance and wisdom.<sup>108</sup> Editorials in the 1972 to 1975 editions of the paper stayed away from politics, and were

<sup>105</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4,705 Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1973, p.1.

<sup>106</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4,714 Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1973, p.1.

<sup>107</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 4,723 Saturday, 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1973,p.1.

<sup>108</sup> *Christian Messenger*, February, 1972.

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devoted mainly to social and economic problems facing the nation, such as, hoarding, shortage of drugs, corruption, etc.

**3.4.3 The Media As Intimidators**

**3.4.3.1** The *Ghanaian Times* Editor, Kwame Gyewu-Kyem, whose one-sided editorials in support of the new political concept Unigov triggered the wrath of the country's professionals, spearheaded the government's media campaign. From the inception of the Unigov idea, the regime invited views from the general public "to ensure that the government implements the type of government that would be the brainchild of the generality of the people".<sup>109</sup> The *Ghanaian Times* showed, very early on, that it was totally in support of the concept. Writing under the caption "Let's Be Original" the paper in its editorial said that the guideline for participating in the debate of the Unigov was that the "exercise is for a government divorced from party politics."<sup>110</sup> With this initial partisan stance, the paper castigated any person or group of people that did not support the Unigov idea. In 1977, at the height of the Unigov debate, while the media were encouraged to feel free to publish anything against the issue,<sup>111</sup> the press carried only arguments for the concept and downplayed arguments against it. The state-owned papers during the referendum on the proposal, conveniently placed the 'Yes' symbol on the front page and the 'No' symbol on the back page.

**3.4.3.2** Kabral Blay-Amihere notes in his autobiography in reference to the Unigov period the following:

The Ghanaian Press which for a greater part of our history has been state-owned and government-controlled lived up to its image as sycophantic and oblivious to anything negative for the government. The period of UNIGOV confirmed for me the role of the state-owned media in managing the news in favour of governments.<sup>112</sup>

**3.4.3.3** Blay-Amihere also notes that Gyewu-Kyem, whom Acheampong had "rescued from difficult times," used his editorial columns effectively to defend Acheampong and assail his opponents. According to Blay-Amihere:

All the nasty incidents which occurred during the campaign [UNIGOV] were never reported. Neither were activities of the opposition. It was the pro UNIGOV campaign that received the widest coverage and most of the harshest attacks on intellectuals were written in the editorial pages of the *Ghanaian Times*. Few journalists dared to show their true feelings about the campaign for fear that this position would be reported to the editor.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>109</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5,938 Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1977.

<sup>110</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5,940 Tuesday, 11<sup>th</sup> January, 1977.

<sup>111</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 8457 Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1977, p.1.

<sup>112</sup> Blay-Amihere, *Fighting For Freedom (The Autobiography of an African Journalist)*, Trans Afrika News Ltd., Accra,2001, p. 102.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

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**3.4.3.4** The doctors were the first to taste the scathing editorials of the *Ghanaian Times* with a report of the closure of the eight main surgery facilities at the Korle-Bu Hospital, because of the deplorable situation in the hospital. The editorial laid the blame for the closure squarely on the administrators of the hospital and did not mention government's responsibility at all.<sup>114</sup> In another editorial captioned: "The politics At Korle-Bu", the *Ghanaian Times* said that the problem faced by Korle-Bu was due to the feuding among the Head of the Surgery Department and the other surgeons.<sup>115</sup> Two letters from two doctors, however, debunked the editor's reasons for the closure of the hospital, citing "perennial shortages" at the hospital as the main cause of the problem. A rejoinder from the surgeons at Korle-Bu on the issue was carried on page 10 and given little prominence.<sup>116</sup> The paper denigrated the facts outlined in the rejoinder by the surgeons, arguing instead that the "learned professors" still had a case to answer for the closure of the surgery facilities, in their capacities as professors and as individuals connected with the "Korle-Bu affair".<sup>117</sup> In one issue, the paper had this short editorial on the doctors: "Good heavens! Has our medical services gone to the dogs? Whatever happened to the Hippocratic oath that doctors take?"<sup>118</sup>

**3.4.3.5** The next group of professionals that faced the wrath of the editor was the lawyers, who as a group, did not agree with the UNIGOV concept and called for a return to civilian rule. In its editorial "Lessons for the Barristers" the paper said:

In almost every age lawyers as a class have created confusion in society which has often exasperated the public. In the first century [sic], Jeremy Bentham and his followers described lawyers as persons of a 'SINISTER INTEREST' who should be destroyed by the society... it is hardly any surprise that the Ghana Bar Association has appointed itself the opponent of the Union Government and in traditional lawyers style has been exasperating the Ghanaian public with provocative outburst and resolutions which are out of tune with the mood of the people.<sup>119</sup>

**3.4.3.6** A subsequent editorial captioned: "The Voice Of The Minority" continued with the tirade on the lawyers. In the paper's view: "The group of barristers, who had been making noise about a return to civilian rule, are but a small minority who don't impress anybody either as champions of democracy which they purport to be or as moralist." The paper then went on to catalogue the sins of these lawyers – evasion of tax, cheating of clients, etc. – and summed up its argument by noting: "the wig and the gown don't by themselves make a genius out of any idiot".<sup>120</sup>

<sup>114</sup> Blay-Amihere, supra, p.102.

<sup>115</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5,962 Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1977, p.4.

<sup>116</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 5,987 Saturday, 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1977,p.4.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,066 Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1977.

<sup>119</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5,982 Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> February, 1977, p.4.

<sup>120</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5983 Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> March, 1977.

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**3.4.3.7** There were also articles in the paper on demonstrations by the public against the lawyers' rejection of, and in support<sup>121</sup> of the Unigov idea. According to one such article:

Several hundreds of workers, market women and various youth organisations yesterday staged a massive demonstration in Accra to condemn the Ghana Bar Association's call for a return to civilian rule in the country by 1978. The demonstration was also in support of the proposed Union Government.<sup>122</sup>

**3.4.4 Intimidation Of The Media**

**3.4.4.1** The NRC/SMC Regimes declared their intention to respect freedom of the press, but the record did not match the declaration. In an interview with the Ghana News Agency (GNA) shortly after taking power, Col Acheampong was quoted as saying "Freedom of the press in Ghana is absolutely guaranteed under the NRC."<sup>123</sup> Commenting on the statement the *Ghanaian Times* noted:

The Chairman of the NRC, Col. Acheampong, is reported to have said that the freedom of the press is absolutely guaranteed under his military regime. This is re-assuring indeed and we fervently hope that the military regime in spite of its obvious peculiar nature, will do much to entrench this freedom in all the affairs of the nation...We must point out, however, that freedom of the press is not license for the press to indulge in undue or cheap sensationalism or any form of vicious propaganda.<sup>124</sup>

The paper hoped that true to the words of the Chairman, the NRC will for all time guarantee the freedom of the press and take criticism in good faith so that they could always win the sympathy and support of the people.<sup>125</sup> Speaking to members of the print media and radio in the Western Region, Col P. K. Agyekum, Western Regional Commissioner, also noted that the freedom of the press was not to be interpreted to mean that a licence had been given to go beyond what is expected of decent men. The Commissioner was quoted as saying: "we expect you to exercise this freedom with caution, cooperation and loyalty from the rank and file of the press within the expectation of the NRC."<sup>126</sup>

**3.4.4.2** It is evident that the regime did not really mean to keep its promise about the freedom of the press. It has already been noted that soon after the coup d'état, editors of state-owned press were briefly detained and later replaced. They were John W. Dumoga of the *Daily Graphic*, Abraham Kutin Mensah of the *Ghanaian Times* and Anthony

<sup>121</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,011 Saturday, 2<sup>nd</sup> April, 1977, p.2: "More support for Union Government".

<sup>122</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 5,991 Thursday, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1977.

<sup>123</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 4,404 Monday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>124</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 4,405 Tuesday, 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 4,406 Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January, 1972.

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Ghansah of the *Weekly Spectator*. The rationale for this action was that the new Head of State, Col Acheampong, needed to have the full support of the media in his campaign for national unity and the promotion of his political agenda.<sup>127</sup> Similarly as was to be expected the new regime dismissed or transferred journalists outside their news organisations.

**3.4.4.3** The NRC had shown its anti-media hand very early on through its first Commissioner of Information, Maj Anthony H. Selormey. In the heat of agitation by journalists for the establishment of a Press Trust, Maj Selormey is quoted as saying:

A military government, by its very nature, is certainly inconsistent with any pretensions to subscribing fully to the concept of freedom of the press in the normal acceptance of the expression. I will, therefore, appeal to all of you to re-adjust your orientation on this matter of Press Trust... On our part we shall do our utmost to ensure that these state-owned Newspapers and mass media should, as far as possible, continue to operate in a free and unimpeded atmosphere and as far as our present circumstance, as a Military Government permit.<sup>128</sup>

**3.4.4.4** Four months into his position, the Head of State took over as Commissioner of Information from Maj Selormey. This particular development was to be a big pointer to the extent of control the NRC intended to have over the media.

**3.4.4.5** The Commission received evidence of instances of victimisation on grounds of people being a “security risk.” For example, Col John Asassie’s appointment as the Director- General of GBC in February, 1975, coincided with the removal of the Head of Television News, Dentu, and a few senior GBC broadcasters to the Information Services Department, then euphemistically referred to as “Siberia.” The order was said to have emanated from the Commissioner of Information, Col Tachie-Menson. Dentu was later redeployed from “Siberia”, only to work as supervisor of gardens at the GBC.

**3.4.4.6** The relationship between journalists and the military leadership was marked by a lack of respect for, and high-handedness towards, the journalists. A former journalist with the GNA<sup>129</sup>, described the NRC/SMC regimes as having the worst record regarding the press, and described the press as sycophants, who practised self-censorship. He cited as an example, the closing down of the GNA office at the Airport by Maj Kwame Asante, the Commissioner for Communications, and the locking up for three days of its correspondent, Steven Gbafa. According to the journalist, Maj Asante was angered, when upon a visit to the GNA Airport office, Gbafa, an old schoolmate of his, called him by a nickname. He also noted that the press became docile and took instructions from Burma Camp or the Castle, and that the military considered the press as non-partners in development. “I could still remember Col. Sanni Thomas treating us, the Castle correspondents, as if we were his slaves,” the journalist said. It was not unusual, he said,

<sup>127</sup> Asante, op cit supra.

<sup>128</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 4,461 30<sup>th</sup> March, 1972, p.6.

<sup>129</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.



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for journalists to be summoned to the seat of government where they were berated by the Head of State for any perceived misreporting.

**3.4.4.7** Six months into its term of office, the NRC regime introduced a series of anti-media legislation to control the press. The first was the Defamation Decree, 1972 (NRCD 67), passed in May, 1972. The Decree criminalised any publication which was against the government. Then in July, 1972 the government enacted the Control of Publications Decree, 1972 (NRCD 89) which banned the publication of the *The Pioneer*, and the *Echo*. The Decree made it an offence for anyone to publish, distribute, sell or offer for sale the two independent newspapers.<sup>130</sup> The banning order was lifted, however, on 18<sup>th</sup> September of the same year. It is interesting that *The Pioneer* suddenly became an ally of the NRC, dutifully joining the government in its declared campaign to rid the nation of all forms of corruption and economic sabotage.

