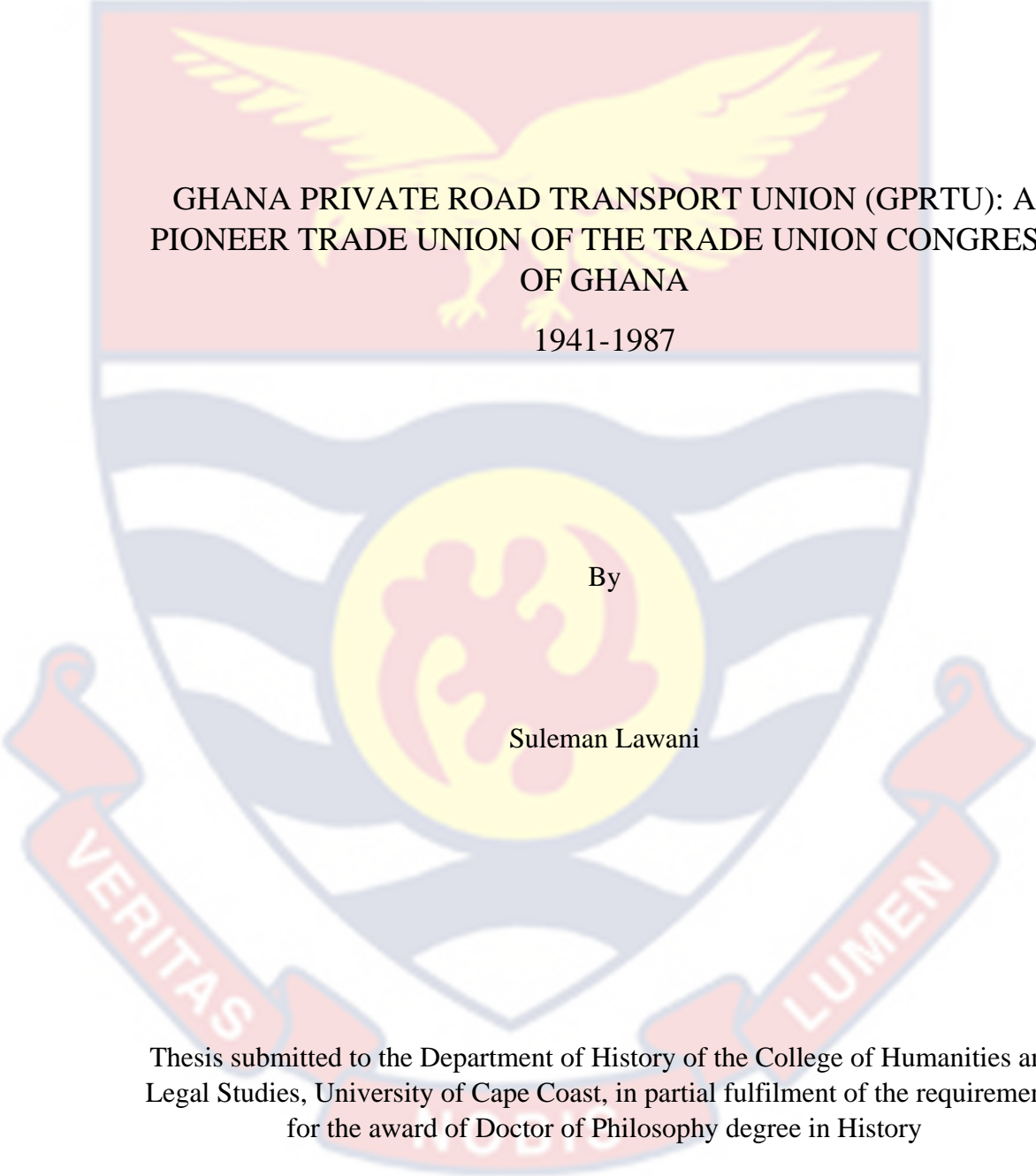


University of Cape Coast



GHANA PRIVATE ROAD TRANSPORT UNION (GPRTU): A  
PIONEER TRADE UNION OF THE TRADE UNION CONGRESS  
OF GHANA

1941-1987

By

Suleman Lawani

Thesis submitted to the Department of History of the College of Humanities and  
Legal Studies, University of Cape Coast, in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

DECEMBER 2021

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Suleman Lawani

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## DECLARATION

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I hereby declare that this study is the result of my own original research and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this University or elsewhere.

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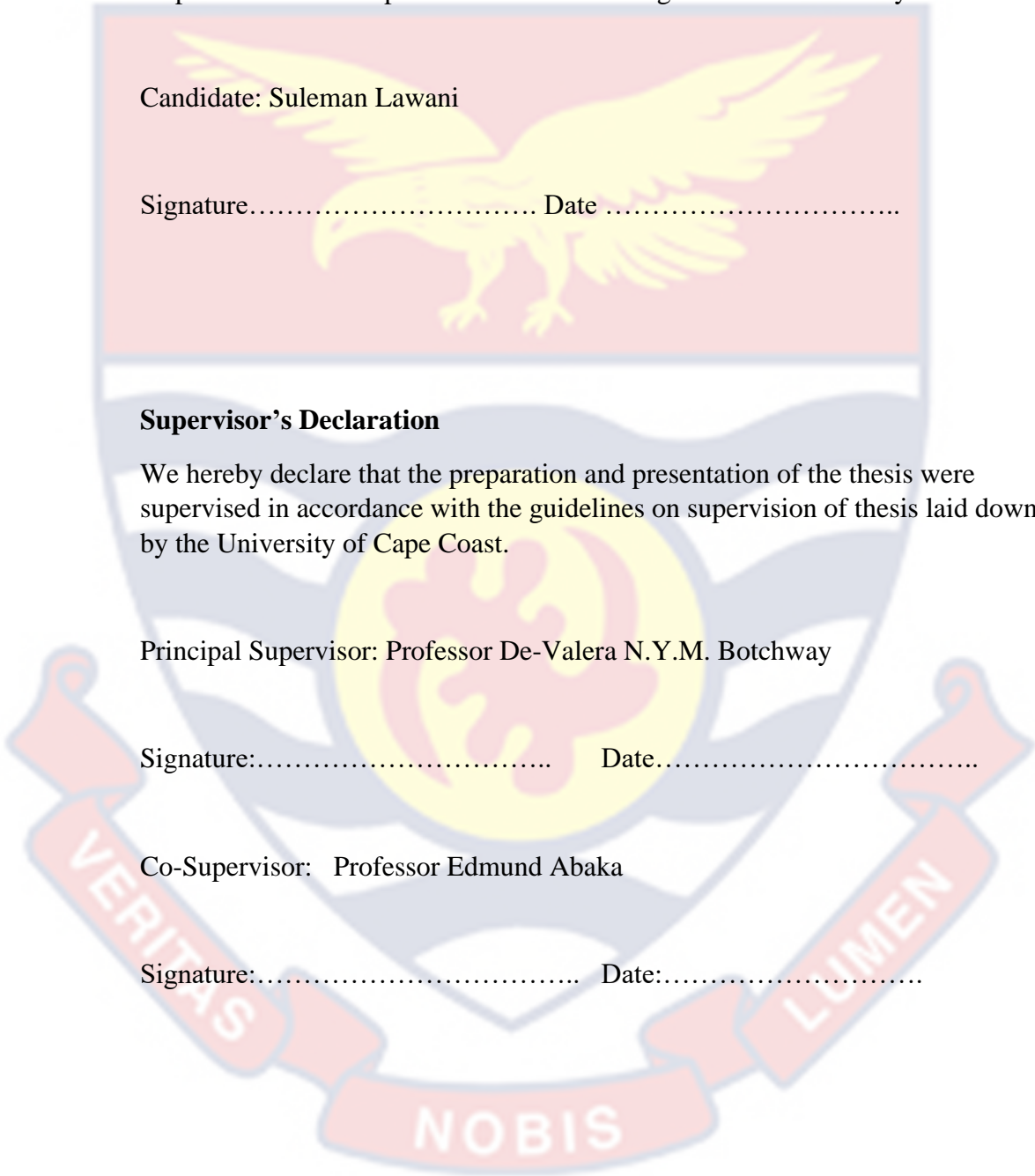
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Principal Supervisor: Professor De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway

Signature:..... Date.....

Co-Supervisor: Professor Edmund Abaka

Signature:..... Date:.....



## ABSTRACT

From 1900 the Gold Coast colonial government invested enormously in railway infrastructure and established the government railways. As the colonial government focused on the railways, motor transportation developed quickly through the effort of private individuals, and the colonial government belatedly, from 1925, began passing ordinances to regulate motor transportation. To better operate within the limits of these ordinances, commercial motor drivers formed trade unions in the Gold Coast from the 1930s. The thesis offers the argument that, in forming trade unions, drivers were not only interested in negotiating colonial motor transport policies that affected their trade but were also concerned about the ruinous competition amongst themselves for both passengers and goods. As such, through unionization the GPRTU streamlined the operations of its members by defining routes and setting standardized fares throughout the country.

The thesis gives an account of the development of trade unionism in the Gold Coast. Interrogating the period from 1941 to 1987, it focuses on the evolution and work of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU), a pioneer trade union, representing commercial drivers and commercial vehicle owners in Ghana. It explains why the GPRTU, made up of both employers and employees, has not received serious scholarly attention within the historiography of Ghana, unlike the Railway Workers' Union and the Mine Workers' Union of Ghana, on which extensive studies has been undertaken. The thesis challenges, implicitly, the view that trade unionism was a phenomenon that was solely associated with wage labour. Using the Gold Coast example, the thesis

contributes to the understanding that trade unions in African societies have developed their own character, as a result of unique conditions in Africa during the colonial and post-colonial periods. To this extent, the thesis projects the significance of trade union mobilization in the informal sector.



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## DEDICATION

To Anna Bodae and Gladys Songsob



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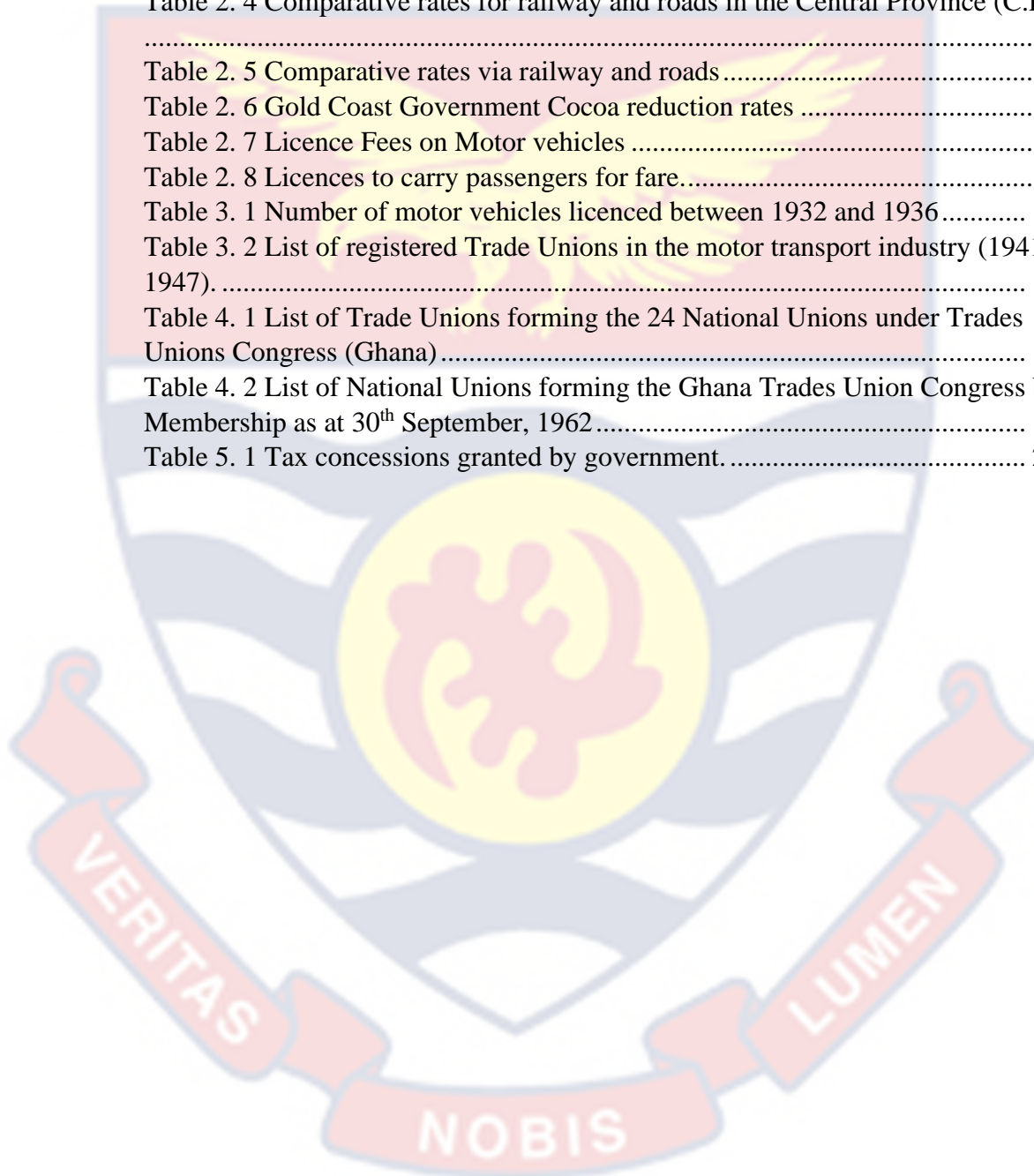
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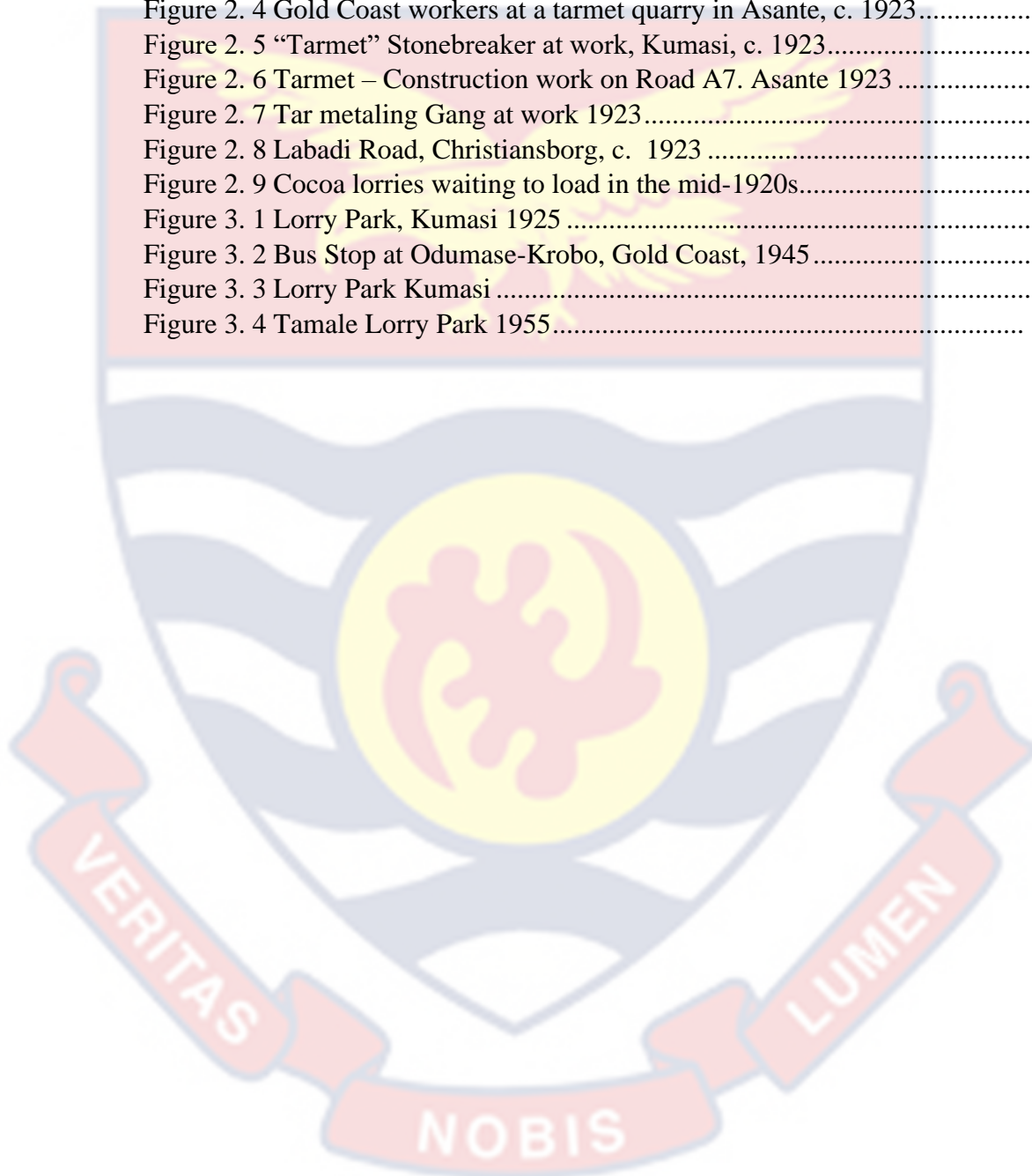
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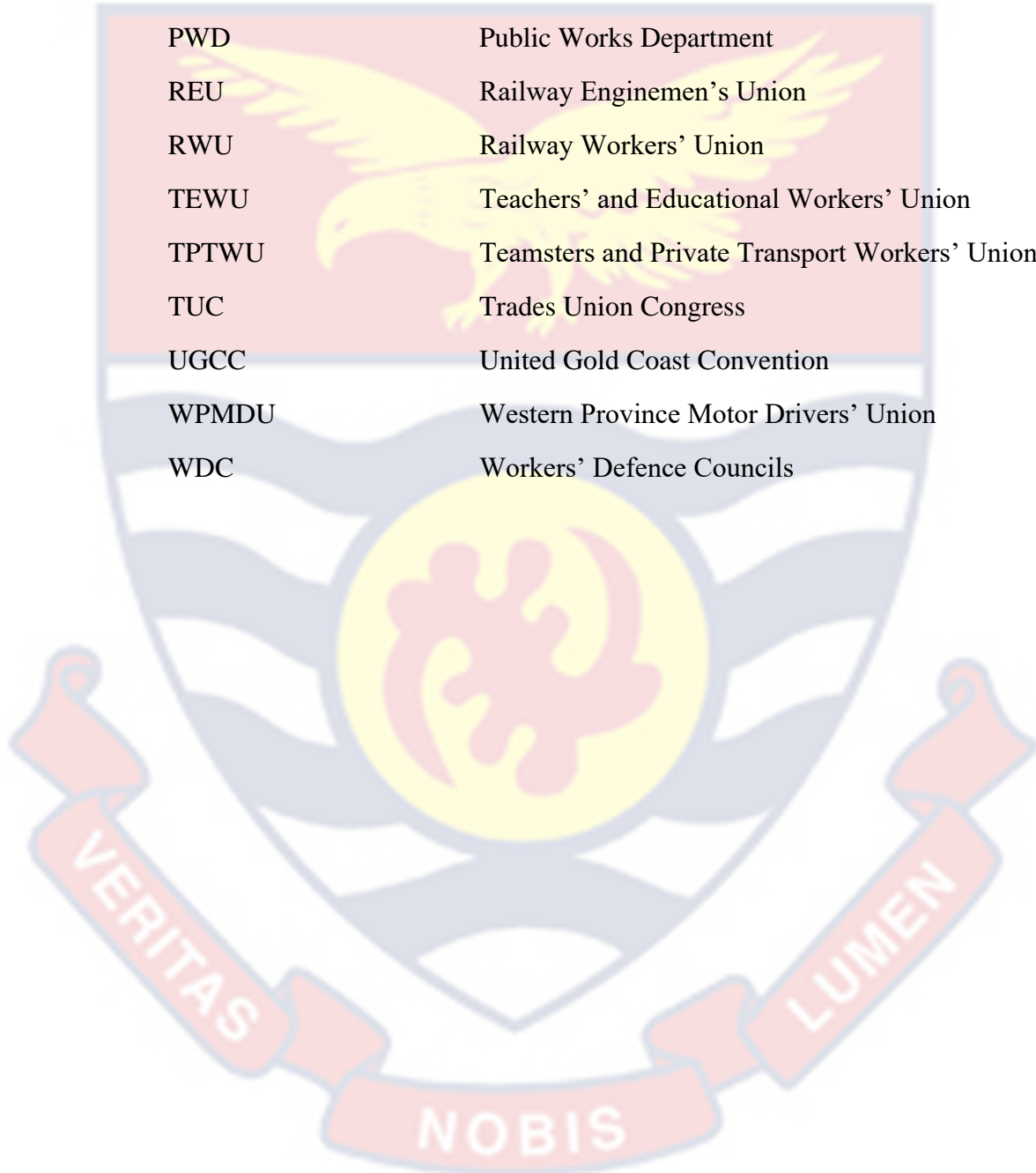
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## Abbreviations

ALU	Association of Local Unions
CPMDU	Central Province Motor Drivers' Union
CDR	Committees for the Defence of the Revolution
CPP	Convention People's Party
EPMDU	Eastern Province Motor Drivers' Union
EU	Enginemen's Union
GAWU	General Agricultural Workers' Union
GCMA	Ghana Co-operative Marketing Association
GCTA	Ghana Co-operative Transport Association
GMWU	Ghana Mine Workers' Union
GMU	Ghana Motor Union
GPRTU	Ghana Private Road Transport Union
GTDU	Ghana Taxi Drivers' Union
GCTUC	Gold Coast Trades Union Congress
GTD	Government Transport Department
ICWU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
KBS	Kenyan Bus Service
KPHB	Kumasi Public Health Board
MDU	Motor Drivers' Union
MDWU	Maritime and Dock Workers' Union
MTO	Motor Traffic Ordinance
MTUA	Motor Transport Union, Asante
NLC	National Liberation Council
NRC	National Redemption Council
NUS	National Union of Seamen
PDC	Peoples' Defence Committees
PAU	Postal Agents Union

PP	Progress Party
PNDC	Provisional National Defence Council
PRAAD	Public Records and Archives Administration Department
PWD	Public Works Department
REU	Railway Enginemen's Union
RWU	Railway Workers' Union
TEWU	Teachers' and Educational Workers' Union
TPTWU	Teamsters and Private Transport Workers' Union
TUC	Trades Union Congress
UGCC	United Gold Coast Convention
WPMDU	Western Province Motor Drivers' Union
WDC	Workers' Defence Councils





## CHAPTER ONE

### Introduction

In 1874, Britain proclaimed the Gold Coast a colony.<sup>1</sup> This action set in motion a process of change in all spheres of life in the Gold Coast. Change occurred in the political, economic and social fields. Politically, British influence was strengthened and widened through the establishment of effective executive, legislative and judicial systems. Economically, the primary sector of the economy witnessed full expansion, as the cash crop production base of the country was expanded and, through indigenous initiatives, cocoa became the leading cash crop export of the Gold Coast. To fully exploit the resources of the Gold Coast, transportation infrastructure was improved through the construction of railways, harbours and roads. Efforts were also made to introduce industrial mining of gold and other minerals in the Gold Coast. Socially, there was an expansion in access to formal education.<sup>2</sup> Adu Boahen asserts that the first visible social impact of colonial rule was the expansion of access to formal education, as education impacted greatly on the social structure of the Gold Coast, particularly, with the rise of an educated elite.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, a major social change which has direct relevance to this study concerns wage labour, and the emergence of a workforce

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<sup>1</sup> Ghana assumed its present name in 1957, when it became independent. Under British colonial rule, however, it was known as the Gold Coast, a name, which was applied in 1900 to the three previously distinct territories: the Gold Coast colony, Asante and the Northern Territories. Unless otherwise indicated, Gold Coast will be used in this work to refer to the geographical area which in 1957 became the independent state of Ghana, including the British mandated area of Togoland, which was administered as part of the Gold Coast from 1919 onwards. Both names, Gold Coast and Ghana, will be used in this work, the reason being that it will be a useful reminder of the contrast between the colonial territory and the independent nation.