**3.4.4.8** On 2<sup>nd</sup> March, 1973, the NRC promulgated another Decree, this time covering the publication of newspapers in the country. The Newspaper Licensing Decree, 1973 (NRCD 161), a replica of Nkrumah's Newspaper Licensing Act of 1963, stated essentially that no person shall print, publish or circulate any newspaper, magazine or journal without an official licence issued by the Ministry of Information. Under this Decree, the Commissioner for Information was authorised to suspend or revoke all newspaper licences. The penalties for offenders included a fine and up to twelve months imprisonment. A year after this Decree, the *Legon Observer* and the *Echo* were shut down because of government pressure on the printers who stood to lose their supply of newsprint if they continued to print those publications.

**3.4.4.9** Legislation apart, the NRC also used subtle methods, such as starving printing firms of import license, to control the media. Thus, the *Legon Observer* in 1974 was unable to publish, the reason being its inability to find a willing printing establishment, including its own regular printer. The printers of *Legon Observer*, the Liberty Press, in a letter to the publishers, stated that its business was in jeopardy due to its association with the journal.<sup>131</sup> Just about the same time in June, 1974, the privately-owned *Evening News* was also compelled to change into a fortnightly newspaper for the same reason.

**3.4.4.10** In order to stem the increasing tide of rumour-mongering in the country about some of the government's unpopular actions and decisions, the SMC in 1977 promulgated the Prohibition of Rumours Decree, 1977 (SMCD 92), which stipulated that:

Any person who by print, writing, painting or word of mouth publishes or reproduces any statement, rumour or report which is false and likely to cause fear or alarm or despondence to the public peace or cause disaffection against the Supreme Military Council or National Redemption Council among the public or members of the armed and police forces shall be guilty of an offence punishable upon conviction by

<sup>130</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol. 6775 Wednesday, 19<sup>th</sup> July, 1972, p.1.

<sup>131</sup> Audrey Gadzekpo, Kwame Karikari and Kwesi Yankah (eds) *Going to Town. The Writings of PAV Ansa*, vol. 1. Ghana Universities Press, Accra, 1996, p.3.

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imprisonment of not less than five years or more than ten years without the option of a fine.

**3.4.4.11** At the GBC, a former employee reports of official interference in programming. For example, one episode of the programme: “Talking Point” (hosted by Prof. Daniel Adzei Bekoe, later to become Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana), was once ordered to be taken off the air in the middle of the programme, by the Commissioner of Foreign Affairs, Major Kwame Baah. Direct censorship at the GBC newsroom was imposed, especially when the government sent a former employee-turned public relations officer as a “news consultant” to the corporation.

**3.5.0 SMC I****3.5.1 Media Intimidation**

**3.5.1.1** On 9<sup>th</sup> October, 1975, the NRC was re-constituted into the Supreme Military Council (SMC), with Gen Acheampong still as its Chairman. One of the early anti-media actions undertaken by the government was the arrest and detention of two freelance journalists, Adolphus A. Patterson and Kwame Kesse-Adu. According to Asante, they were arrested and detained for “destructive criticism of the NRC”.<sup>132</sup>

**3.5.1.2** In May, 1978, the regime again banned *The Pioneer* from publication. The paper’s crime was the publicity it gave to the closure of the University of Science and Technology by the government, following a boycott of lectures by the students. The ban lasted for a month, before being lifted by the government in June.

**3.5.2 Media Support**

**3.5.2.1** On the credit side, the SMC (I) in response to media pressure, appointed the ‘Essah Committee’ in January, 1978, to look into the salary and other working conditions of journalists in public service. However, the regime did not last long enough to implement or ignore the committee’s recommendations.

**3.5.3 Media Inducement**

**3.5.3.1** The relationship between the government and the media was not all negative. It has been noted that “ [Gen] Acheampong was popular with the press and enjoyed often close, affable relationships with Ghanaian journalists, especially senior editors.” The Head of State was known to have often invited journalists to his residence to be entertained lavishly and sent away home with drinks and cash presents.<sup>133</sup> These acts of inducement and efforts to forge personal friendships with senior journalists, were not always in the interest of the public, as it was bound to affect the capacity of the

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<sup>132</sup> Asante, supra, p.63.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid, pp. 63-64.

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journalists to be objective in their reportage, as well as their willingness to give space to dissenting views in the public media.

**3.5.3.2** Certainly one can appreciate the effect that such inducements had on the press during the now-infamous Unigov campaign, when the state-owned media became a part of the Unigov campaign team. It is not surprising that the *Ghanaian Times* announced the palace-coup of 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1978, in an uncharacteristically restrained fashion. “Kutu Resigns And Retires, Akuffo Now Takes Over”,<sup>134</sup> was the subdued manner in which the ousting of the Chairman of the SMC I was announced to the Ghanaian public. However, the impression of “voluntary retirement of the Head of State” that the headline sought to create was completely false as Gen Acheampong had then been arrested and detained by his former colleagues. The news item also sought to explain the event by creating the false impression that the resignation of Gen Acheampong had been a thoughtful act, done in the interest of the nation, to ensure the unity and stability of the nation. The active Unigov campaigning that the *Ghanaian Times* had done, made the event a tragic one for the paper and its Editor, Kwame Gyewu-Kyem.

**3.6.0 SMC II****3.6.1 Government – Media Relations**

**3.6.1.1** Widespread public opposition to the SMC I was enough to invite the military to oust Gen Acheampong on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1978. The SMC II was born under its new Chairman, Lt-Gen Akuffo. SMC II pledged itself to ensuring greater freedom of the mass media. However, it soon became clear that the intervention was not exactly in the interest of the media. “The Press Is Truly Free Now, SMC Pledges” was the banner headline of the Friday, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1978 issue of the *Ghanaian Times*. The paper reported,

The government yesterday assured the press of freedom to report, criticise and comment on any subject of public interest without fear or favour provided they are not libellous or seditious...a journalist who panders the interest of his or her employers or sectional interest tends to sacrifice his or her independence and professional standards...this has been the bane of Ghanaian journalists in recent years.

**3.6.1.2** The editorial of the same *Ghanaian Times* issue was revealing of the plight of journalists over the years, and worth reproducing:

It is well that the SMC came out yesterday with what could be taken as a new policy statement on the freedom of the press, short of libellous, seditious, discourteous and state security busting items, the Press is free to publish what is printable...the freedom of the Press does not consist in the freedom of an editor to crucify principle so that he can say one thing today and another tomorrow. That could be weathercock behaviour, and it is as bad as sycophancy...this freedom does not, either, mean what the

<sup>134</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,402 Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 1978.

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Ghanaian public want it to be – that some 500 pressmen should say what they themselves, 10 million people do not want to say...and what is worse, when the whole nation fail [sic] to appreciate it when a pressman dies...or when for the sake of getting personal favours nobody's no is truly no and nobody's yes is truly yes, it is self deception to think that the Press can secure freedom of expression in such a nation. Pressmen have fallen for standing by the truth and seeking the public good. Editors were dismissed for opposing government agreement inimical to the national interest; they were sacked for criticising government foreign policy; they were fired for telling the government that freedom of the Press could not be like the freedom of the zoo. Pressmen have been disgraced by the authorities in many ways over the years... In thus daring to fight for the interest of the people and dying for it, what have the editors got in the form of support and encouragement from the public? Nothing! The dismissed disgraced editors went unsung, with no public protest in their favour. Indeed many Ghanaians secretly said, "They deserve it, these too known editors!"...It is not the members of the press who are being released, as from bondage, by the SMC's press freedom statement yesterday. It is the whole of society that is being united to conduct itself in the manner that can make press freedom possible and realistic.<sup>135</sup>

**3.6.1.3** No sooner had these high-sounding ideas on press liberty been expressed by the SMC II, than it dismissed Kwame Gyewu-Kyem, the Supervising Editor of the New Times Corporation from that position. He was moved to a much less-prestigious position at the Information Services Department. Abraham Kutin-Mensah, Editor of the *Weekly Spectator*, was appointed the new Supervising Editor in his place. The government also appointed Willie Kwarteng, then deputy-editor of the *Weekly Spectator*, as the new editor of *Ghanaian Times*.

**3.6.1.4** Soon a confrontation ensued between the government and journalists. In October, 1978, the GJA mounted a strike against the government asking it to act on the Essah Committee Report. But, the government slighted the journalists, most of whom were on government payroll, by refusing to act directly on the recommendations.

**3.6.1.5** Belatedly into its short term in office, the SMC II under Gen Akuffo, attempted to warm up to media practitioners by promising at the inauguration of the 'Guild of Ghana Editors', an independent press council. This press council was "to provide a suitable framework within which the media, Ghanaian and foreign journalists could practise their profession."<sup>136</sup> Akuffo's Government was overthrown shortly after, however, and the council was never established.

**3.6.1.6** The *Ghanaian Times* provides further perspective on the situation of Ghanaian journalists in another editorial captioned "Chops and Booze". Although it is unclear what provoked this tirade, it is instructive in what it notes as the "stumbling blocks" in journalism:

<sup>135</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,427 Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> August, 1978.

<sup>136</sup> See C. Udofia, "Ghana" in G. T. Kurian (ed.), *World Press Encyclopaedia*, New York, N.Y.: Facts on File, 1982, pp. 398- 397.

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The development of the standards of journalism in this country suffer [sic] a number of stumbling blocks, including the fact that anyone who can afford a cheap meal of dirty salad, rotten meat, and smuggled drinks, thinks he has a right to engage the attention of Editors. Another stumbling block is the tendency of most high officials both in the public service and private business to maintain with Reporters the kind of relationship that exist [sic] between prostitutes and the members of public honour: they deny the prostitutes in the day and hug them at night. A third stumbling block in the way of the Press is the class-conscious, superiority complex attitude towards journalist from too many self estimating people in the society...food and drinks as the basis for determining news value is only in the minds of those who want publicity and this sort of awry and skewed view of the Press in many otherwise knowledgeable circles is one reason why journalists are bombarded right and left with unsolicited offers of inducements.<sup>137</sup>

**3.6.1.7** Some observations of the Essah Committee, however, are worth noting as they provide a good assessment of the public image of journalists and their culpability in the denigration of their own profession:

Some journalists, it is sad to observe, do not wait for the government to give them a line. Motivated by opportunism to the exclusion of any professional ethics or regard for the public interest, they can launch witch hunts against political dissenters and carry out distortion of facts if they surmise that such activities, while not ordered by the government, will not unduly displease it.

As a result of such activities, journalists in the public service have largely become objects of hatred and contempt in the society that normally expects so much of them. Instead of being regarded as leaders of opinion (which is their right as members of the 'Fourth Estate of the Realm,' a status won for them by men of integrity throughout the ages), they are almost generally regarded as stooges, ignorant dealers in misinformation or perverters of truth...

Before any dismissal, transfer or deployment is effected in any of the mass media organisations in the public service, the individual affected should be confronted with his or her accusers and given an opportunity to state his or her case...<sup>138</sup>

**3.6.2 Media Resistance**

**3.6.2.1** As already indicated, the Acheampong and Akuffo Governments of the NRC/SMC showed a dubious record regarding media liberties, and the press in general, a disappointing record of complicity with the ruling regimes. However, there were some

<sup>137</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol 6,635 Monday, 9<sup>th</sup> April, 1979.

<sup>138</sup> The Essah Committee Report as reported in the *Daily Graphic* vol 8701 Wednesday, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1978, pp. 8 &9.

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few acts of resistance that must be acknowledged. For instance, in 1977, with the debate on Unigov just starting, the *Christian Messenger* and *The Standard* voiced opposition to the idea. A lead article in the *Christian Messenger*, for example, said: “Union Government Is Not The Answer.”<sup>139</sup> The article was on an interview with a professor of the Political Science Department at the University of Ghana. The July/August, 1977 issue of the same paper had an editorial with the title “Will It Work?”, which questioned some appointments of civilians and soldiers to head public corporations that the government had made. The paper’s beef was whether the action was not calculated to pre-empt demands by students for civilian rule. The paper also asked how different such appointments of civilians to work with the military were from the proposed Unigov. The paper, however undermined its critical stance by noting:

We of the Christian Messenger firmly believe that given the goodwill of the people minus all recriminations, and search for scape-goats, this new experiment in civilian cum military co-operation stands a chance of saving Ghana from death. Backed with prayers, the experiment will succeed.<sup>140</sup>

**3.6.2.2** Two articles in *The Standard* better illustrate attempts at criticism rather than support of the government. One editorial titled “The Task Ahead”, was a critique on the commemoration of the 1972 revolution. The paper started by praising the NRC on some of its policies, such as, the “operation feed yourself” programme and pursuing a vigorous foreign policy. However, the paper said some of these laudable policies were being pursued at the expense of the “common man – the average worker and labourer – to be precise.” The paper proposed that to keep the economy buoyant, the government should drastically cut down on military expenditure, spend less money on non-essentials such as hiking, exercise, training and ammunition. The paper added that expenditure on non-productive sectors such as defence, anniversaries and parties should be reduced for great allocation to be made on productive sectors of agriculture, industry and corporations.

**3.6.2.3** The second article took the form of an editorial, which dealt with a call by the Ghana Bar Association (GBA) on the government to hand over power to a civilian government not later than 1978, and also to abolish the existing military tribunals, since their existence was unfavourable to the rule of law.<sup>141</sup> The paper’s view was that “the call by the GBA is a call for a truly representative government, a government which rules by the mandate of the people.” The paper then went on to say that even the most liberal among military regimes were not truly representative of the people. Thus, the call by the GBA was “timely and to the point.” The paper ended with a strong warning:

Maybe the SMC had better pay heed to the call of the ‘learned men’. For the same people who are loud in singing paeans and praises of the militia, shall be the same elements of the society to discredit the SMC should they fail the Nation in their duty.<sup>142</sup>

<sup>139</sup> *Christian Messenger*, March/April 1977.

<sup>140</sup> *Christian Messenger*, July/August 1977.

<sup>141</sup> *The Standard*, 10<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> October, 1976.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*

**VOLUME 4** CHAPTER 3**3.7 4<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 1979 - 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER, 1979: ARMED FORCES  
REVOLUTIONARY COUNCIL (AFRC)****3.7.1 Government- Media Relations**

**3.7.1.1** The short three-month period of AFRC rule is generally considered by some as being an “interregnum”, as indeed was the belief of the coup-makers themselves, who described it simply as a period of “house-cleaning.” However, it is also notably a period during which the military government exerted a profound impact on the psyche of the nation and on the media.

**3.7.1.2** On the one hand, the regime was able to appeal to, and evoke the fervour of nationalism in the citizenry, including journalists, through its brutal campaign against trade malpractices or “*kalabule*”, that were blamed for the scarcity of basic consumer goods on the market. For example, on 24<sup>th</sup> June, 1979, the AFRC announced the establishment of the special “People’s Court” to try people in pursuance of its house-cleaning exercise. The policies that resulted in deprivation within the generality of the population, and the extent of corruption - perceived or real - during the NRC/SMC I & II regimes, did win some public sympathy for the AFRC. On the other hand, the arbitrariness with which the AFRC enforced compliance to whatever it alone considered right, and the brutal executions of former military leaders, shocked many Ghanaians.

**3.7.1.3** The “secret trials” of alleged “economic saboteurs,” and the execution by firing squad of eight senior Military Officers, Gen Ignatius K. Acheampong; Maj-Gen Edward K. Utuka; Gen Frederick W. K. Akuffo; Lt-Gen Akwasi A. Afrifa; Maj-Gen. Robert E. A Kotei; Air Vice-Marshall George Y. Boakye; Rear Admiral Joy Amedume; and Col Roger Felli, on 16<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1979, as well as the razing to the ground of Makola No.1 Market on 20<sup>th</sup> August, 1979, were particularly traumatic. There were very few voices in the press that made bold to condemn these atrocities.

**3.7.2 Media Support**

**3.7.2.1** The *Daily Graphic* cautiously welcomed the takeover by the AFRC, led by Flt Lt Jerry John Rawlings, on 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1979. The paper’s report of the events immediately after the takeover showed that while people rejoiced in the past when coups occurred, this time some people went looting in Accra-Central, while others were seen in clusters discussing the development.<sup>143</sup> The editorial in the same issue was not so exuberant as previous editorials (immediately after the NLC and NRC coups d’état) and serves as a good illustration of mitigated press euphoria:

Ghanaians woke up yesterday to what certainly has all the features of a people’s revolution...There is no doubt that Ghanaians in general have had their feel [sic] of military rule. It is therefore welcome that the

<sup>143</sup> *Daily Graphic*,\_ vol. 8902 Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

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leaders of yesterday's exercise have assured the nation that the electioneering procedure will continue as scheduled so that the country can return to civilian rule as planned.<sup>144</sup>

This time the coup-makers were not "gallant men" neither was the revolution a "glorious" one. The *Daily Graphic* called the coup "a people's revolution" and an "exercise", and asked the leaders to avoid bloodshed.

**3.7.2.2** The *Ghanaian Times* was also equally sober in its initial reportage of the coup. "Revolutionary Council takes over - Hamidu appeals for calm" was the banner headline in the *Ghanaian Times* announcing the coup d'état by the AFRC. Unlike former coups d'état, the *Ghanaian Times* reported that people did not take to the streets in support of the uprising but hurried back to their various homes.<sup>145</sup> The editorial in the same issue captioned, "Need for Peace, Calm," appealed to all Ghanaians to help maintain peace and calm in the nation. The editorial was neither supportive nor condemnatory of the coup.

**3.7.2.3** Subsequent issues of the paper gave the *raison d'être* of the takeover. In his maiden speech to the nation, the Chairman of the AFRC, Flt Lt Rawlings declared, that the coup was "a natural reaction to injustices and events of the last few years". He added that any person who attempted to misuse the opportunity to serve the country was to be "shot outright". The *Ghanaian Times* editorial on the maiden speech, captioned "Chance for Discipline", lauded the commitment of the new regime and prayed that all resistance to the regime should cease. The editorial also highlighted the incidence of burglaries and lawlessness since the day of the takeover.<sup>146</sup> The *Ghanaian Times*, three days later, dutifully reported that the Chairman of the AFRC had declared in Accra that, "Ghana needs a strong man who is a benevolent dictator."<sup>147</sup>

**3.7.2.4** The *Ghanaian Times* rapidly resumed its characteristic posture of using its pages to vilify and de-legitimise the past government that it had lauded and defended aggressively, once it had fallen. It began to portray the past government as corrupt, by carrying stories cataloguing dubious practices of the previous leaders, and questioning whether assets had been declared by these former leaders.<sup>148</sup>

**3.7.2.5** The initial restraint and unenthusiastic support for the new regime displayed by newspapers during this period was severely contradicted by the most disturbing endorsements of gross human rights abuses ever manifested in the Ghanaian media. Under the caption, "A Lesson To All Ghanaians", the *Daily Graphic*<sup>149</sup> welcomed the

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, Vol. 6,683, Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>146</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, Vol. 6,684 Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1979; *Ghanaian Times*, Vol. 6,686 Friday 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1979- "Coup was a spontaneous reaction – Rawlings".

<sup>147</sup> *Ghanaian Times* \_vol. 6,685 Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>148</sup> See *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,691, Thursday, 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1979; *Ghanaian Times*, Vol. 6,692, Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> June 1979-Illegal loans covered by bank loans; Kutu has three houses in UK; *Ghanaian Times*, Vol. 6,693, Saturday, 16<sup>th</sup> June, 1979 - Declaration of assets by top military men.

<sup>149</sup> *Daily Graphic* Vol. 8913 Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.



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execution of “Mr.”<sup>150</sup> Acheampong former Head of State, and Maj-Gen Utuka, former Commander of the Border Guards. According to the paper, “there cannot be a better anti-coup elixir than what has begun to unfold before our very eyes.”<sup>151</sup> The *Ghanaian Times* did not condemn the execution by firing squad of the former Heads of State and military officers, but rather encouraged the regime not to begin the house cleaning exercise from only the year 1972, but 1966 when the first coup occurred.<sup>152</sup>

**3.7.2.6** Often newspapers depicted through words and pictures the human rights abuses meted out on the citizens of the country, but failed to criticise or condemn such abuses. Indeed, the framing of stories suggested that the press endorsed some of the junta’s harsh measures. Even before the public executions of alleged economic and other saboteurs started, the *Ghanaian Times*, for example, showed pictures of the Teshie Firing Range and another one at Sunyani, being prepared for those who would be brought to the stakes.<sup>153</sup> The paper enhanced its endorsement of human rights abuses with pictures and sensational headlines. Some of the headlines of the articles that carried the reports were: “Woman Contractor given 24 strokes”;<sup>154</sup> “T’di Contractor caned in public”;<sup>155</sup> and “18 caned in K’si”.<sup>156</sup> One article showed four soldiers holding the hands and legs of the victim, while the victim was being caned on the bare back and buttocks.<sup>157</sup>

**3.7.2.7** Both the *Christian Messenger* and *The Standard* also hailed the AFRC’s revolution and its policies as well. The 24<sup>th</sup> June, 1979 editorial in *The Standard* completely backed the executions of “Mr” Acheampong and Maj-Gen Utuka at the Teshie firing range. The paper was of the view that the executions had brought the sordid history of the notorious second military regime to a close. The paper termed the executions a “disciplinary action”, taken by the AFRC in public to serve as a deterrent, adding that the AFRC’s determination to tackle the economic problem of the country is seen through its action of executing the two officers. *The Standard* ended by saying that the fate of leaders since Independence, should be a warning to future aspiring political leaders: Nkrumah and Busia had both died in exile, the assets of Ankrah and Afrifa had been frozen, and Mr. Acheampong had been shot by firing squad.