<sup>2</sup> A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1975, 103.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

that was needed in all areas of the expanding Gold Coast economy.<sup>4</sup> It was needed for the staffing of mercantile firms, colonial government bureaucracy, and the cocoa industry, as well as for creating and maintaining transport and communication in the Gold Coast.

The people of the Gold Coast were largely farmers, and the colonial government took steps to encourage the development of wage labour in the Gold Coast.<sup>5</sup> Following the proclamation of the Gold Coast as a colony in 1874, Governor George Cumine Strahan proceeded to abolish slave dealing and emancipated those already in slavery.<sup>6</sup> The release of people from slavery, it was hoped by the colonial government, would lead to an increase in the number of people for wage labour.<sup>7</sup> As such, the Gold Coast colonial government encouraged the development of this new wage work by introducing the Master

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<sup>4</sup> Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 103.

<sup>5</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1946*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1932-1933, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Between 1441 and the nineteenth century a commercial enterprise, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade flourished on the Gold Coast. It involved the export of Africans to the New World to supply labour for European gold and silver mines and cotton, sugar cane, tobacco and rice plantations. The eighteenth century saw the peak of this traffic in human beings, as a result of the increased demand for African slave labour in the New World and the intensified competition among the European countries dealing in slaves. For Europeans, the traffic in human beings became known as the triangular trade, which began when goods were exported from Europe to West Africa and exchanged for men and women. The second arm of the trade referred to the transportation of the African slaves across the Atlantic for re-sale in the New World. The third arm of the trade was the route from the New World to Europe. Influenced by the industrial revolution and the activities of the humanitarians, Great Britain abolished the slave trade in 1807. What was left was the old forms of servitude like pawning, panyarring and others that predated European contact. See Akosua A. Perbi, *A History of Indigenous Slavery in Ghana from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century*. Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Prior to contact with Europeans, various forms of indentured, communal and customary labour existed. However, there was no class of wage and salaried workers in the modern sense. This class of wage earners began to emerge after contact with Europeans. By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a wage labour class had emerged to one degree or another. This development was necessary because before there could be an organised labour movement, there had to be a class of workers dependent on wages. See: G. St J. Orde-Browne, *The African Labourer*. London: Cass, 1967; Gareth Austin, *Labour, Land, and Capital in Ghana: From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807-1956*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2004; Peter Claus Wolfgang Gutkind, *The Emergent African Urban Proletariat*. Centre for Developing-Area Studies: McGill University, 1974.

and Servants Ordinance of 1877, which came into effect on 1 January 1878.<sup>8</sup> This Ordinance sought to regulate the relationship between the employer and the employee. Although this Ordinance was bereft of provisions for trade unions, it stated clearly that employees should be paid wages.<sup>9</sup> As a result of this encouragement of wage earning, three distinct social classes could be identified in the Gold Coast by the 1880s, namely, the African educated elite class, the European elite class and the wage-earning class.<sup>10</sup> It was largely among the wage-earning class that trade unions started to emerge.

Notwithstanding the above, the development of wage labour was very slow in the Gold Coast. Emancipation of slaves and the subsequent attempt to regulate wage labour did not result in the smooth transition from slave labour to the nascent wage labour category. W. W. Claridge and David Kimble have indicated that the impact of the two ordinances, the Slave Dealing Ordinance of 1874 and the Emancipation of Slaves Ordinance of 1874, had little effect on the institution of slavery or on the social, economic or political status quo in the late

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<sup>8</sup> Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Hereafter, PRAAD, Accra, ADM 4/1/6 An Ordinance for regulating the relations between Employers and Employed under contracts, 23 July, 1877.

<sup>9</sup> Many definitions abound for Trade Unions. The Gold Coast Trade Union Ordinance, 1941, section 2, defines a Trade Union “as any combination whether temporary or permanent, the principal purposes of which are the regulation of the relation between workmen and masters or between workmen and workmen or between masters and masters.” A trade union can also be described as the gathering together of many single workers whose interest in work are the same because they earn their living in the same way. From these definitions there are two basic factors that determine whether a group is christened a trade union or not. There should be a common occupation and a common employer. Trade unionism as used in the study describes collective action by people who sell their labour in order to protect their living standards. PRAAD, Accra, ADM 4/1/6 An Ordinance for regulating the relations between Employers and Employed under contracts, 23 July, 1877.

<sup>10</sup> Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 103.



nineteenth century Gold Coast.<sup>11</sup> While servile response to emancipation was widespread and spontaneous, some emancipated slaves opted to stay in their master's house under special arrangements.<sup>12</sup> Others voluntarily aligned themselves to the court of an influential chief.<sup>13</sup> Per this arrangement the master or the influential chief provided shelter, clothing and food while the manumitted individuals offered services on farms, fetched water and wood for him.<sup>14</sup> Again, some emancipated slaves went into farming, while others preferred to migrate and work in the cocoa farms of Asante.<sup>15</sup>

Notwithstanding the slow development of wage labour, as early as 1896 there was evidence of wage workers' agitation in the Gold Coast. In that year, Cape Coast canoemen withdrew their labour as a form of protest.<sup>16</sup> This group of

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<sup>11</sup> W. W. Claridge, *A History of the Gold Coast and Ashanti from the Earliest Time to the Commencement of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. London: Frank Cass, 1915, 177-186; David Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism, 1850-1928*. London: Oxford University Press, 1963, 303-304.

<sup>12</sup> Accounts of the Basel Missionaries indicate that in most areas slaves left their masters upon hearing of the emancipation proclamation. The Basel missionaries on several occasions manumitted slaves and also helped emancipated slaves to resettle by way of training. Indeed mission stations, particularly in Kukurantumi and Anyinam became places of refuge for runaway slaves. The Basel Mission have had a long presence on the Gold Coast and campaigned vigorously against slavery and pawning. Its pre-colonial campaign consisted of buying and freeing slaves or rescuing pawns from bondage by the payment of their debt. Sources of the Basel Mission has contributed greatly to understanding servile reaction to the emancipation proclamation, especially in the Eastern Province of the Gold Coast, as the mission received several runaway slaves as a result of the proclamation. See R. Addo-Fening, *Akyem Abuakwa 1700-1943: From Ofori Panin to Ofori Atta*. Trondheim: Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997, 194.

<sup>13</sup> Colonial Office, *Report by His Britannic Majesty's Government on the Administration under mandate of British Togoland for the year 1924*. London: His Majesty's Stationery office 1925.

<sup>14</sup> Colonial Office, *Report of His Britannic Majesty's Government to the Council of the League of Nations on the Administration of Togoland under British Mandate for the year 1927*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 44. Peter C. Gutkind has been able to demonstrate, using primary document from the Royal African Company that cannoemen agitation dates back to 1753. He traces how indispensable the cannoemen were to the European trading ships and how they were able to withdraw their labour whenever their wage demands were not met. During this time the cannoemen received rum, liquor and tobacco as pay. Whenever they agitated for better conditions, they demanded high quality cloth and gold instead of liquor, rum and tobacco. For further discussion of the Gold Coast cannoemen see Peter Gutkind, "The cannoemen of the Gold

workmen who earned a living by ferrying goods and people from European ships that could not anchor close to the shore took this action in support of a demand for improvement in their conditions of service.<sup>17</sup> Thereafter, in 1898, the Commissioner of the Northern Territories reported the existence of a union of carriers from the coast that was able to dictate the terms on which they would convey loads.<sup>18</sup> These ‘proto unions’, as Charles Orr called them, demonstrated all the features of a trade union.<sup>19</sup> However, very little is known of these ‘proto unions’ as their activities were not documented. They only appeared in historical documents as a category of workers that openly confronted their employers over issues of their welfare.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, in place of these ‘proto unions,’ colonial records reveal the existence of institutional organisation of craftsmen. Craftsmen associations like those of goldsmiths, silversmiths, blacksmiths, and carpenters were akin to trade unions in their objectives. In 1911, the Colonial government report of the population census conducted in the Gold Coast indicated that “certain of the trades possess organisations termed guilds, which are not dissimilar in objects and methods to a modern trade-union.”<sup>20</sup> These craftsmen associations aimed “to regulate wages [of members], to make laws concerning apprentices, to guard against unfair competition and to settle dispute among the

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Coast (Ghana): A survey and an Exploration in precolonial African Labour History,” *Cahiers d’Études Africaines*, 29, cahier 115/116, 2, 1989, 339-376

<sup>17</sup> The cannoemen were able to strike because they were fishermen by profession. They partook in wage work to supplement their earnings from fishing.

<sup>18</sup> Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*, 44.

<sup>19</sup> Charles A. Orr, “Trade Unionism in Colonial Africa,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 4, 1, 1966, 65–81.

<sup>20</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Census Report*. Accra: Government Printer, 1911, 35.

craftsmen.”<sup>21</sup> These associations worked to safeguard the living standards of their members. For example, when Kwamin Dwinfu of the “Gold Smiths Association League” applied to the Commissioner of Asante in 1914 for recognition of the association, he pointed out that:

It has become a general practice of some of the goldsmiths in Ashanti to alloy gold with brass, copper and other metals when executing work for customers who have given them pure or fine gold for such work. In the interest of our business and work we have formed the present association the object of which is to pursue, prosecute and bring to punishment such people.<sup>22</sup>

An emerging habit of these burgeoning associations of wage earners was protest against economic difficulties and government policies and ordinances that they disliked. The interwar period witnessed increased labour protests in the Gold Coast. These protests can be understood by examining the economic challenges of the period. At the end of 1917, prices of goods in the Gold Coast rose steeply. Although there was general shortage of labour, wages did not rise to compensate for the increased prices of goods. Thereafter, the Gold Coast experienced an economic depression between 1920 and 1921.<sup>23</sup> These economic difficulties were compounded by the worldwide depression of 1929, which led to an astronomical increase in the prices of goods in the Gold Coast.<sup>24</sup> Workers reacted spontaneously to these difficulties and their prime target was the government, the largest employer of wage labour.

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<sup>21</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Census Report*. Accra: Government Printer, 1911, 35.

<sup>22</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi, ARG1/10/1 Kwamina Dwinfu to the Chief Commissioner of Ashanti.