**3.7.2.8** On the revolution, the *Christian Messenger* said:

Rawlings showed the way by his speedy and lightening [sic] decisions. One may not accept all his methods, or even accept most of their actions. His revolution however made Ghanaians sit up. Within a brief spell, the nostalgic and clammy effects of kalabulism were exposed. The nation’s oppressed masses especially the youth were electrified...

<sup>150</sup> Gen Acheampong had been stripped of his military rank when he was removed from power under the Armed Forces (Miscellaneous Provisions Decree, 1979 (SMCD 235).

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,686, Friday, 8<sup>th</sup> June, 1979-Editorial- “The House Cleaning”.

<sup>153</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,689 Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1979 – “Site ready for firing squad”.

<sup>154</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,700 Monday, 25<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>155</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,699 Saturday, 23<sup>rd</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>156</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6,701 Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>157</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 6694 Monday, 18<sup>th</sup> June, 1979 – “5 men and a woman whipped in public”.

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**3.7.2.9** To sum up the performance of the AFRC at the end of their stay in power, *The Standard* paid the government this memorable tribute in its editorial:

Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings and the AFRC have performed their onerous task with a touch of high drama, rare courage, dedication and a high sense of duty. In the final summation therefore, we should always remember that if Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings had not happened on the Ghanaian political scene when he did, it is hard to envisage what could have been done about the stupendous task of moral regeneration and ‘house cleaning’ on which he and the AFRC are now engaged. We salute Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings and the AFRC.<sup>158</sup>

**3.7.3 Media Intimidation**

**3.7.3.1** The brief period of the AFRC in 1979, has been described by a former employee of the GBC as “harrowing.” According to the journalist, many GBC staff members at Broadcasting House in Accra were in a state of constant fear of their lives, as it was not uncommon for soldiers to fire their guns, including the heavy weapons mounted on armoured vehicles, on the compound of the corporation.

**3.7.3.2** The period also witnessed its share of direct interference in the work of the media with the AFRC Chairman, Flt Lt Rawlings, actually going to address GBC workers at the Music Studio in August, 1979, and asking them to comply with the dictates of the revolution.

**3.7.3.3** The AFRC regime also appointed Elizabeth Ohene, Literary Editor of the *Daily Graphic* as its Editor, an elevation she declined. She rather chose to be the Acting Editor, pending the return to constitutional rule.

**3.7.3.4** In June, 1979, the Commissioner for Information of the AFRC Government, Dickson Kwame Afreh, verbally announced the removal from office of Nana Addo-Twum, as editor of the *Daily Graphic*, and the appointment of Ms Elizabeth Ohene as Acting Editor. Nana Addo-Twum sued the government for breach of contract at an Accra High court, but before a date could be set for the hearing of the case, the Press Commission intervened and a compromise was reached. Nana Addo-Twum retained his job as editor, when it became clear that both his removal and the appointment of his successor were done by verbal instructions only.<sup>159</sup> Needless to state, such a reversal was possible only because the government that caused the removal was no longer in power, and the Press Commission had been established under the authority of the 1979 Constitution. What was also remarkable was that the occupant of a position as important as that of the editor of a major newspaper, could be removed merely by verbal instructions. The incident thus only illustrated the measure of authority that the AFRC

<sup>158</sup> *The Standard*, September, 1979.

<sup>159</sup> *Daily Graphic*\_vol. 9279 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1980, pp. 1, 4-5.

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Government exercised over the media. The Chairman of the Press Commission, Kofi Badu, expressed the hopes of the media in these words:

The myth of a monolithic information community within which editors can be moved, transferred or banished at the whims of a government, needs to be exercised [sic]. Journalists should be free to select their places of employment and to rise and fall with their employers on the basis of their performance.<sup>160</sup>

**3.7.3.5** Media intimidation did not emanate from the government only, but from other sources as well. There is the example of Elizabeth Ohene, Acting Editor of *Daily Graphic* who was physically threatened by students for daring to write an editorial condemning the call “Let the blood flow”, that was being spearheaded by students. This attack occurred, when a group of angry students, dissatisfied with the stance of the paper, marched to the premises of Graphic Corporation and painted graffiti on the walls. Some of these writings read “Death to Ohene”.<sup>161</sup> Rawlings later appealed to a crowd of students to leave Elizabeth Ohene alone, and to allow her to speak her mind.

**3.7.4 Media Resistance**

**3.7.4.1** Soon after the coup, the *Daily Graphic* with Elizabeth Ohene as Acting Editor, displayed a rare moment of courage when in an editorial, in the wake of the executions, it advocated the need to avoid bloodshed and appealed to the regime to withdraw troops from the streets. Defiantly, the paper wrote:

As the ‘Graphic’ indicated yesterday, Ghanaians seem in no mood to live under military government any longer and only the right thing should be done to generate confidence and restore image to our Armed Forces.<sup>162</sup>

**3.7.4.2** Despite being intimidated, state-media journalists such as Ms Ajoa Yeboah-Afari and Ms Elizabeth Ohene were able to dissent and keep their jobs. Notable is Elizabeth Ohene’s “Death Not The Answer” article that incurred the wrath of the students in which she notes:

What is even more important, the executions will not solve the problems that we have, the anger we feel will not be expurgated after the killings because we shall still be hungry after they have all been killed.<sup>163</sup>

**3.7.4.3** In another opinion piece, Elizabeth Ohene advised the regime to stick to its pledge of house cleaning, get it done with and hand over to a civilian government. She also admonished the press to be truthful and honest if the revolution was to succeed.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Asante, supra, p. 73.

<sup>162</sup> *Daily Graphic*, vol 8904 Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

<sup>163</sup> *Daily Graphic* 5<sup>th</sup> June, 1979, supra.

<sup>164</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 8908 Tuesday, 12<sup>th</sup> June, 1979.

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**VOLUME 4** CHAPTER 3**3.8 24TH SEPTEMBER, 1979- 30<sup>TH</sup> DECEMBER, 1981: THIRD REPUBLIC THE PEOPLE'S NATIONAL PARTY GOVERNMENT (PNP)****3.8.1 Government – Media Relations**

**3.8.1.1** The press under the Government of President Hilla Limann also experienced a season of freedom. Soon after assuming office, the President on 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1980, before the official inauguration of a Press Commission, which had been provided for in the 1979 Constitution to ensure media freedom, appointed three senior journalists to fill editorial vacancies at the *Daily Graphic*, the *Mirror* and the *Ghanaian Times*. Ms Elizabeth Ohene, Acting Editor of the *Daily Graphic* who was confirmed as editor with other colleagues, opposed this action of the President. An editorial in the paper said:

After careful consideration of the matter, however, we are sure that these so-called appointments cannot go unchallenged since they appear at best mischievous and at worst quite contrary to the letter and spirit of the constitution. Mischievous because appointments seek to frustrate the very aims of the Press Commission which seek to protect press freedom, one of its features being the security of tenure of the office of journalists.

**3.8.1.2** Despite the protests, the government went ahead with the appointments and the journalists dragged it to court. The case was settled at the Supreme Court; however, the government withdrew the appointments after that.

**3.8.2 Media Support**

**3.8.2.1** The political and social climate that prevailed under the Third Republic permitted the free discussion of the performance of the media in the country.<sup>165</sup> Asante noted that at the end of 1980, several parliamentarians commended the press, particularly the *Ghanaian Times* for its objective and accurate coverage of events in the country. President Limann on his part appealed to the press, on the eve of the second anniversary of the Third Republic, “not to subject the country’s young democracy to the licentiousness, fabricated scandals and shocks which older democracies and mature economies can absorb.”

**3.8.3.2** Media intimidation under the Limann Regime was subtle and carried out by government officials. Although the Press Commission had been set up, many thought the membership constituted mainly of PNP adherents. On January 27, 1981, the newly appointed Board of Directors of the Graphic Corporation told the Acting Deputy Editor of the paper that editorials “lacked meat”, consequently, they had decided to see and vet

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<sup>165</sup> Asante, *supra*, p.89.

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editorials. The editorial staff, however, refused to comply and the GJA<sup>166</sup> supported this action. In an editorial on the issue titled “Our editors versus our board” the paper said:

If the board of directors want to determine what shall be written in the editorial columns of the Daily Graphic, then their best bet is to assume completely the production of the paper and dismiss the whole editorial staff...The board of directors want to paralyse the operations of the editors, tie their hands behind their back and effectively destroy the press freedom which the constitution guarantees.

Under the Third Republic therefore, the media tried to assert its freedom in the new constitutional dispensation, with some degree of success.

### **3.9                    31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER, 1981 -- 6<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY, 1993: THE PROVISIONAL NATIONAL DEFENCE COUNCIL (PNDC)**

#### **3.9.1    Government – Media Relations**

**3.9.1.1.** Another military take-over occurred on Thursday, 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1981, when Flt Lt Rawlings took power for the second time to launch what he claimed was a revolution that would transform the social and economic order of Ghana. The rule by the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) was the longest single period of military rule in Ghana, ending on 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1993, when the Fourth Republic was ushered in. The regime’s criminalisation of wealth as a result of its ideological posture, particularly in the very first year of the regime, set this military regime apart from all the earlier ones.

**3.9.1.2** Although the coup d’état was represented as a continuation of the June, 1979 agenda to clean up the society, it was, in fact, not so. This was because none of the original members of the AFRC, except its Chairman, re-appeared in the membership of the PNDC. Furthermore, none of the original PNDC members retained their position to the end, except the Chairman, Flt Lt Rawlings. The PNDC Proclamation as amended, unlike any others decreed by military regimes, installed a dictator in disguise, when it invested extraordinary powers in the person of Chairman. According to the law, the Chairman of the PNDC could, in emergency situations or in exceptional circumstances, take any decision on behalf of the PNDC which could be ratified later by the whole Council.<sup>167</sup> What constituted an “emergency”, or “exceptional circumstances”, however, were not defined, leaving the decision when to act on behalf of the Council by himself, to the Chairman himself.

**3.9.1.3** Immediately after seizing power on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1981, the PNDC launched its “Power to the People” crusade by establishing revolutionary watchdogs (the Workers’ Defence Committees and the People’s Defence Committees) at workplaces and in

<sup>166</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9410, Thursday, 29<sup>th</sup> January, 1981, pp. 1, 4-5.

<sup>167</sup> Provisional National Defence Council (Establishment) Proclamation, 1981, section 4(1).

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neighbourhoods to deal with malpractices. Special courts to dispense revolutionary justice to “offenders” were also established. There was an agenda to settle old scores, stemming from the feeling that the reversal of “the gains of June 4” had either been supervised by an incompetent PNP government, or motivated by a self-seeking affluent middle-class. The media were seen as having backed that status quo. The abuse of power by the PNDC Government, individual soldiers and revolutionary PDCs/WDCs, as well as the PNDC’s anti media policies are therefore direct spillovers from the PNDC’s ideology.

**3.9.1.4** It is striking and telling that copies of newspapers during the first year in office of the PNDC are virtually unavailable. For inexplicable reasons depositories in Ghana, including the national archives, and public libraries do not have issues of state newspapers published in 1982 that would have illuminated better issues relating to the press and the PNDC Government in the early days of the PNDC government. By most accounts, however, the PNDC government had the worst record of human rights abuses, including abuses against the media. The fact that newspapers appear to have been removed from national depositories, is itself suggestive of an agenda by persons unknown to tamper with the record of available information on the first year of the PNDC. This is even more significant, viewed against the background that electronic recordings of that period were lost in the fire that engulfed GBC’s library in the late 1980s.

**3.9.1.5** Several background events, some occurring as far back as the late 1979 and early 1980 during the civilian regime of the PNP may help to put the anti-media posture of the PNDC in proper perspective. On 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1979, Flt Lt Rawlings was retired from the Armed Forces, contrary to his wish to remain in active service. The *Daily Graphic* reported the event with a photograph of Flt Lt Rawlings smiling, and in the company of President Limann. The announced retirement happened two weeks after a jail break of 12<sup>th</sup> November, 1979. On 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1980, George E. Amuah, an AFRC convict, also escaped from prison. On 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1980, the media gave considerable coverage to a press conference held at the former Ambassador Hotel in Accra by the National Chapter of Amnesty International, during which Maj Boakye-Gyan and Maj Mensah Poku, former members of the AFRC, called for a probe into the regime of the AFRC.

**3.9.1.6** In May, 1980, the government dissolved the AFRC Assets Disposal and Recovery Committee over allegations that its members made use of confiscated vehicles. On 4<sup>th</sup> June, 1980, Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd) addressed a rally at the Accra Community Centre and expressed indignation about the campaign to undermine the Transitional Provisions of the 1979 Constitution. On 18<sup>th</sup> July, 1980, Paul Victor Obeng, a close associate of Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd) was searched for arms. Media reports said the police found at his Tema residence some weapons and ammunition, belonging to him and Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd). Four days later on 22<sup>nd</sup> July, 1980, the police followed up and questioned Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd) at the CID headquarters. All these events were given prominence in national media.

**3.9.1.7** In September, 1980, President Limann, at a press conference, made some remarks about an appeal by AFRC convicts for their release. The *Free Press* called for the impeachment of President Limann for commenting on the Transitional Provisions of the

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1979 Constitution. On 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1980, the Editor of the *Daily Graphic* Nana Addo Twum was verbally threatened by Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd), when Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd) was distributing to the *Daily Graphic* a press release in which he denied involvement in subversive activities. According to Flt Lt Rawlings, the *Daily Graphic* was part of the machinery accusing him of subversive activities. In November, 1980, George Aidoo published a *Daily Graphic* story of Flt Lt Rawlings (Rtd) threatening the editorial staff of the *Graphic*. All these events lend credence to the adversarial posture of the PNDC in its early years.

**3.9.2 Media Support**

**3.9.2.1** The PNDC's policy toward the media aimed at controlling them and using them to further the aims of the revolution. Ato Austin, Totobi Quakyi and Joyce Aryee became the Secretaries of Information in succession under the PNDC. The PNDC did not leave support to chance. They proclaimed a policy of "non neutrality" of the media, and this left journalists with only one of two choices of either supporting, or being against the government.<sup>168</sup>

**3.9.2.2** Characteristic of all military regimes, the PNDC immediately imposed editorial changes at the state-owned media. At the GBC, Kwame Karikari was appointed as Acting Director-General of GBC; David Anaglate replaced Ewusi Brookman as the Acting Director at the radio section; and Aba Hayford replaced Sam Bannerman as the Director of Television. At the Graphic Corporation, the editor of the *Daily Graphic*, George Aidoo, was promptly dismissed and Kojo Yankah appointed in his place.<sup>169</sup> The following day, the editor of *The Mirror* was also dismissed, and replaced by Yaw Boakye Ofori Atta, who was transferred from *Daily Graphic*. Changes were also made at the New Times Corporation; the publisher and printer of the *Ghanaian Times* and the *Weekly Spectator* were both replaced. Several other senior editors and management staff at state media, such as Peregrino Peters, Elizabeth Ohene and George Naykene were asked to proceed on an "indefinite leave."<sup>170</sup> At the *Daily Graphic*, in particular, there was a mass transfer from Accra, to the Regions of some senior journalists such as Kofi Akumenyi, Ben Mensah, Ken Bediako, and Joe Aggrey. Many of them resigned, resulting in the loss of experienced hands at the *Daily Graphic*, and this reflected on the quality of work on the paper. According to a senior journalist of the time, newly recruited journalists saw themselves as "riding the crest of the so-called revolution" and had difficulty taking instructions from older hands whom they considered as reactionaries.<sup>171</sup>

**3.9.2.3** As time went on, other journalists from the Regions were brought to the Accra office of the *Daily Graphic*, among them Elvis Aryeh, who also doubled as a kind of publicist stationed at the Castle, in addition to working at the *Daily Graphic*. This

<sup>168</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9696 Tuesday, 5<sup>th</sup> January, 1982, p.1; editorial, "The Media At Crossroads", p.2.

<sup>169</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9697 Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> January, 1982, p.1.

<sup>170</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9698 Thursday, 7<sup>th</sup> January, 1982, p.1.

<sup>171</sup> Memorandum to National Reconciliation Commission.

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situation seriously compromised the independence and integrity of the paper.<sup>172</sup> The PNDC also dismissed three officials who worked with the Press Secretariat at the Castle.

**3.9.2.4** Taking a cue from the government's new policies, the Workers' Defence Committee (WDC) of the Graphic Corporation passed a resolution to abolish "Management" and to establish a 15-member Workers' Council to run the corporation.<sup>173</sup> With these changes and fresh appointments, the government was able to reorient the outlook and mood of the Ghanaian media to suit its particular needs. In fact, on numerous occasions, Flt Lt Rawlings exhorted the Ghanaian media to serve as a vehicle for the revolution, arguing that it was frivolous for them to stay neutral. Flt Lt Rawlings was seen by the outside world not only as censoring the press to minimise political criticism but also as using the Ghanaian media to arouse mass support for the 31<sup>st</sup> December Revolution.

**3.9.2.5** In tune with the mood of the government, editors imposed a censorship on themselves, suppressing stories for a variety of reasons, so as not to incur the displeasure of the new revolutionary government, thereby jeopardising their positions. They justified these practices by arguing that the suppression of such stories would serve the public better than publication of the truth. During this period, rumours were rife that the Castle Information Bureau (CIB), the information and publicity outfit of the PNDC, sometimes sent already-written editorials to the state-owned press houses for publication. Even though government vehemently denied such practices, some journalists have insisted it was not uncommon for outside forces that were associated with the regime to dictate what ought to go into the pages of state-owned newspapers. The fact that the government Press Secretary doubled as editor of the *Daily Graphic*; that a known sympathiser of the regime was editor of the *Ghanaian Times*, would suggest a very strong, direct hand of government in state print media.

**3.9.2.6** Control was similarly exerted on the GBC. There are reports of direct interference in the day-to-day running of the GBC by the PNDC Chairman himself, direct censorship at the newsroom, as well as oversight control from the Castle and the Ministry of Information. There was evidence before the Commission that the Secretary for Information imposed daily routine supervision, including constant summons and telephone instructions on anything, from programmes to news on labour matters.

**3.9.2.7** GBC engaged in several propaganda techniques on behalf of the PNDC, as they had done in the past. These included: "name-calling" (attaching pejorative label to a person in order to discredit him or her), "glittering generality" (associating individuals or governments with 'virtue word' in order to evoke acceptability), "plain folks" (identifying a government with the ideals of the common person) and "testimonial" (having a respected individual or celebrity endorse a concept, or an individual). Other propagandist techniques were "band-wagon" (false claim that a mass of people endorse a concept in order to evoke public support), "card-stacking/disinformation" (selective use

<sup>172</sup> Aryeh was eventually made editor of the *Daily Graphic*.

<sup>173</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9738 Tuesday, 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1982, p.1.



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of facts or falsehoods to discredit or support a concept or policy, and finally “songs/slogans” (composition of patriotic eulogies for political leaders).

**3.9.2.8** On 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1982, the *Daily Graphic* underwent a name-change to reflect the fact of the ownership by the people, and the views of the revolutionary leadership. It became known as *People’s Daily Graphic*, and remained so until 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1992.

**3.9.3 Media Intimidation**

**3.9.3.1** The media operated under very difficult conditions, very often under the surveillance of officials from the Bureau of National Investigations (BNI), and many journalists and editors were followed around and intimidated. Editors and publishers have given harrowing accounts of how government pressures forced them out of the country’s newspaper business. Such accounts, ranging from intimidation to detention to repressive press laws, can be found in international newspapers, special watch group reports, academic journals, biographies and autobiographies of that period.

**3.9.3.2** One journalist recalled that on Sunday, 3<sup>rd</sup> January, 1982, a few days after the coup, a busload of June 4<sup>th</sup> Movement activists invaded the editorial office of the *Daily Graphic*.<sup>174</sup> Led by Kwesi Adu and some armed soldiers, they assembled journalists and singled out some such as Elizabeth Ohene, and George Naykene, and demanded that they leave the premises of the paper and never return. They were warned that should they find them on the premises next time they came back, they would “pounce on the fellow, beat him or her to pulp and throw the person into the sea.” That incident so chilled the journalists in the newsroom that they were totally cowed. At the New Times Corporation, the workers locked out the Managing Director, Kankam Nantwi, and chased out his three female secretaries. They impounded the vehicle of the Managing Director, and invited the government to “throw out all the ‘deadwoods’ and corrupt officers”. Subsequently, the PNDC Secretary for Information sent the Managing Director on leave, in endorsement of the workers’ demonstration.<sup>175</sup>

**3.9.3.3** Another journalist also testified to instances of human rights abuses against GBC workers.<sup>176</sup> According to him, journalists in the news division of the GBC:

... who insisted on professional editorial principles and practice, have faced varying degrees of intimidation, harassment and outright repression. These have included wrongful dismissal, demotion, denial of promotion, unwarranted and frequent station transfers, and administrative harassment.

**3.9.3.4** On 25<sup>th</sup> July, 1982, Bombardier Mathias Cudjoe and L/Cpl Samuel Amedeka, two soldiers who were prominent in the making of the coup, sent a letter to the GBC newsroom, asking for the resignation of Kojo Yankah of the *Daily Graphic*, Ato Austin,

<sup>174</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission. The incident was reported in *Daily Graphic* vol. 9695 Monday, 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1982, p.1.

<sup>175</sup> *Daily Graphic* vol. 9748 Saturday, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1982, p.3.

<sup>176</sup> Memorandum to the National Reconciliation Commission.

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as Information Secretary and Kwame Karikari as Acting Director General of GBC.<sup>177</sup> This was unsettling for the staff, especially since these soldiers were in charge of security at GBC. Particularly after the setting up of the Castle Information Bureau, under the directorship of Mrs. Valerie Sackey, not only were the content of state-owned media often interfered with, but also journalists were summoned before either the Secretary for Information or even the Head of State, to be berated for some infraction or other.