<sup>23</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1921.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*



In February 1919, the workers of the Public Works Department (PWD) set off a series of protests that marked the period when they demonstrated collectively against the delay in the payment of their wages.<sup>25</sup> Then again, artisans in Accra also embarked on strike in 1921 under a union which they called “Artisans and Labourers Union.”<sup>26</sup> The employees of the railway sector who have been described as the most militant of all the trade unions and the PWD workers went on strike when the colonial administration demanded a reduction of wages as a result of the depression.<sup>27</sup> In 1925, boatmen also refused to ferry the Prince of Wales from his ship to the shore of the Gold Coast unless their wages were increased by one hundred percent.<sup>28</sup> According to Frederick Cooper, it was in response to this African agency- the wave of strikes, and the fear that the trade unions in Africa would develop underground like the British unions that the colonial administration started battling around with the idea of encouraging the development of trade unions.<sup>29</sup> From this would emerge formalised and

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<sup>25</sup> Patrick Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana: The Law and the Practice*. Accra: Ghana University Press, 1991, 4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> See Lacy, L. Alexander, *A History of Railway Unionism in Ghana*. M.A Thesis: University of Ghana, 1965.

<sup>28</sup> Labour protests during this period was not limited to the Gold Coast; it was experienced throughout the British colonies.

<sup>29</sup> The early stage of the Industrial Revolution in Britain was a period of appalling working conditions and long working hours. Workers were paid a pittance for their work and seventeen hours work per day was the norm. These conditions brought workers together according to their trades such as carpenters, brick layers, cobblers etc. in order to secure better working conditions from their employers. However the British parliament passed the Combination Act of 1799, which banned Trade Unionism. The Trade Union movement thus went underground. Workers formed gangs known as the luddites who lynched unscrupulous employers, looted property, broke machines, set fire to factory buildings and vanished. For the twenty-five years that the trade unions were banned, both the rich and the poor lived in fear. There were wide spread strikes and lockouts, looting, arson, civil commotion, burglary and armed robberies. To remedy the situation the British Government repealed the Combination Act in 1824 and passed the Trade Union Act in 1825, so that workers could legally organise trade unions and bargain collectively with their employers. For further insight into the development of British Trade Unions see Allan Flanders, *Trade Unions*. London: Hutchinson & Co. Ltd, 1968; Eric L. Wigham, *Trade Unions*. London: Oxford

government-recognised trade unions. These trade unions have animated for economic terrains of colonial Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana.

### Statement of the Problem

Trade unions in Ghana and Africa as a whole have enjoyed considerable scholarly attention over the years, particularly, from the 1950s to the 1990s.<sup>30</sup> Many of these studies have indicated the desire of the colonial government to keep trade unions in Africa apolitical. However, the trade unions have always shown a tendency to be involved in politics. This is particularly so since African governments are the largest employers of wage labour, and economic demands of workers are almost always resolved through political action. This contrasts sharply with non-African spaces, for example, the west, where trade unions operated wholly in the private sector of the economy and mostly dealt with private employers.

In Ghana, trade unions affiliated to the TUC may be conveniently put into four categories. First, there were those that operated in private institutions such as the Ghana Mine Workers' Union (GMWU), the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICWU) and the National Union of Seamen (NUS). Second, there were trade unions that operated in state institutions like the Railway Enginemen's Union (REU), Railway Workers' Union (RWU) and the Teachers'

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University Press, 1969; Clive Jenkins and James Edward Mortimer, *British Trade Unions Today*. Oxford: Pergamon Press Ltd, 1972; Victor Feather, *The Essentials of Trade Unionism*. London: The Bodley Head Ltd, 1963; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 2.

<sup>30</sup> Examples of such scholarly works include George E. Lynd, *The Politics of African Trade Unionism*. New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968; Jon Kraus, "African Trade Unions: Progress or Poverty?," *African Studies Review* 19, 3, 1976, 95–108; Jean Meynaud and Anisse Salah Bey, *Trade Unionism in Africa: A Study of Its Growth and Orientation*. London: Methuen, 1967; R. E. Luyt, *Trade Unionism in African Colonies*. South African Institute of Race Relations, 1949.

and Educational Workers' Union (TEWU). Third, were those that operated in public private institutions like General Agricultural Workers' Union (GAWU) and the Maritime and Dock Workers' Union (MDWU). The fourth type operated in the private informal economy, represented by the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU).

Some of the trade unions mentioned above enjoyed considerable study. For example, Jeff Crisp examined trade unionism among mine workers.<sup>31</sup> In the story as told by Crisp, mine workers developed over the years a strong sense of occupational solidarity which, despite the potential, remained a latent form of class consciousness. With this latent form of class consciousness, the mine workers have traditionally displayed very little interest in participating in the national political arena or in consciously using their solidarity as a means to effecting progressive change within the prevailing national power structure. They have not espoused any political ideology. Richard Jefferies did a similar examination of trade unionism among railway workers.<sup>32</sup> Jefferies discussed the broader labour movement of Ghana through an understanding of the Railwaymen of Sekondi. Considering early unionised workers of the 1920s, "they alone were able to sustain their organization on active footing throughout the inter-war period, staging a number of effective (if only partly successful) strike actions."<sup>33</sup> Jeffries traces the beginning of the railway union by looking at the start of railway

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<sup>31</sup> Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners' Struggles 1870-1980*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Richard Jefferies, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

construction and the important role of sekondi as the terminus of the railway and the site for workshops.

It is informative to note that transport workers were the first to unionise in Ghana.<sup>34</sup> While Richard Jefferies has accounted for the railway workers, nothing has been written about the other major transport union - the GPRTU. As a pioneer trade union of the TUC, uniquely organizing both employers and employees in road transportation, the GPRTU deserves to be critically investigated. This investigation can help answer question such as what informed the unionization of this group of employers and employees? How did unionization provide protection for driving as a profession? When this is done, the GPRTU can provide a perspective from which the history of trade unionism in Ghana can be examined.

The GPRTU represented a group of entrepreneurs who operated in the colonial economy to provide commercial motor transport service with the advent of motor vehicles in the Gold Coast in the 1900s. By the 1930s they found the need to come together to form trade unions to negotiate the colonial governments motor transport policies and also to regulate competition among themselves.

Accordingly, while other trade unions like the GMWU and REU negotiated for better wages from the government or their employers, the GPRTU contested governments on how government policies affected their livelihood. Indeed, the union was formed in 1931 to secure the livelihood of its members at a time when the colonial administration sought to protect the railway lines from the competition offered by commercial motor road transportation.

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<sup>34</sup> See Orr, "Trade Unionism in Colonial Africa," 78; Timothy Oberst, "Transport Workers, Strikes and the 'Imperial Response': Africa and the Post World War War II Conjuncture," *African Studies Review* 31, 1, April 1988, 117-133.



This thesis examines the emergence and operation of the GPRTU as a key group of workers in Ghana. On the other hand, this work serves as a prism to understand changes in colonial labour policy and in the evolving consciousness of Ghanaian workers engaged in private employment. One emphatic thread that runs throughout the narrative is that the history of these workers must be contextualized within the international historiography of transport workers, mobility studies, and trade unions.

### **Analytical framework**

Trade unions as construed in this thesis -refers to any combination aimed at regulating the relation between workers and employers, or between workers and workers, or between employers and employers.<sup>35</sup> In other words, it is the gathering together of single workers whose interest in work is the same because they earn their living in the same way.<sup>36</sup> Two basic factors identify a trade union, that is, a common occupation and a common employer.

Any analysis of trade unions is centred on the issue of why workers join Trade Unions. Analysing trade unions in Africa requires an understanding of dialectical materialism or the class conflict model as espoused by Karl Marx in his books *Poverty of Philosophy* and the *communist Manifesto*.<sup>37</sup> On dialectical materialism Marx asserts that in every historical epoch the prevailing economic system by which goods and services are produced determines the political system. In other words, the economic structure supersedes the political structure.

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<sup>35</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/3/54 The Trade Unions Ordinance, 1931.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*. New York: International Publishers, 1963; Karl Marx and Engels Friedrich, *The Communist Manifesto*. London: Penguin, 1967.

Although Marx's interest was originally in formulating a theory of history, his thinking over the years has been associated with labour or the working classes. It is this influence on labour that is relevant to this study.

Marx's analysis of the trade union movement shows a strict conformity with his dialectical materialism, where the trade union movement is viewed in the light of a class struggle. According to this, the conflict between the owners of capital (bourgeoisie) and free labourers (proletariat) is inevitable and the trade unions provide the institution through which the proletariat could contest the bourgeoisie. Per this analysis the aim of the trade unions went beyond a mere improvement in wage levels and standard of living. The trade unions overall aim should be the complete overthrow of capitalism. Marx argued that to achieve economic equality every trade union or proletariat class consciously or unconsciously get involved in political action because economic demands are always achieved through political action. The class conflict model offers a legitimate basis for analysing the economic system in the Gold Coast under British colonial rule and how most trade unions became highly radicalized.

Sydney and Beatrice Webb conceptualized trade unions as an extension of the principle of democracy in the industrial sphere.<sup>38</sup> They agreed with most of the underlining principles of the class conflict model. However, the point of departure was that, the Webb's did not agree that trade unions were instruments for the

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<sup>38</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, "Primitive Democracy in British Trade-Unionism. I," *Political Science Quarterly* 11, 3, 1896, 397–432. See also, Oliver Clarke, "Industrial Relations Theory and Practice: A Note," *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations* 42, no. 1 (1987): 196–202; Syed Hameed, "A Critique of Industrial Relations Theory," *Relations Industrielles/Industrial Relations* 37, no. 1 (1982): 15–31; Peter Waterman and Henk Thomas, "Labour Relations Theories and Trade Union Realities: Report on an Experimental Seminar in Ghana," *Manpower and Unemployment Research* 10, 2 (1977): 87–102.



overthrow of capitalism but a means by which workers could equalize bargaining power of labour and capital.<sup>39</sup> Thus, in the context of examining the GPRTU in the post-colonial era, this principle helped in offering an understanding about negotiations with government during the era of the independent nation when most trade unions were issued with collective bargaining certificates enabling them to negotiate their conditions of work with their employers.

### **Scope and objectives**

The thesis focuses on the period between 1941 and 1987. The starting period 1941 is significant because that was when the colonial government officially recognized trade unions in the Gold Coast. Prior to 1941, unions like the Motor Driver's Union (MDU), Postal Agents Union (PAU) and the Enginemen's Union (EU), which were already functioning, were not officially recognized by the colonial government. The year 1941 is also significant because that was when the motor transport union was registered under the Trade Unions Ordinance. However, in order to offer background information, certain examinations have been made about events related to infrastructural development during the period from 1900 to 1941, when the colonial government of the Gold Coast sought to improve transportation in the Gold Coast and motor vehicles made their entry into the Gold Coast. The terminal period 1987 marks the point at which the government of Ghana, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC), entrusted the GPRTU with the responsibilities of collecting taxes from its

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<sup>39</sup> Sidney Webb and Beatrice Webb, "The Method of Collective Bargaining," *The Economic Journal* 6, 21, 1896, 1–29.

members on behalf of the government. This is indicative of active cooperation between the government and the union.

This thesis investigates and brings into proper perspective the relationship between a union that operates wholly in the private sector and successive governments of Ghana. A key primary question was: to what extent did the unionization provide protection to driving as a profession? The thesis has provided an understanding of the foundations and development of indigenous entrepreneurship since motor transportation has been dominated by indigenous African entrepreneurs right from the beginning to the present.

### **Literature Review**

Trade unionism as a social phenomenon of “collective action by people who sell their labour power in order to protect and improve their living standards” has been interrogated in historical studies in several non-African societies.<sup>40</sup> However, academic interest in labour as a social movement, by historians, is relatively recent in Ghana as in most parts of tropical Africa.<sup>41</sup>

Most early books of political and economic history subsumed the history of labour and trade unions as part of the struggle for independence. Examples of such works include those of Dennis Austin, Francis Agbodeka and David

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<sup>40</sup> Victor Leonard Allen, “The Study of African Trade Unionism,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, 2, 1969, 289–307.

<sup>41</sup> The aim of all colonial governments in Africa and elsewhere had been the quest for raw materials and the use of the colonies as the destination for manufactured goods. Thus for a long time academic attention was focused on labour as a commodity with emphasis on labour productivity, efficiency, labour turnover, selection, control and training.