**3.9.3.5** The year 1983 proved a most trying time for state media journalists who were covering the proceedings of the Special Investigations Board (SIB), which was set up to probe the murder of three High Court Judges and a retired Army Officer. Regular reporters assigned by the media houses to cover the proceedings were recalled and replaced by editors of state-owned media by the Minister for Information, Ato Austin. Thus for example, Kwao Lotsu, the Acting General Manager of the GNA, Sam Clegg, then Deputy Editor of the *Daily Graphic* and David Anaglate, Director of Radio at GBC, found themselves covering the SIB proceedings, during the period Capt Kojo Tsikata was giving his testimony.

**3.9.3.6** Following the conviction and subsequent execution of Joachim Amartey Kwei, a member of the PNDC, who was implicated in the murder of the judges, top and senior journalists of state media were summoned to the conference room of the Ministry for Information, where Flt Lt Rawlings played a tape on which a voice said to be Amartey Kwei's, was heard saying certain things before being executed. Evidence before the Commission indicated that the journalists were also subjected to a horror video of a nursing tigress mauling a tourist who went too close to it, and they were then given the message that anyone who took the revolution for granted would be playing a dangerous game. The journalists were told that the Amartey Kwei tape was off record, and so they were not even allowed to take notes. Subsequently, the *Daily Graphic* published a story based upon the embargoed tape. Following the story, Kojo Yankah was publicly reprimanded by the Secretary for Information, Ms Joyce Aryee, for having disgraced journalism and then removed as editor of the newspaper. He was later assigned as Director of the Ghana Institute of Journalism.

**3.9.3.7** By 1985, when virtually only state-owned media were able to operate, the PNDC embarked on a sweeping re-organisational exercise of the country's mass media institutions to ensure that certain loyal persons were placed in key positions. The government explained that the measures were intended to motivate qualitative changes in the productive capacities of the various media organisations. Thus, under the PNDC regime many journalists became very fearful not only about retaining their jobs, but for their personal safety. According to one account:

There were spies in the newsroom; pressmen trained in the Eastern Bloc and at the Ghana Institute of Journalism to spy on their colleagues... Security operatives infiltrated GIJ and the message to young journalists

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<sup>177</sup> See Jacob J. Yidana, *Who Killed the Judges: Ghana In Retrospect*, Bismi Enterprise. Printing and Publishing, Accra, 1988.

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was that they would have difficulty finding jobs if they stepped out of line.

**3.9.3.8** Apart from professional abuse, GBC workers were known to have also suffered physical and psychological abuses, sometimes from the near-permanent presence of armed police/military presence on the premises of the GBC, or at the hands of military personnel posted to the GBC. Women staff have reported instances of sexual abuse by soldiers. It was noted that in 1983/84, a medical report to the Director-General indicated extensive cases of hypertension as well as anxiety symptoms or psychiatric disorders, among GBC staff at Broadcasting House.

**3.9.3.9** Under the new regime, several private newspaper organisations were either confiscated, banned, or forced out of business. In July, 1982, a group of angry youths and workers attacked the offices of such newspapers as the *Echo* and *The Believer* in Accra, claiming that the newspapers were using their pages and editorial columns to subvert the PNDC Government and to cause chaos and anarchy in the country. The attackers smashed office and printing equipment as well as destroyed printing materials.<sup>178</sup> One victim stated that these physical harassments and ordeals had a cowering impact on the private press. He pointed out that after the attack, the management of the *Echo* published a letter in the 1<sup>st</sup> August 1982 edition, apologising to the government for “the nature and tone of the opinions expressed in the *Echo* which amount practically to an incitement of the people against the present administration.” Boafo has noted that the newspaper’s guest-editor was relieved of his post, and from August, 1982, critical editorial comments and coverage of views opposing the 31<sup>st</sup> December Revolution, and expressions which were not in consonance with official line of thinking, completely disappeared from the newspaper.

**3.9.3.10** On 21<sup>st</sup> June, 1983, the *Free Press* and the *Citadel Daily*, which also had been critical of events in the country, were similarly attacked by a group of angry protesters who took over the printing press of Tommark Advertising, publishers of the newspapers, saying they intended to use the printing facilities to print the “people’s news” and to champion the cause of the revolution. The demonstrators also besieged the Supreme Court Building in Accra to show their disapproval of the old judicial system, which they thought benefited the elite. That same year a number of Ghanaians, including three journalists of the *Free Press*, Tommy Thompson, John Kugblenu and Mike Adjei, were arrested for their alleged involvement in an attempt to derail the 31<sup>st</sup> December Revolution, and for being agents of the CIA.<sup>179</sup> Even though it was widely believed that the *Free Press* was closed down because it criticised the government, government officials strenuously denied this.<sup>180</sup>

**3.9.3.11** Other private publications and press houses such as Unipress, the publishers of the *Palaver*, the *Herald Tribune*, and the *Chronicle*, also suffered a ban. Indeed, one of

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<sup>178</sup> Boafo, supra, p.77.

<sup>179</sup> Mike Adjei, *DEATH and PAIN RAWLINGS’ GHANA THE INSIDE STORY* Black Line Publishing Ltd, London, 1993, chapter 2.

<sup>180</sup> See CPJ Update, May/June 1984.

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the first legislative acts of the PNDC in 1982, was to confiscate that press.<sup>181</sup> Unipress newspapers owned by Chris Asher, had, in previous years, been stridently critical of Flt Lt Rawlings. He had even gone to the extent of occasionally organising rallies to condemn him, as well as suggesting that Flt Lt Rawlings be imprisoned for his past actions.

**3.9.3.12** On 24<sup>th</sup> January, 1985, the government ordered the immediate suspension of a private newspaper, *Ghanaian Voice* for allegedly “distorting news” and “fabricating stories which are completely without foundation.” An official statement issued by the Ministry for Information stated that the government could not allow the newspaper’s mischievous brand of journalism which was prejudicial to the national interest, to continue. Three months later, on 5<sup>th</sup> March, 1985 the suspension order was lifted.<sup>182</sup> By this time, the tone of the *Ghanaian Voice* had changed to become one that was supportive of the government.

**3.9.3.13** In June, 1985, Flt Lt Rawlings verbally attacked the Catholic Church, at a function to commission new transmitters for the GBC and in December that year his government banned the *The Standard*, a weekly publication of the Catholic Church, for its critical news stories and comments against the government. The newspaper, among other things, had criticised the PNDC’s human rights record and had called for the democratisation of government in Ghana. The PNDC claimed the newspaper was banned for its “unpatriotic reporting.” A lead article on the front page of the 3<sup>rd</sup> February, 1985 issue of *The Standard*, for example, had criticised the government for pursuing traditional economic policies which called for an over reliance on foreign investments and loans and a commitment to IMF. The article also condemned the creation of the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs) and the Joint Consultative Committees (JCCs). It complained that these organs undermined the structural basis of workers’ and the people’s power. *The Standard* summed up general frustration with military regimes by noting in one of its articles, “Military interventions or military bullyism is the one curse which has bedevilled this nation...”<sup>183</sup>

**3.9.3.14** An editorial in the same issue of *The Standard*, added its voice to a communiqué of the GBA on human rights abuses going on in the country.<sup>184</sup> Another editorial of *The Standard* in June, 1985, among other things, criticised the execution of some persons for embezzlement of funds from a bank, and stated that executions were not the sole answers to economic ills. An issue of the paper even went as far as to carry a news flash that challenged why some political detainees had been released on bail and not Kankam da Costa, the former Central Regional Minister. This news flash was repeated in subsequent issues of the paper.

<sup>181</sup> Forfeiture of Assets and Transfer of Shares and Other Proprietary Interests (Unipress Limited) Law, 1982 (PNDC L. 3).

<sup>182</sup> *People’s Daily Graphic*, vol. 10671 Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1985 p.6.

<sup>183</sup> *The Standard*, 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 1985.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

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**3.9.3.15** At the end of its annual conference in Sunyani on 5<sup>th</sup> July, 1986, the Catholic Bishops' Conference issued a communiqué condemning the ban on *The Standard*, and describing it as "arbitrary, unjustified and repressive."

**3.9.3.16** The PNDC, like other military dictatorships, used legislative restrictions to control free speech and curtail press freedom in the country. On 27<sup>th</sup> March, 1989, the PNDC passed the Newspaper Licensing Law. This Law revoked the registration of all newspapers and magazines published in the country, and asked all publishers to apply to the Ministry of Information for re-registration. In addition, all importers of foreign magazines were required to obtain authorisation from the Ministry before magazines and publications were cleared from the port of entry. The passing of this Newspaper Licensing Law, made it virtually impossible for newspapers critical of government to survive, and, created further problems for the private press in Ghana. Several editors and publishers were pressured to toe the government's line, or forced out of the country's newspaper business altogether. For example, papers such as the *Free Press* and *The Independent* had difficulty obtaining a licence to operate.<sup>185</sup> Others found a third way out: they abandoned main-line journalism and went into the publishing of sports papers and Lotto papers.

**3.9.3.17** The era of the PNDC has aptly been referred to as the era of the culture of silence. An article by Ajoa Yeboah-Afari culled from the *West African Magazine*, and published in the February/ March issue of the *Christian Messenger* noted that:

The blame for the performance of the Ghanaian press does not totally lie with individual journalist, but mainly with a system that discourages dissent and encourages debilitating self-censorship...

Another article captioned "How free is the press in Africa?" by Dr. George B.N. Ayittey observed:

The rule in Africa is to toe the government's line or engage in self censorship. As a result, creativity is lost, initiative is stifled and writers wither on the vine...Ghana meanwhile exercises no direct censorship and editors are officially free to publish whatever is news worthy. Yet says Baffour Ankomah, former editor of the *Pioneer*: 'you publish whatever is news worthy when you want to commit suicide.'

**3.9.3.18** The plight of journalists and critics such as Tommy Thompson, John Kugblenu, Kabral Blay Amihere, Kweku Baako and Kwesi Pratt, who were all detained for voicing their opposition to government, underscores the regime's hostility and abusive conduct towards the media and journalists. Kugblenu, for example, fell ill in prison and died soon after his release, having never recovered from the brutal treatment meted out to him. George Naykene was tried and imprisoned for publishing a story that was allegedly inaccurate about which of the members of the AFRC received a share of the Chiavelli loan.

<sup>185</sup> see *Index on Censorship*, June/July 1990.

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**3.9.3.19** As it had done in previous regimes, therefore, the state dailies under the PNDC government gave their unflinching and uncritical support to the regime and made little attempt to criticise government's human rights abuses and excesses. This status quo was maintained even after the Rawlings regime lifted restrictions on the press and the ban on political parties, as a prelude to democratic rule.

**3.9.4 Media Resistance**

**3.9.4.1** In the face of intimidation however, there were certain isolated incidents of resistance from state media journalists and many noteworthy acts of resistance from journalists in the private media and on the part of privately-owned newspapers. In April, 1985, a confrontation ensued between the GJA and Mrs. Valerie Sackey of the Castle Information Bureau who had accused Ghanaian journalists of engaging in self-censorship and lacking judgment.<sup>186</sup>

**3.9.4.2** Far more impressive were the collective and individual acts of editorial resistance displayed by some journalists and the high price that was exacted from them on account of their courage.

**3.9.4.3** The *Free Press*, owned by Tommy Thompson, *The Standard* and the *Christian Messenger* stand out as consistent critics of the abuses and wrongdoings occurring during the period of PNDC rule. Some of their critical articles have already been noted. The *Christian Messenger*, for example, carried a headline to a lead article in its January, 1984, that the "Revolution Cannot Succeed With Violence: Christian Council tells PNDC." The article said the Christian Council of Ghana was concerned about the "violence, hatred, human suffering, fear and flagrant violations of human rights that have characterized the two-year rule of the Provisional National Defence Council PNDC." It must be noted, however, an editorial comment in the same issue praised the manner in which the public tribunals, had dealt with the detractors and saboteurs of the revolution. On another occasion, a front-page lead article in the June 1984 edition of the *Christian Messenger* also carried a critical headline: "'Human Rights Are Being Violated,' says Christian Council". The article criticised the PNDC regime for its record of disquieting violations of human rights especially the kidnapping and murder of the three High Court Judges and a retired Army Officer.

**3.9.5 Media As Intimidators**

**3.9.5.1** Intimidation by the media at this time was the norm. Editorials of the newspapers, Features as well as *GBC Commentary* on radio, were used to attack the reputations of private individuals. Scurrilous articles were published by print or broadcast that left reputations completely destroyed. For instance, a call by civil society groups for the government to hand over power to a National Government headed by the Chief Justice, elicited an editorial in the *Ghanaian Times*, "Judges, Morality And The Revolution", that attacked members of the Bench and Bar. In particular, there was a vicious attack on the

<sup>186</sup> See *West Africa Magazine*, Vol..... 29<sup>th</sup> April, 1985.

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integrity of the Mr Justice Akufo-Addo, former Chief Justice and President of Ghana, who had been dead for some years, as well as the sitting Chief Justice, Mr. Justice Fred K. Apaloo. This attack was intended to demonstrate that Chief Justices were not paragons of virtue. It thus appeared that nothing was sacred as long as the *Ghanaian Times* needed to undermine the basis for a call for a government under the leadership of the Chief Justice.

**3.9.5.2 Reportage On The SIB**

**3.9.5.2.1** From the beginning of January, 1983, until the SIB submitted its report, the *Ghanaian Times* used its editorials to campaign against the Special Investigations Board (SIB), set up to investigate the murder of the three High Court Judges and a retired Army Officer.

**3.9.5.2.2** The Chairman, Mr. Justice Samuel Azu Crabbe, came under a sustained attack in the media – particularly in the *Ghanaian Times*. In a series of editorials titled; The Drag of Vested Interests published between 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1983, and 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1983, the newspaper mounted a vicious campaign against the SIB in general, and its Chairman in particular. It alleged that selected materials from the SIB were circulating widely in the circles of Ghanaians in political exile and that enemies of the revolution in Togo, Britain and Holland were openly saying they would “use the Board by hook or by crook to topple the Government of the PNDC.”<sup>187</sup> For these alleged activities of the *émigrés* community, the SIB was held blameable.

**3.9.5.2.3** The SIB was also accused by the *Ghanaian Times* of setting up its own Technical Investigative Team, made up of persons who were active in persecuting Flt Lt Rawlings and his associates during the Limann Administration, and that this new team was different from the one announced by the government under the chairmanship of the Secretary for the Interior, Johnny Hansen. This information to the public was incorrect as the investigative team which worked with the SIB, was set up by the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) of the Police, even before the SIB itself began its work. It was also untrue that there were two teams investigating the event, since the one under the chairmanship of Johnny Hansen though announced, was never, in fact, set up.<sup>188</sup> The newspaper further alleged that the *in camera* proceedings of the SIB were circulating among the ranks of enemies of the revolution abroad and therefore demanded that the proceedings be made available for publication in the local press to enable Ghanaians at home to read them too. The newspaper also expressed the belief “that an inquiry will reveal all the machinations, plots and manoeuvres that have taken place behind the scenes – that is, behind the public image of the Board.”<sup>189</sup> By these allegations, the newspaper sought to cast doubt on the integrity of the members of the SIB whilst fixing on them a political agenda to assist the enemies of the government to unseat it.

<sup>187</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 7,784 Friday 4<sup>th</sup> February, 1983 p.2.

<sup>188</sup> SIB Report, paras 34-38.

<sup>189</sup> *Ghanaian Times* Editorial of 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1983, *supra*.

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**3.9.5.2.4** The editorial also repeated an allegation made to the SIB by Capt Tsikata that at a meeting of the PNDC, Sgt Alolga Akata-Pore had complained that an unnamed Judge had told him that attempts were being made to frame him up at the SIB, thus pitching him against his colleagues on the PNDC. Not only did such an allegation suggest that some judges were in league with the SIB, but that through those persons, information to potential witnesses was being leaked, for malicious purposes. Why any member of the Judiciary would have an interest in causing disaffection within the PNDC was not indicated, but it was clearly an attempt to create a perception that the Judiciary was in league with the enemies of the government to cause mischief.

**3.9.5.2.5** In another editorial in the series, the newspaper accused the SIB, first of changing its procedures midstream to allow for public confrontations between witnesses, and then of adopting a legally-indefensible procedure when it allowed L/Cpl Amedeka to be present during the time Capt Tsikata appeared before it to cross-examine Amartey Kwei.<sup>190</sup>

**3.9.5.2.6** In a further editorial in the series, the newspaper appeared to have joined the defence team of Capt Tsikata when it accused the SIB of arbitrariness in the “manner in which the board decided to bring out the allegations against the Special Adviser to the PNDC in public contrary to the procedure which it had followed up to that point”.<sup>191</sup> It also raised issues pertaining to some evidence before the SIB that it did not consider credible. The newspaper also alleged that, unknown to some of the members of the SIB, copies of a document purporting to be the Draft Report were circulating among some Western Embassies and that the Political Officer of the Embassy of the United States of America had told some journalists that the report would soon be released. This editorial thus sought, not only to sow disaffection within the membership of the SIB but also to suggest that some members were in league with the Americans to discredit the government.

**3.9.5.2.7** Even more disturbing was a reproduction of a handwritten letter purporting to have emanated from one of the suspects in the murder investigations, Johnny Dzandu, in which he alleged that he and others had been offered safe sanctuary if he and others could escape from prison and make it to the American Embassy.<sup>192</sup> This letter was supposed to expose the agenda of “vested interests” in the work of the SIB and consequently why the SIB would become their willing tool. Coming on the same day as an announcement that the report had been presented to the Attorney-General,<sup>193</sup> it was difficult to resist the inference of mischief-making that underlay the persistent and consistent newspaper attacks.

**3.9.5.2.8** The *Ghanaian Times* also reported the proceedings in a manner calculated to cast doubt on the eventual conclusions of the SIB. These hostile media reports as well as other acts of official harassment, led to an attempt by the Chairman of the SIB to resign

<sup>190</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 7,790, Wednesday, 12<sup>th</sup> January, 1983.

<sup>191</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 7,855 Tuesday, 29<sup>th</sup> March, 1983 p.2.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*, p.1.



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on 4<sup>th</sup> January, 1983. Although he was prevailed upon to rescind the decision, it was clear that the Chairman was unhappy about the war waged on him by the national media, then all state-owned.

**3.9.5.2.9** The *Ghanaian Times* published the comments of the Attorney-General on the SIB Report before announcing its intention to publish the Report itself the next day, thereby giving primacy to the comments rather than the Report.<sup>194</sup> It is unclear why the *Ghanaian Times* saw its duty to the public in the light of an adversarial posture to the SIB.

**3.9.5.2.10** The *People's Daily Graphic* was not left out of this fray, but also played its part in sabotaging the work of the SIB. Soon after the SIB handed in its report in 1983, a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) scare-mongering effort began in the newspapers. As if on cue, any critic of the government was immediately tagged a "CIA Agent" in the media. The members of the SIB, the leadership of National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) and the Association of Recognised Professional Bodies (ARPB), as well as some journalists, came under attack for having links with the CIA.<sup>195</sup>

### **3.9.5.3 Intimidation Of Student Leaders**

**3.9.5.3.1** In 1987, following a major protest by students against the government's policies on financing of tertiary education, the *People's Daily Graphic* joined the fray on the side of the government. In an editorial on its front page entitled "Dishonest Poison",<sup>196</sup> remarkable for its personalised use of invective against the individual student leaders and their intellectual mentors, an attack was mounted to discredit the leaders. Even family-members of the leaders did not escape the attack. The newspaper, stated its view in the following manner:

This nation is presently having to examine the extent to which the fabric of our revolutionary process has been contaminated by the unprincipled, dishonest poison of little minds which have been turned sour by empty ambition.

We are referring to those who, on our university campuses have been focal points of misinformation and distortion and have spread their own poison to young minds in a bid *to destroy that which they cannot control*" (emphasis ours).<sup>197</sup>

It proceeded to further explain its position on the closure of the university thus:

When the government closed down the University of Ghana and dismissed certain students last week, many people may have thought this was a harsh step.

<sup>194</sup> *Ghanaian Times*, vol. 7,909 Thursday, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1983.

<sup>195</sup> *People's Daily Graphic* vol. 10104 Friday, 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1983, p.1.

<sup>196</sup> *People's Daily Graphic*, vol. 11347 Monday, 11<sup>th</sup> May, 1987 'Front Page Comment'.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*

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Others who have been more aware of the activities of the past and present student leaders may, on the other hand, have wondered why the government has been so tolerant for so long, and why it has gone to considerable lengths [sic] to avoid publicizing and holding up for public ridicule and condemnation the carefully orchestrated game which they have been playing. It is about time, we consider, that their tactics were exposed.

**3.9.5.3.2** The newspaper editorial also attacked some named persons described as “pseudo-intellectuals, the super leftists, the pretentious talkers who have become campus fixtures over the past decade” behind the students’ action. Accusing them as a “super radical clique” they were blamed for having corrupted many “good cadres by poisoning their minds.” In specific terms, blame for the 1982 misadventure of Sgt Alolga Akata-Pore that led to his departure from the PNDC was laid squarely at the door of these “infantile leftists.” The newspaper also stated that it was these same “super radicals” whose impractical theories had led to confusion in the Interim National Coordinating Council (INCC) of the PDCs/WDCs and that it was their influence that had so misled the PDCs/WDCs that they had to be changed to Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (CDR). The *People’s Daily Graphic* editorial left one in no doubt, by the way it attacked the “super radicals”, that the 1987 student-government clash was known to be a part of the 1982-84 struggle for ideological supremacy that caused the extreme leftists in the PNDC to attempt to usurp power in 1983, and that also immobilised and destroyed the INCC, which was set up to organise the PDC/WDC. The issue for the media is whether a national resource, such as a state newspaper ought to be used in such a manner.