Kimble.<sup>42</sup> The main focus of these works was on political history. Even that, these works did not examine broader political participation from workers, peasants and women. These works treat the trade unions as a standard component of the nationalist movement. That notwithstanding, some of these literature provided basic information that served as a guide for this thesis. Kimble for example provided information on the development of wage labour, as he discussed the emergence of employed labour and addressed the origins of wage labour with emphasis on labour recruitment strategies.<sup>43</sup>

The early phase of colonial rule in Africa, between 1900 and 1920, was fraught with shortages of wage labour. The abolishing of slavery had not translated into increased wage labour. This engendered negative discussions of African labour by colonial official with respect to work. In discussing labour problems in the colonies, colonial officials viewed African labour as lazy and unproductive.<sup>44</sup> Such discussions had racial connotations where the African was generally described as lazy and unfit for European work discipline and response to time. Within the Gold Coast context, the discussion of this shortage of wage

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<sup>42</sup> Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964; Francis Agbodeka, *Ghana in the Twentieth Century*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1972; Kimble, *A Political History of Ghana*.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-60.

<sup>44</sup> See Orde-Browne, *The African Labourer*, 2018; G. St J. Orde-Browne, "The African Labourer," *Africa* 3, 1, 1930, 13-30; Granville St John Orde-Browne, *Labour Conditions in East Africa: Report*. London: HM Stationery Office, 1946; Boris Gussman, "Industrial Efficiency and the Urban African. A Study of Conditions in Southern Rhodesia," *Africa* 23, 2, 1953, 135-144; J. Heigham, *Productivity of Labour in the Gold Coast*. Accra, 1953; W. Hudson, "Observation on African Labour", *Journal of the National Institute of Personal Research*, March 1955.

labour led to several suggestions and experimentation with labour from other parts of the world, mainly China.<sup>45</sup>

It was in response to the categorization of African labour as lazy that Keletso Atkins addressed and set the tone for a new understanding of the African work habits in her publication on the cultural origins of an African work ethic.<sup>46</sup> Atkins discusses work, labour and culture in colonial Natal in the nineteenth century. Principally, she challenged the characterization of the African as work shy, lazy and inefficient because the African workers refused to accept European notions of work time.<sup>47</sup> Atkins re-conceptualizes the behaviour of early Zulu workers who entered the labour market within an existing work ethic that their employers failed to understand. This led to several misunderstandings and in some cases violations of peasant norms, which repelled African labourers and compounded an already existing labour crisis.<sup>48</sup>

From the 1950s, intellectual interest in tropical African trade unions began to develop. This development was influenced by the publications of Benjamin C. Roberts, Joseph I. Roper and Arnold L. Epstein.<sup>49</sup> The work of these authors

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<sup>45</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM1/496 Proposal to import Chinese Gold Prospectors. See also; Kwabena O. Akurang-Parry, “‘We Cast about for a Remedy’: Chinese Labor and African Opposition in the Gold Coast, 1874-1914,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 34, 2, 2001, 365-384.

<sup>46</sup> Keletso E. Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money!: The Cultural Origins of an African Work Ethic, Natal, South Africa, 1843-1900*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1993, 61.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 61. See also Keletso E. Atkins, “Origins of the Amawasha: The Zulu Washermen’s Guild in Natal, 1850–1910,” *The Journal of African History* 27, 1, 1986, 41–57.

<sup>48</sup> Atkins, *The Moon Is Dead! Give Us Our Money!*, 61; See also Achebe Chinua, “Things Fall Apart,” *Ch. Achebe*, 1958, 1–117.

<sup>49</sup> B. C Roberts, “Labour Relations in Overseas Territories,” *The Political Quarterly* 28, 4 (1957): 390–404; Joseph I. Roper, *Labour Problems in West Africa*. London: Penguin Books, 1958; Arnold Leonard Epstein, *Politics in an Urban African Community*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1958.



focused on the emergence of a wage-earning class and the development of trade unions. Together, they help in providing understanding about the development of a wage-earning class and the subsequent development of trade unions out of this class. Roper's strong point is his argument for indigenous development of trade unions in West Africa and the fact that colonial governments and employers tolerated these trade unions although they were not legally recognized during the early phase of their existence.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, Roberts argues that the methods and practices of trade unions in colonial Africa were considerably different from those that pertained in Britain. In colonial Africa efforts were made over the years to model the trade unions along the line of Western unions, but differences still remained.<sup>51</sup> For instance, in Europe and the US the economic system has been capitalist with its very strong private sector participation while in Africa government participated actively in wage employment. That is, to say, most African economies were largely controlled by the government. This means that while trade unions deal with private employers in the Western countries, they deal with the government in Africa. Using the Northern Rhodesia Copperbelt as a case study, Epstein made a similar contribution. His interest was in the development of social groupings and organisation among the urban dwellers of different ethnic background.

Another body of literature seeks to understand the emergence and development of working-class proletariat consciousness in Africa. The proletariat can be looked at broadly to include all the alienated workers of the world. From

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<sup>50</sup> Roper, *Labour Problems in West Africa*.

<sup>51</sup> Roberts, "Labour Relations in Overseas Territories."

the perspective of Karl Marx, the proletariat is “a class of labourers, who live only so long as they find work, and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital.”<sup>52</sup> Peter Gutkind, Jeff Crisp, Richard Jeffries have used Ghanaian case studies to argue for the existence of a working-class consciousness among Ghanaian workers.<sup>53</sup> Gutkind discusses the emergence of “a well-established and rapidly evolving proletarian consciousness” among African workers.<sup>54</sup> He argues that proletariat consciousness among Africans can be seen as “the consciousness of a working class whether they be peasants or urban workers.”<sup>55</sup> Jeff Crisp examines the ‘labour question’ in the Ghanaian economy by discussing mine labour. The labour question describes a regular and adequate supply of indigenous workers; a labour force that was efficient and reliable; and one that was willing to work for low wages.<sup>56</sup> For Crisp, the labour question was a land question. Land was easily available even to a former slave, so most of the people preferred to go into farming.<sup>57</sup> Accordingly, the introduction of capitalist mining into the Gold Coast in the 1870s created the inevitable confrontation between forces of labour control (capital and state) and those of labour resistance (wage labour, its representatives and allies).<sup>58</sup> Crisp adopts the revolutionary theory in analysing the contest between the two groups. E. P. Thompson’s publication on the artisanal origin of the English working class also influenced

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<sup>52</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, 15.

<sup>53</sup> Gutkind, *The Emergent African Urban Proletariat*; Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*; Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978.

<sup>54</sup> Gutkind, *The Emergent African Urban Proletariat*, 1.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>56</sup> Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class*. 15

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.



several scholars to examine the working class in Africa.<sup>59</sup> The most important concern was whether the African working class was present at its own making.

Although Carola Lentz and her colleague agree that workers became proletarianized right from the beginning of the introduction of capital, they argue that labour was not a fully proletarianized, permanently urbanized and culturally homogenous entity.<sup>60</sup> Focusing on Dagara mine workers in Tarkwa and Obuasi, Lentz and her colleague demonstrated that wage labour coexisted with rural forms of subsistence.<sup>61</sup> In other words wage workers also took part in farming and petty trading to augment what they got from selling their labour.<sup>62</sup>

With heightened nationalist agitation for self-rule in colonial Africa from the 1950s, the role of labour was critical. The participation of trade unions in these agitations contributed to a growing interest in labour as a social movement, because trade unions by their structure and nature are political organisations. Scholars began to focus on the labour unions as an institution with a political

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<sup>59</sup> Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage books, 1963. See also Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*. London: Longman Group Ltd., 1975; John Higginson, *A Working Class in the Making: Belgian Colonial Labor Policy, Private Enterprise, and the African Mineworker, 1907-1951*. Univ of Wisconsin Press, 1989; Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society since 1800*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Nigel Worden, "The Making of Modern South Africa: Conquest, Segregation and Apartheid," *The English Historical Review* 111, 443, 1996, 1016–1018; Vic L. Allen, "The Meaning of the Working Class in Africa," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 10, 2, 1972, 169–189.

<sup>60</sup> Carola Lentz and Veit Erlmann, "A Working Class in Formation? Economic Crisis and Strategies of Survival among Dagara Mine Workers in Ghana (Une Classe Ouvrière En Formation? Crise Économique et Stratégies Ouvrières Chez Les Mineurs Dagara Du Ghana)," *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 1989, 69–111. See also, Giovanni Arrighi and John S. Saul, *Essays on the Political Economy of Africa*. New York: Monthly Press, 1973; Peter Waterman, "The Concept of the 'Semiproletarianized Peasantry': An Empirical and Theoretical Note," *Contemporary Marxism*, 6, 1983, 172–82; Janet M. Bujra, "Proletarianization and the 'Informal Economy': A Case Study from Nairobi," *African Urban Studies*, 3, 1978, 47–66.

<sup>61</sup> Lentz and Erlmann, "A Working Class in Formation?" 71.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

force in Africa. In this regard, Ahmad Alawad Sikainga points out that when the British introduced the railways in Sudan, the town of Atbara became very important as it was the seat of the headquarters of the railways.<sup>63</sup> Atbara became a place of social struggle between the railway's colonial authorities and the emerging urban populace who were mostly employed by the railways. After independence, the post-colonial state, from late 1970s, invested in road infrastructure to the neglect of the railway network. Thus, by the 1980s "the world the railway workers of Atbara made had begun to crumble. Their social and political institutions collapsed, and their community and family life were ravaged."<sup>64</sup>

Concentrating on South Western Nigeria, Lisa Lindsay discusses wage labour and social change.<sup>65</sup> The Nigerian railway was the largest single employer of wage labour throughout the colonial period with a workforce of about thirty thousand from 1952 to 1965. She argues that because of its longstanding commercialization, the Yoruba people placed special importance on money. Money was a link to masculinity in colonial Yorubaland. Stable wage labour offered new access to money, which in turn had important implications for their places in homes and communities. The author argues that since the 1930's, colonial administrators, trade unionists, individual workers and women manipulated gender to suit their respective needs and agendas. This made categorizations like "male family breadwinners", "male household providers" and

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<sup>63</sup> Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, *"City of Steel and Fire:" A Social History of Atbara, Sudan's Railway Town, 1906-1984*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>65</sup> Lisa A. Lindsay, *Working with Gender: Wage Labor and Social Change in South Western Nigeria*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003.

female “housewives” a major feature of the politics and struggles for increased family incomes and other benefits.

Carolyn Brown traces the conflicts between Igbo-speaking Africans and the colonial state in the context of the Enugu Colliery.<sup>66</sup> She argues that the colonial workplace reflected the principle of “indirect rule” through which rural life was reconstructed. She details how Igbo workers integrated the realities of industrial labour into a cultural framework that remained fundamentally Igbo. Through this work, the author “seeks to rescue the history of Nigerian colliery workers from its absorption by nationalist historiography.”<sup>67</sup> She also explores the issue of identities within the workplace. In the colonial workplace “All African job categories used the appellation “boy”, denigrating all men to a permanent adolescence; “pick boys” were hewers, “tub boys” pushed tubs underground.”<sup>68</sup> Thus, at the workplace all African men no matter their social standing in their communities were viewed as boys. Elizabeth Schmidt also provides an understanding of the contribution of trade unions to anti-colonial activism.<sup>69</sup> Fundamentally, she argues, nationalism in Guinea was a broad-based project in which elites responded to the masses as much as led them. Thus, “The political movement that resulted in Guinea’s independence was primarily a movement of the masses, shaped from the bottom up rather than the top down.”<sup>70</sup> In this account, the Guinea branch of the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA),

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<sup>66</sup> Carolyn A. Brown, *“We Were all Slaves” African Miners, Culture and Resistance at the Enugu Government Colliery*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2003.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>69</sup> Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity and Class in The Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958*, Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

the political party which spear headed the anti-colonial struggle and took power after independence, represented an alliance between elite nationalists and an array of overlapping groups. These included war veterans, urban workers, peasants and women.

Ioan Davies provides insights into the political involvement of trade unions, as he argued, the degree of political articulation of trade unions during the period of colonial rule determined post-independence relationships.<sup>71</sup> For Ghana, this led to the “Siamese twins” relationship that existed between the TUC and the Convention People’s Party (CPP) government. Lester Trachtman argues that this relationship led to a party dominated labour movement after independence.<sup>72</sup> However, Rolf Gerritsen, Asuquo E. Cowan and Kwamina Panford have challenged this traditional interpretation of the post-independence relationship by agreeing that the relationship was that of cooperation.<sup>73</sup> This is in view of the fact that the TUC benefited from this collaboration through legislation that guaranteed good working conditions for the workers in general and strengthened the structure of the TUC.<sup>74</sup> African labour studies have also expanded from a primary concentration on male workers within the formal sector to cover female workers, casual labour, peasants, petty traders, slaves and other marginal groups. Light has

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<sup>71</sup> Ioan Davies, *African Trade Unions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, 10-11.

<sup>72</sup> Lester N. Trachtman, “The Labor Movement of Ghana: A Study in Political Unionism,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 10, 2, 1962, 183–200.

<sup>73</sup> Rolf Gerritsen, “The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party: Towards a Re-Interpretation,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 2, 1972, 229–244; E. Asuquo Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*. Accra: Trades Union Congress, 1957; Martin Kwamina Panford, *African Labor Relations and Workers’ Rights: Assessing the Role of the International Labor Organisation*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1994.

<sup>74</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 8.



also been shed on non-wage workers in the informal sector of the economy as well. Van Onselen, Robertson Claire and Luise White have written on prostitutes, taxi drivers, market women and domestic workers.<sup>75</sup> All in all, the literature helps in understanding the paths that other scholars have taken in assessing the growth and development of workers organisations in Africa and Ghana. The literature also helps to shape and situate the study well within the Ghanaian informal sector.<sup>76</sup>

While the thesis basically examines the GPRTU within the context of trade unionism, it must be said that a work of this nature also relates to the scholarship on road transport, several of which have been recently produced. One particular area that has attracted several studies concerns urban road transportation. In Africa, urban road transportation services are known by various names in various cities. In Ghana, they are called *tro-tro*; *dala dala* in Dar es Salaam, *matatu* in Kenya, *danfo* in Lagos, *car rapides* in Dakar, *kamuny* in Kampala, *gbaka* in Abidjan, *spirit de mort* in Kinshasa, *candongueiros* in Luanda, *poda-poda* in Freetown, *sotrama* in Bamako, *songa kidogo* in Kigali and *Kombi* in Cape Town.

It is within this context of urban road transportation that Kenda Mutongi and Meghan Elizabeth Ference have examined mobility in Nairobi with special

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<sup>75</sup> Charles Van Onselen, *New Babylon: Studies in the Social and Economic History of the Witwatersrand, 1886-1914*. London: Longman, 1982; Claire C. Robertson, *Sharing the Same Bowl: A Socioeconomic History of Women and Class in Accra, Ghana*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984; Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

<sup>76</sup> Informal sector is used here to describe work outside wage labour.



focus on matatu.<sup>77</sup> The matatu as an indigenous mode of road transportation emerged in postcolonial Nairobi as racial barriers and restrictions disintegrated, and African entrepreneurs moved in to satisfy the transportation needs of the theming Africans who moved into Nairobi.<sup>78</sup> Hitherto, colonial policy prevented the development of indigenous transportation as Nairobi was administered as a white colonial city and its transportation needs were provided by the government through the Kenyan Bus Service (KBS).<sup>79</sup> Thus, the matatu thrived and became popular because the colonial infrastructure left gaps that the matatu was able to fill.<sup>80</sup>

What is more significant, according to Mutongi, is that the matatu industry developed without foreign capital and government intervention.<sup>81</sup> It is the only business in Kenya that is wholly locally owned and controlled.<sup>82</sup> Mutongi argues that while the matatu industry confers social, economic and political advantages, “its history has been one of exploitation, crime, violence and corruption,” That notwithstanding, the matatu problems were partly, self-imposed, the fault of government neglect or dishonesty, and complicity of customers in the industry’s illegal practices.<sup>83</sup> In a 2006 article, “*Thugs or Entrepreneurs?: changing perception of the matatu industry in Kenya, 1973 to the present,*” Mutongi further indicates that although commuters ceaselessly criticized the matatu crews,

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<sup>77</sup> Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017; Meghan Elizabeth Ference, “Moving Targets: Meanings of Mobility in Metropolitan Nairobi,” PhD Dissertation, Washington University, St. Louis, 2013.

<sup>78</sup> Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transport*, 6, 16-18; Ference, “Moving Targets,” 6, 18;

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-78.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 11

commuters at the same time helped to shape the matatu.<sup>84</sup> She further argues that the ‘us’/‘them’ dichotomy often portrayed in mainstream media between matatu crews and commuters, indeed the whole of the Kenya public – for that matter – is false.<sup>85</sup>

Ference argues that the “perception” of matatu operators were far more complicated.<sup>86</sup> However, what is intriguing is what Mutongi called the “Generation Matatu” that came of age from the 1990s.<sup>87</sup> A generation of young educated but unemployed men and women who entered the industry as drivers and conductors and redefined the social and political landscape of the matatu.<sup>88</sup>

In the same way, Rizzo Matteo’s study of the dala dala in the Tanzanian city of Dar es Salaam provides insights into the operation of private entrepreneurs in the motor transport industry.<sup>89</sup> Matteo suggest that private buses were allowed to provide public transport in Dar es Salaam from 1983 after the collapse of the state-owned public transport company which, hitherto, had provided the service under a monopoly regime.<sup>90</sup> Matteo’s study attempts to understand “the origin, logic and tensions of what at first appeared as functional chaos.”<sup>91</sup> Thus, it entailed a journey of examining the history, economic and politics of public transport in Dar es Salaam, as it transition from state provision of service in the

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<sup>84</sup> Kenda Mutongi, “Thugs or Entrepreneurs? Perceptions of Matatu Operations in Nairobi, 1970 to the Present,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 76, 4 (2006): 549–68.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 551.

<sup>86</sup> Ference, “Moving Targets.” 66, 98, 71-74.

<sup>87</sup> Mutongi, *Matatu*, 191.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

<sup>89</sup> Matteo Rizzo, *Taken for a Ride: Grounding Neoliberalism, Precarious Labour, and Public Transport in an African Metropolis*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

<sup>90</sup> Matteo Rizzo, *Taken for a Ride: Grounding Neoliberalism, Precarious Labour, and Public Transport in an African Metropolis*. Oxford University Press, 2017, 2.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

1960s and 1970s to its progressive privatization, liberalization, and informalization from 1983 to the present.<sup>92</sup>

In her book, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*, Jennifer Hart examines how African entrepreneurs appropriated motor transport technologies and infrastructure as tools for their own wellbeing.<sup>93</sup> In doing this they shaped the emergence of an increasingly mobile society “defined not by the static backwardness often associated with the African continent but rather by the frantic and kinetic energy of a country ‘on the go’.”<sup>94</sup>

Hart argues that Africans in twentieth-century Ghana were, in many ways, united through the aspirational modernity of automobility and the developmentalist promises of a language of asphalt.<sup>95</sup> An interesting point she drive home is that African automobility in the twentieth-century Ghana had its roots in this history of colonial technopolitics and industrial modernity.<sup>96</sup> However, the culture and practices of African automobility also differed substantially from its American and European iterations.<sup>97</sup> Hart further argues that the independence and entrepreneurial success of drivers, which had once been the foundation of their respect and status as cosmopolitan, modern men, became their

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<sup>92</sup> Rizzo, *Taken for a Ride*, 2. See also Matteo Rizzo, “Being Taken for a Ride: Privatisation of the Dar Es Salaam Transport System 1983-1998,” *Journal of Modern African Studies* 40, 1 (2002): 133–57.

<sup>93</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

greatest liability during the 'era of decline', from the 1950 to the 1980s.<sup>98</sup> This began the stigmatization of drivers as they were described variedly by the society as cheats. Hart argues that the situation led to the change of the status of drivers from 'modern men' through bad citizens and as public enemies.<sup>99</sup>

In a related publication, Jennifer Hart celebrates the professionalism of Ghanaian drivers as the country changed from right hand to left hand drive in 1974.<sup>100</sup> She argues that the switch from right hand to left hand was successful and that accomplishment depicts the professionalism of Ghanaian drivers. However, for those who decided to hold their vehicles out of the system until they were guaranteed survival, they contributed to the shortage of vehicles during the period.

This thesis is in agreement with Harts work to the extent that motor vehicles defined modernization in Ghana. However, the thesis argues that the GPRTU and its members did not take undue advantage of the period of decline between 1950 and 1980. Far from taking advantage, they participated in economic activities on the basis of survival as they also struggle to keep their vehicles in operation as result of shortages of spare parts and the activities of middlemen. In addition, whereas Hart focuses on drivers in general as the basis of her analysis of drivers being seen as bad citizens. The thesis examines the activities of the GPRTU and the lack of collaboration of the state in reining in one of its constituent members, the "bookmen" at the lorry parks.

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<sup>98</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go*, 124.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 95, 123.

<sup>100</sup> Jennifer Hart, "'Nifa Nifa': Technopolitics, Mobile Workers, and the Ambivalence of Decline in Acheampong's Ghana," *African Economic History* 44, 1, 2016, 181–201.



The works of Ference, Mutongi and Matteo on mobility that have been reviewed above, have described the development of the modes of urban transportation as an indigenous development on the continent. While in Nairobi, it was a post-independence development and evolved along racial lines, in Ghana, the story is quite different, as it developed through the colonial period, as African entrepreneurs took advantage of the neglected space created by the colonial government to provide alternative transportation to the African.

### **Methodology and Sources**

This thesis has been produced from a research that used qualitative approach. It has benefited from written primary records obtained from the head office of the Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD) in Accra and its regional offices in Cape Coast, Sekondi, Kumasi and Koforidua. Data was collected from important files from each of these offices, over month. These include the CSO series, that is, records related to the correspondence to and from the colonial secretary's office, from 1902 to 1945. The CSO documents, especially, the series CSO 17/1/39 and CSO 17/1/24, for the period 1931 to 1937, came up with a wealth of information. These include the report on the trade unions operating in the motor transport sector, their petitions and strikes. CSO 15/7 series at the Accra office offered information about the level of engagement the trade unions had with the colonial government. At the Kumasi office of PRAAD, the files ARG 1/10/5 and ARG 1/10/7 provided information about the beginnings of trade unions in the Gold Coast. The Koforidua office produced file ERG 2/1/71, which provided materials of independent Ghana and its trade unions.



Another important source of documentary information was a number of collections at the Africana, periodical section of Balme Library, University of Ghana. This part of the Balme Library holds extensive collection of Legislative Council and parliamentary debates, ordinances and laws, blue books, and departmental reports. The Legislative Council debates offered vivid accounts of proceedings in the council, as members pressed their points for and against issues on the floor of the house. The periodical section of Balme Library also offered publications by institutions such as the Department of Labour, TUC and the Ghana Statistical Service. It includes the *Ghana Worker's Bulletin*, the *TUC newsletters*, *Ghana Commercial and Industrial Bulletin*, *Ghana Trade Journal and Gold Coast Weekly Review*. These documents, while scanty, provided data about perceptions of trade unionists of their institution and the government as a whole.