**3.9.5.4 Intimidation of Church Leaders**

**3.9.5.4.1** Church leaders did not escape the vicious campaigns of the media. In an editorial entitled “For the Pulpit”, the Churches and their leadership came in for condemnation for instigating the coup attempt of 19<sup>th</sup> June, 1983, by their constant criticism in Pastoral Letters and sermons. In the paper’s own words:

Thus the church leaders carried on until they pushed the nation into the crisis of June 19. Frightened by their realization of what would have happened to themselves if June 19 had succeeded – stupefied by looking back at the dangerous, self-effacing tiger riding game they had been playing – the church leadership are now cleverly trying to give the impression that they were not responsible for instigating the crisis. But history will judge them as fast as they are able to realize that they have misunderstood and misjudged the moral and divine solidity of the foundations of the revolution, the people’s power it has gathered, and the strength of the historic forces that push the process forward.

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**3.9.5.5.1** These editorials were also read on the radio, thus achieving an all-round attack on the “victim of the moment”. Commentaries read on television, also repeated the information that attacked the integrity of the “victim of the moment”.

**3.9.5.6 Censorship by Editors**

**3.9.5.6.1** Editors also practised a policy of refusing to publish certain news items, even as paid advertisements. This was not an exercise of the “gate-keeping function” of the media, but a deliberate policy to deny publicity to views they did not share because they were quick to publish the government’s reaction to such views. In 1987, the GBA was compelled to start its own publication because, as its President complained”

none of the state-owned media is willing to give publicity to our views, not even when we offer to pay for the publication of such views as advertisements. You would no doubt have noticed that although several attacks were mounted upon me personally for the views expressed in my address to you last year [1986], the speech containing the views itself was never published in any of the state-owned mass media although I was assured that the full text of my speech was communicated to the Castle the very day it was delivered.<sup>198</sup>

**3.9.5.6.2** These examples of the misuse of the media by their editors succeeded in shutting out alternative voices in public discourse and in the governance of the country. The editors of the period became part of the government’s arsenal against its opponents and enabled massive abuses and violations to occur, with only the very brave few, being able to mutter words of protest.

**3.10 CONCLUSIONS**

**3.10.1** By their very nature as usurpers and self-proclaimed rulers, military dictators are able to impose themselves on societies they purport to represent by resorting to coercive measures aimed at ensuring compliance. To some extent this is also true of the period of the First Republic. During the mandate period, various tactics were used to coerce, co-opt and secure journalistic compliance, or to intimidate critics of the government:

1. intimidation of journalists through arrests, imprisonment, dismissals, threats, harassment, and physical abuse;
2. direct interference in media content;
3. compromising and co-optation of journalists – through inducements such as outright bribes and favours; special relationships between some journalists and

<sup>198</sup> Opening Address of the President of GBA, Peter Ala Adjetey, to the Annual Conference of GBA, Accra, on 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1987, p.2.

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- members of the ruling government; recruitment of informants in the media houses and planting of spies in newsrooms;
4. promulgation of legislation that muzzled the press; and
  5. recruitment of editors of media houses as political activists to fight the cause of government.

**3.10.2** The resulting dilemma faced by media practitioners between their professional dictates and irrational military adventurism is captured by an observation made in the Essah Committee Report:

The effect on the morale of those journalists who retain a modicum of the decent standards taught them in training schools or on the job has been catastrophic. They hold their heads low in society because they know what they are part of but cannot change. Nor can they resign easily because they see few other avenues open to them to practise.<sup>199</sup>

**3.10.3** Media, no doubt, constitute an important battleground in the hegemonic process mostly because they are often one of the key agents which articulate the interests of the dominant class/group in society.<sup>200</sup> This perspective on the media is helpful in understanding why and how they played a legitimising role during various regimes that have taken over power through the barrel of the gun in Ghana; how they lent tacit or overt support to human rights abuses that occurred when those regimes were in power; and how the editors abused the control over their pages or airtime, to violate the rights of other citizens.

**3.10.4** Just as a discernible pattern of co-optation strategy is manifested in the behaviour of military regimes, journalists themselves also employed strategies to legitimize illegal and brutal regimes, and to undermine public attachment to constitutional governance.

**3.10.5** Journalistic strategies of complicity include:

1. villification of constitutional governments;
2. extolling the courage of the new military regime;
3. de-legitimisation and demonisation of the overthrown constitutional government;
4. validation of actions of the new regime, including human rights violations and abuses by the new regime, through rationalisation and extolling magnanimity that had been displayed by the regime;
5. villification of opponents of the new regime; and
6. overbearing criticism of minor infractions by constitutional governments.

**3.10.6** As demonstrated in this chapter throughout the pages of newspapers and on the airwaves, government actions and pronouncements were propagated, endorsed, but

<sup>199</sup> Essah Committee, as reported in the *Daily Graphic*, 11<sup>th</sup> October, 1978, supra.

<sup>200</sup> Leslie Steeves, *Gender Violence and the Press: The St. Kizito Story*. Ohio University Centre for International Studies, Monographs in International Studies. Africa Series No. 67. 1997.

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hardly ever criticised. State media and sometimes private media rationalised policies – good or bad – of the different military regimes, and were in many ways accomplices in the victimisation of people. Even Christian faith-based newspapers, such as *The Standard* and *Christian Messenger*, were swept up in the euphoria that greeted some military regimes and often did not condemn human rights abuses perpetrated by them.

**3.10.7** During the regime of the NRC and SMC I, when opposition from civil society groups was open, the state-owned media could have played a more professional role by being less sycophantic, or even neutral. However, not much courageous journalism was shown. Thus, whenever Ghanaian journalists have been denounced, the accusation has been mainly that of sycophancy, if not outright cowardice. A typical example was when the Front for the Prevention of Dictatorship (FDP) and the People’s Movement for Freedom and Justice (PMFJ) came into being in 1976 and 1978 respectively to fight military dictatorship, the press did not give them space to air their views. Other examples were: in 1977, the GBA and the Ghana Medical Association, both operating under the umbrella of the Association of Recognised Professional Bodies (ARPB), spearheaded a daring confrontation with the military government by ordering their members to go on strike, they were vilified by the media. Asante again observes that military periods were unique times for Ghanaian journalism to have gone into history as either hero or villain, but it chose the latter by “prostituting itself to any government that came to power.”<sup>201</sup> The press chose to lose its dignity and self-respect in the eyes of civil society, rather than incur the displeasure of the government of the day.

**3.10.8** During negotiations for a return to constitutional rule at various times, the media were able to press for the establishment of buffer institutions known variously as the Press Council, the Press Commission or the National Media Commission. This drives home the importance of protecting press freedom. Consequently, civilian governments usually are put on notice that the press intends to vigorously defend its freedom to operate, and have been less inclined to interfere with press freedom, than governments which were not accountable to an electorate. During the mandate period, the media themselves were not as supportive of colleagues in conflict with the government, as they could have been.

**3.10.9** Even under military rule, state-owned media like the *Daily Graphic* were occasionally able to criticise some of the regimes’ policies that they considered objectionable, such as the ‘Abbot Agreement’ under the NLC regime, and Elizabeth Ohene and Ajoa Yeboah Afari’s condemnation of the executions in 1979. Through satires, such as “Abonsam Fireman” in *The Standard*; “Thoughts of a Native Daughter” by Ajoa Yeboah-Afari, “Carl Mutt” by Henry Ofori and “Woes of a Kwatriot” by Kwesi Yankah in *The Mirror* were some of the columns that voiced dissent by satire, during those critical periods of the nation’s history. In the PNDC period, some dissent could also be found during discussions on television programmes such as “Talking Point” or during radio discussion programmes. Most noteworthy of all is the role the private press, in particular *The Pioneer*, the *Free Press*, *The Standard* and the *Christian Messenger* played

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<sup>201</sup> Ibid. p.69.

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throughout most of the period under review, at times risking their newspapers and personal liberties by taking a stand against human rights abuses.

**3.10.10** The legacy of Ghana's illiberal, sometimes brutal socio-political history, has been a media with stunted growth; a media in which journalists, particularly of the state-owned media, have developed a culture of self-censorship and where the media in general, still show a tendency to be sycophantic to governments as well as various centres of power. Coercion, co-optation and corruption of the media by various governments, resulted in the fragmentation of the press along political lines, with many journalists pursuing their private agenda not necessarily for the public good, but for the attainment of factional and parochial goals. This legacy is hard to overcome even in a democratic era. Journalists are still likely to undermine each other and are not as sensitised to human rights abuses and violations as they ought to be. Relations remain polarised between journalists of the state-owned media, and those in the privately owned sector. The former views the latter with suspicion as "largely untrained" and lacking appropriate professional skills, and the latter views the former as lacking courage to be critical of government. Hard to change is the habit of settling old and personal scores, and even at the present time, it is not uncommon to hear of people being "fixed" in the media.

**3.10.11** Surprisingly, despite the abundance of evidence to suggest that the media themselves are culpable in undermining democracy and human rights, it is often only their acts of valour that are publicly discussed. The media by their actions and inactions have sometimes encouraged would-be coup-makers to initiate action against lawfully established governments. The media, during periods of constitutional rule, often painted such gloomy pictures about the state of the economy, in comparison with the level of ostentatious living being indulged in by members of constitutional governments. These pictures undermined the loyalty of the citizenry to the constitutional government. For instance, there was a hue and cry over 504 Peugeot cars imported for sale to Members of Parliament during the Third Republic, as being over-indulgence in luxury. Yet, upon the overthrow of that government, there was never a whimper about the Nissan Stanzas and Four-wheel Drives that became the official vehicles of political office-holders. Again, during periods of constitutional rule, journalists subjected the government to such criticism that they ended up creating the impression that nothing good would come of a constitutional government because of the slowness of processes. However, without leading the public to appreciate that constitutionalism dictated compliance with requirements of legality, the public soon lost patience with civilian rulers. Yet, non-constitutional governments are the ones, whose lack of compliance with legal requirements, have ended up creating major human rights violations and abuse for the country. All these unappealing images cultivated by the media, have helped to prepare the ground for usurpers to step in, and use the media-led complaints as the justification for the seizure of power.

**3.10.12** Despite these criticisms, it is important to acknowledge and validate the subtle and not so subtle ways in which the media resisted government actions and abuse. This overview indicates that some journalists took the route of martyrdom and suffered

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accordingly, through detention, loss of lives, loss of jobs and seizure of publications or premises. These definite acts of heroism must be commended and celebrated.

**3.10.13** Considering that the media are expected to be facilitators of the process of truth and reconciliation, it is important that journalists, collectively and individually examine some of the past actions of the media, in order to better understand the role the media have wittingly or unwittingly played in the country's noble and ignoble history. There is a need to recognise and acknowledge their role in promoting a culture of human rights abuse, as well as their role in helping to nurture a culture of respect for human rights and dignity. This is what would enable the media to spearhead the process of their own institutional re-invention, improve their capacity to champion the cause of human rights, and thereby prevent future governments from using them to legitimize their actions.

**3.10.14** The pledge of "Never Again" is one to which current practitioners should commit themselves.