Newspapers also constituted another source of information and material for this thesis. Editorials, articles, comments and reports, containing general perspectives and information on developments in the Gold Coast and Ghana were consulted. The information deemed relevant to the narrative of the thesis was analysed and used to build arguments on the thesis. While several newspapers were consulted, the four that are directly referenced in the work include the *Gold Coast Independent*, *Daily Graphic/People's Daily Graphic*, *Ghanaian Times* and the *Accra Evening News*.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> The *Daily Graphic* was founded in 1950 by the then London-based Daily Mirror group, owned by Cecil King. The newspaper was nationalized after independence by the Nkrumah government. It is important to note that the newspaper carried the name *Daily Graphic* from the colonial period

The research utilized secondary sources. The major ones have already been cited in the Literature Review section of this thesis. The secondary sources offered information about current state of research in the field, and other points of view. They complemented information from primary sources. They also served as the basis for verifying, supporting and reinforcing the corpus of primary information and knowledge.

Ethnographic fieldwork also offered information for this thesis. It involved a combination of “participant observation and interviewing” of drivers, conductors and other key stakeholders of GPRTU at commercial car stations.<sup>102</sup> This allowed an observation of “informants spatial practices in situ while accessing their experiences and interpretations at the same time.”<sup>103</sup> Oral evidence has something to offer when one locates well informed informants who possess a fair sense of judgment. In collecting oral evidence, the semi-structured face-to-face interview was adopted; this fostered a conversation that allowed participants to give their own account and work-related experience, as it placed less restriction on the kind of answers interviewees could give. In interacting with the rank and file of the Union at the various points, language was of the

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through the post-colonial era until the PNDC government led by Flt. Lt. J. J. Rawlings came to power. The PNDC instituted a name change to the *People's Daily Graphic*, “to remind the people it belongs to them.” Thus, the *People's Daily Graphic* became the name of the newspaper for a ten-year period, from 1983 to 1993. The name reverted back to the *Daily Graphic* in 1994. In this study, the newspaper will be referenced as it appears in its publication, as such, the *People's Daily Graphic* would mark publications within the ten-year period identified.

<sup>102</sup> Margarethe Kusenbach, “Street Phenomenology: The Go-along as Ethnographic Research Tool,” *Ethnography* 4, 3, 2003, 455–485.

<sup>103</sup> Kusenbach, “Street Phenomenology,” 463. Go-alongs are presently more favoured because it is a more systematic and outcome oriented version of ‘hanging-out’ with key informants. See, Kath Woodward, “Hanging out and Hanging about: Insider/Outsider Research in the Sport of Boxing,” *Ethnography* 9, 4, 2008, 536–560.

essence. Ga, Twi, English and Pidgin English were primarily used for the interviews.

While collecting information in the field, issues and ideas from quiet a number of literature on methodology were helpful. These included ideas about oral tradition from the works of Jan Vansina, Nwando Achebe, David P. Henige, Jan Vansina and Carolyn Keyes Adenaike, Luise White, and Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings.<sup>104</sup> Although not much had been written on the GPRTU, the construction of this thesis in terms of research and writing was guided by works on the issue of feedback in oral tradition by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, and David Henige.<sup>105</sup> Therefore, all information from oral accounts was subjected to critical analysis.

### **Organisation of the Thesis**

This thesis has six chapters. Chapter one offers a background of the emergence of wage labour in Ghana. It examines the roots of the labour movement in the colonial era, concentrating on three major issues. First, what necessitated the formation of labour groups? Second, it demonstrates that trade

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<sup>104</sup> Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History*. Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985; Nwando Achebe, "Nwando Achebe—Daughter, Wife, and Guest—A Researcher at the Crossroads," *Journal of Women's History* 14, 3, 2002, 9–31; David P. Henige, *The Chronology of Oral Tradition. Quest for a Chimera*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1974; Jan Vansina and Carolyn Keyes Adenaike, *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa*. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996; Luise White et al., *African Words, African Voices: Critical Practices in Oral History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001; Toyin Falola and Christian Jennings, *Sources and Methods in African History: Spoken, Written, Unearthed*. Rochester NY: University Rochester Press, 2003.

<sup>105</sup> Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012; David P. Henige, "The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands," *The Journal of African History* 14, 2, 1973, 223–235; David Henige, "Truths Yet Unborn? Oral Tradition as a Casualty of Culture Contact," *The Journal of African History* 23, 3, 1982, 395–412.

union development in Ghana was indigenous and not an imposition by the colonial government.

Chapter two explores the development of transport infrastructure in the Gold Coast, with a special focus on road transportation. It discusses the challenges that private motor transport operators posed to European commercial motor transport operators and the railways, especially, the ensuing road and rail competition that dominated official discourse in the 1920s and 1930s. The chapter also examines the laws that the colonial government used to streamline the activities of private transport operators, to ensure fair competition between road and rail transport. The chapter argues that, from the beginning of the 1920s, colonial transport policies, with its tax component, began regulating strictly commercial road transport.

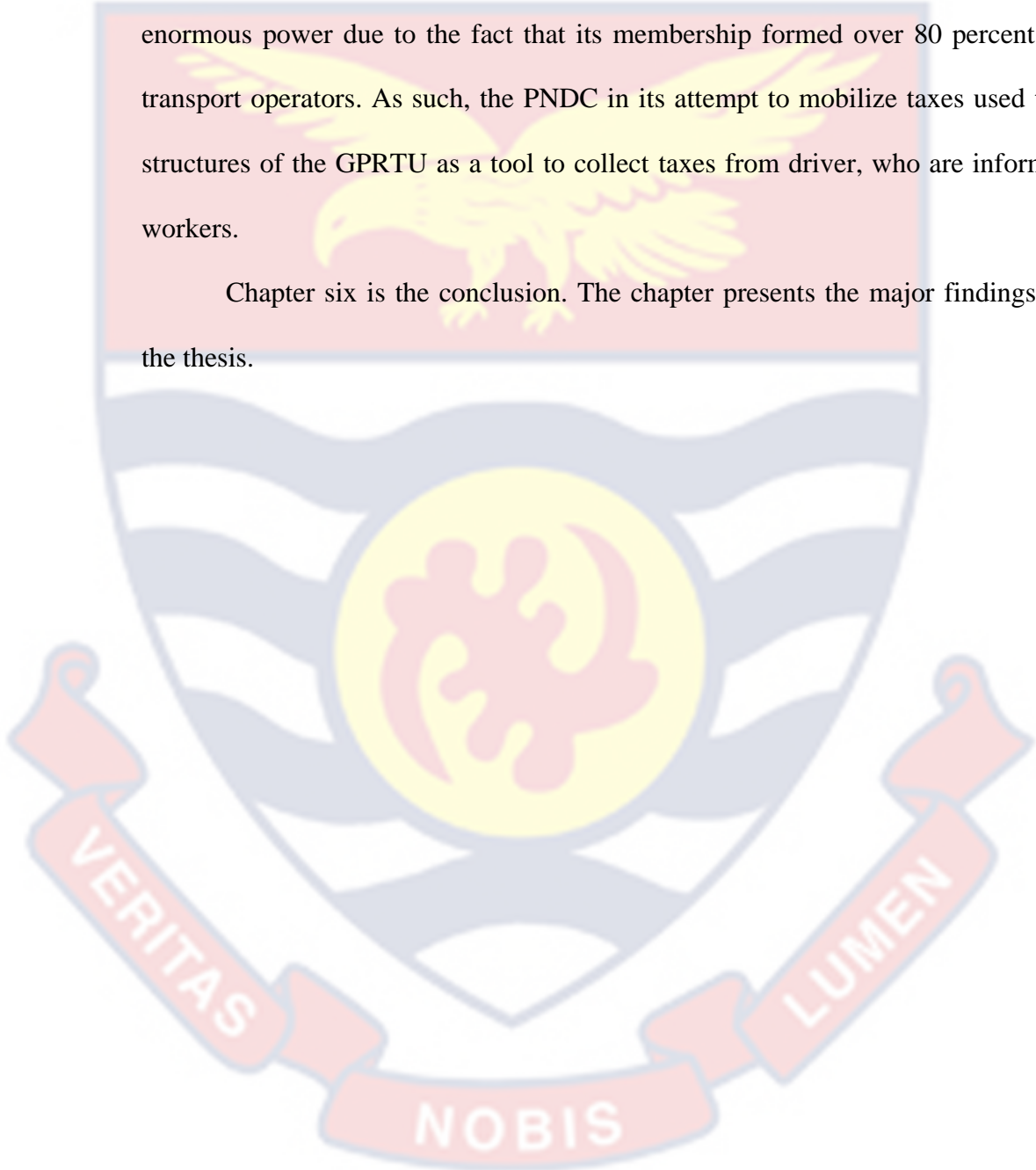
Chapter three examines the beginnings of the GPRTU through the many trade unions formed by commercial transport operators. In addition to the discussion about colonial transport policies, the chapter argues that, the formation of trade unions by commercial road transport operators was in response to the need for drivers to curb the stiff competition among their members- competition for which they flouted most to the motor transport laws.

Chapter four looks at the formation of regional trade unions and the eventual amalgamation of these regional unions into one national union, to represent drivers. The chapter argues that, the driver unions succeeded in forming a strong national union before the national umbrella body, that is, the TUC, considered the importance of having unions organised along industrial lines.



Chapter five discusses how the monopoly of the GPRTU was broken by the formation of the Ghana Co-operative Transport Association (GCTA). The chapter argues that, while the monopoly to the GPRTU was broken, it still exerted enormous power due to the fact that its membership formed over 80 percent of transport operators. As such, the PNDC in its attempt to mobilize taxes used the structures of the GPRTU as a tool to collect taxes from driver, who are informal workers.

Chapter six is the conclusion. The chapter presents the major findings of the thesis.





## CHAPTER TWO

### THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE GOLD COAST, 1900-1930

#### Introduction

By 1900, British colonial rule had taken shape and become rooted in the Gold Coast with an effective administrative network. One of the major concerns of the British colonial government was to increase trade and revenue of the Gold Coast. To achieve this, the colonial government invested in transportation infrastructure, that is, railways, harbours and roads, in the Gold Coast.

The British colonial government owned the Gold Coast railway and port systems and obtained revenue from them. Road transportation was not fully managed by the colonial government. Road transportation was dominated by European merchant firms and individual private Gold Coast African operators. This chapter discusses transportation in the Gold Coast between 1900 and 1930 and examines how colonial officials imagined and conceptualized railways as a superior investment to roads and, therefore, focused on railways. The chapter also discussed the development of private road transportation in the Gold Coast and policies regulating road transportation.

#### Transportation in the Gold Coast

Before the beginning of the twentieth century, transportation in the Gold Coast was limited to the use of human portage, pack animals, canoe transport, cask-rolling, go-carts and hand-carts.<sup>1</sup> Human portage, the largest means of

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<sup>1</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 80; Robin Law, "Wheeled Transport in Pre-Colonial West Africa," *Africa* 50, 3,

transporting goods from place to place, was not only costly, but also exceedingly slow. For the transportation of heavy machinery needed in the mining field, human portage was simply useless.<sup>2</sup> These methods of transport were labour intensive. That is, they required the use of considerable labour and that made them very expensive. As colonialism expanded, so was the need to expand transportation in the Gold Coast. As early as 1873, the British colonial government had considered the possibility of constructing railway lines in the Gold Coast.<sup>3</sup> In 1873 the British colonial government envisioned the construction of a railway line from Cape Coast to Kumasi via Praso, to help send troops to fight Asante.<sup>4</sup>

Christian Tsey has argued that the early phase of the development of the railway system in the Gold Coast was that of indecision, delay and lack of official commitment.<sup>5</sup> His assessment was based on the fact that between 1879 and 1893, railway speculators and promoters had impressed on the Gold Coast colonial government of the viability of building and operating a railway line in the Gold Coast.<sup>6</sup> Since the construction of railways required huge investment most of these

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1980, 249–262. A. Antony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* London: Longman Group Ltd, 1973, 70-76; Allan McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa*. London: Frank Cass, 1971.

<sup>2</sup>A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1975, 97.

<sup>3</sup> See Peter Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*. Department of Geography, Northwestern University, 1960; Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 99.

<sup>4</sup> Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 99.

<sup>5</sup> Christian E. Tsey, “Gold Coast Railways: The Making of a Colonial Economy, 1879-1929,” PhD Dissertation, University of Glasgow, 1986.

<sup>6</sup> Some of the speculators included, Messrs Frederick Fitzgerald of the African Times and William Mercer, former Director of Public Works in the Gold Coast, who in 1879 proposed to build three railway lines- from Accra to kpong, Saltpond through the Central Province and from Shama to the Wassa gold mines in the Western Province. Other proposals came from the African Concessions Trust, Messrs James Irvine and Company of Liverpool and Messrs Edwards Bros. Company of

promoters sought government guarantees of interest on the capital outlay in order to set up a railways system in the Gold Coast. While the use of government guarantees by private speculators had been instrumental in the development of railways in the British Empire during the early decades of the nineteenth century, by the 1870s this system of sponsorship was being phased out.<sup>7</sup> Thus, from 1890, when serious considerations were given to these proposals by the Gold Coast colonial government different alternatives were sought. Due to the speculative nature of the initial proposals and the fact that most of the speculators lacked the needed financial backing, colonial officials were of the opinion that the colonial government might as well construct the railways itself since revenue would accrue from railways to the treasury. Thus, in 1893, a rail line from Saltpond through Oda to Kumasi was considered and surveyed with the aim of fostering trade between the hinterland and the coast, but it was later abandoned due to the expenses involved.<sup>8</sup>

Further calls for the expansion of the transportation system came mainly from the merchant firms in the Gold Coast who viewed the development of a railway system as a means of protecting and expanding their trading activities. Subsequently, the expatriate mining firms in the Gold Coast also expressed

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Liverpool. The interest of speculators in developing the railways was not limited to the Gold Coast, but across West Africa. They made similar proposals in Nigeria and Sierra Leone. In the end the colonial governments adopted government involvement in the development of railways through the Departmental system. See; Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways."; Olufemi Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa, 1872-1903," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1971, 491–507; David Sunderland, "The Departmental System of Railway Construction in British West Africa, 1895–1906," *The Journal of Transport History* 23, 2, 2002, 87–112.

<sup>7</sup> Omosini, "Railway Projects and British Attitude towards the Development of West Africa, 1872-1903," 492.

<sup>8</sup> Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 21.

interest in the development of a railway system that would make it easy for the transportation of bulky mining equipment from the coast to Obuasi and other interior mining areas. As such, from 1889, several proposals, meetings and consultations were held between the mining firms on the Gold Coast, engineers and the colonial government concerning the construction of railway lines.<sup>9</sup>

Following these meetings the colonial government began the construction of the first western “pioneer” railway line from the coastal town of Sekondi to Tarkwa in 1898.<sup>10</sup> According to Tsey, this railway line was built to serve the gold mines in Tarkwa and the Gold Coast colonial government was hopeful that revenue would accrue to the colonial treasury through royalties, and profits from gold mining.<sup>11</sup> Upon the insistence of the mining interest in Obuasi, particularly, the Ashanti Goldfields Ltd., and the political relevance of Asante, extension work began on this railway line from 1901.<sup>12</sup> The extended railway line reached Obuasi in 1902 and terminated at Kumasi in 1903 thus, completing the western railway

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<sup>9</sup> See PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/467/143 Lieutenant-Governor Freeling to Secretary of State, Gold Mining Prospects; Problems of Land, Administration and Transportation, 29 May 1877; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/489/54 Governor Griffith to Secretary of State, Proposal for a Railway to the Gold Mines, 25 March 1889; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/490/294 Acting-Governor Hodgson to Secretary of State, Proposed Railway from Axim to Ankobra Mouth, 3 Oct. 1889; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/490/56 Governor Griffith to Secretary of State, Progress of the Mining Industry; Proposal to meet its needs for improved Transport and Communication, 24 Feb. 1890; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/491/171 Governor Griffith to Secretary of State, Proposals to improve Transport to Mines by Rivers, Rail and Road, 2 June 1891; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/495/283 Governor Maxwell to Secretary of State, Proposed Railway to Interior from Apam, 1 July 1895; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/495/389 Governor Maxwell to Secretary of State, Inspection of Wasaw Mines; Their Transport problems; Extent of Government responsibilities for Assistance, 28 Sept. 1895; ADM 1/497/183 Governor Hodgson to Secretary of State, Harbour and Railway Proposals, 4 May 1898; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/497/370 Governor Hodgson to Secretary of State, Proposal for a Railway system based on Accra, 31 Aug. 1898; PRAAD, Accra, ADM 1/498/190 Acting-Governor Low to Secretary of State, Proposed Railway to Volta river District, 20 May 1899.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond E. Dumett, “British Imperial Transport Management: The Gold Coast Sekondi–Kumase Railway, 1903–1911,” *The Journal of Transport History* 27, 2, 2006, 60–79.

<sup>11</sup> Tsey, “Gold Coast Railways,” 39.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.



line. The completion of this railway line did not end the government's interest in improving transportation infrastructure in the Gold Coast.<sup>13</sup>

From the 1900s the official policy of the Gold Coast colonial government was to extend transportation systems and make them effective and cheap. However, colonial officials favoured rail and harbour transport development over road transportation. Transportation and communication, colonial officials argued, would make a great contribution to the Gold Coast economy by stimulating trade. Cheap transportation, according to colonial officials, would facilitate trade and increase revenue in the Gold Coast and this meant extensive railway development. Thus, the colonial government endeavoured to rapidly develop the railway system in the Gold Coast. Parallel to the construction of the western railway line, was the planning of the construction of an eastern province railway line to serve the needs of indigenous and expatriate commercial and agrarian groups in the Gold Coast.<sup>14</sup>

In 1909, the construction of an eastern railway line commenced from Accra to Mangoase in the Eastern Province with the purpose of serving the cocoa-growing districts of the Gold Coast. The first section of the Accra to Nsawam railway line opened in 1910.<sup>15</sup> The next section of the line between Nsawam and Mangoase was completed in 1913, while the 13-mile extension from Mangoase to Koforidua was opened to the public in 1915.<sup>16</sup> This line was further extended to

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<sup>13</sup> Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 46; Dumett, "British Imperial Transport Management," 61.

<sup>14</sup> Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways"; Dumett, "British Imperial Transport Management,"

<sup>15</sup> J. Maxwell, *The Gold Coast Handbook*, 1928. London: Government of the Gold Coast, 1928, 123.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

Tafo by 1916.<sup>17</sup> Although First World War restrictions stalled the completion of the eastern railway line, by 1923, the eastern railway line had reached Kumasi.<sup>18</sup>

After the construction of the eastern line, the next project of interest to the colonial government was one that had been conceived right from the beginning of the introduction of railways in the Gold Coast. The project involved the construction of a proposed northern railway line from Kumasi to Tamale. This railway line, officials argued, was to help exploit the groundnut and shea nut industries in territories in the north. By 1922 feasibility studies on the northern railway line had been completed.<sup>19</sup> However, this line was not to be completed, due to the heavy dependence on labour from territories in the north.

Throughout the 1900s the Gold Coast colonial government depended on labour from the northern territories for its massive public works programme. By the 1920s, the mining sector and the booming cocoa industry also competed heavily for labourers from the Northern Territories.<sup>20</sup> Thus, to extend a railway network to the north would be limiting the labour that migrated to the south to

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<sup>17</sup> J. Maxwell, *The Gold Coast Handbook*, 1928. London: Government of the Gold Coast, 1928, 123.

<sup>18</sup> Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways." 90; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1946*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1923-1924, 43.

<sup>19</sup> See *Gold Coast Papers relating to A Project for the Construction of a Railway between Kumasi and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928; Lieut-Colonel F. D. Hammond, *Report on the Railway System of the Gold Coast*. London: Crown Agents, 1922.

<sup>20</sup> Early efforts at cultivating cocoa in the Gold Coast was made by the Basel Missionaries at Akropong in 1859. They did not succeed in arousing the interest of the local farmers in cocoa cultivation. The interest of local farmers were aroused after Tetteh Quarshie of Accra had brought cocoa seeds from Fernando Po and experimented with them. Thereafter, the cultivation of cocoa spread throughout the Gold Coast and from the 1900s cocoa became the leading export of the Gold Coast and a major source of revenue. See: Agbodeka, *Ghana in the Twentieth Century*. 30

work on the public works, in the mines and in the cocoa industry.<sup>21</sup> In shelving the proposed northern railway, Governor Frederick Gordon Guggisberg wrote:

To encourage agricultural production in the Northern Territories by constructing a railway before the development of communications in the south would result in the greater part of this labour being lost. For the above reasons, I have deliberately sacrificed for the moment the development of the agricultural products of the North.<sup>22</sup>

In assessing the contribution of Governor Guggisberg to the economic development of the Northern Territories, N. J. K. Brukum argued that Guggisberg did very little to reduce the economic dependency of the territories in the north.<sup>23</sup> Brukum also contended that, the decision not to extend the railway line to the Northern Territories was a dent in Guggisberg's reputation in the Gold Coast. Thus, although Guggisberg "may be regarded as a hero in the Gold Coast Colony and Asante; as far as Northerners are concerned, he was the worst governor that ever ruled their territory."<sup>24</sup>

In the aftermath of the decision not to construct the northern railway line, the construction of the Central Province railway to serve the cocoa districts commenced in September 1923.<sup>25</sup> This railway line run in a north-easterly

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<sup>21</sup> For a better understanding of how underdevelopment of the Northern Territories served the colonial purpose of encouraging the movement of unskilled labour to the south to work in the mines, on cocoa farms and on the railways, see Roger G. Thomas, "Forced Labour in British West Africa: The Case of the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast 1906-1927," *The Journal of African History* 14, 1, 1973, 79-103; N. J. K. Brukum, "Studied Neglect or Lack of Resources? The Socio-Economic Underdevelopment of Northern Ghana under British Colonial Rule," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 2, 1998, 117-131.

<sup>22</sup> Governor G. Guggisberg, quoted in Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 94.

<sup>23</sup> N. J. K. Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg And Socio-Economic Development Of Northern Ghana, 1919-1927," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, 9, 2005, 1-15.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>25</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Despatch from the Governor to the Secretary of State on the subject of the proposed Central Province Railway*. Accra: Government Press, 1923.

direction from Huni valley to Kade in the Central Province and was fully operational in 1927.<sup>26</sup> Thus, by the end of the 1920s, the railway system of the Gold Coast consisted of a Western railway line between Sekondi and Kumasi, a distance of 167miles, an Eastern railway line between Accra and Kumasi which was 195miles and the Central Province railway line from Huni valley to Kade a distance of 99miles. These railway lines form a shape resembling the letter “A.”

### Road Transportation

While the Gold Coast colonial government focused on building and developing the railway sector, the general use of motor vehicles started to increase in the Gold Coast from the mid-1920s. It must be noted that the use of motor cars began in the Gold Coast in 1902, when the Gold Coast colonial government imported a steam engine driven car for Governor Mathew Nathan to use. Although it is widely agreed by scholars that the car did not last long in the Gold Coast, it set the pace for the development of motor roads and the importation of more cars into the Gold Coast.<sup>27</sup> Prior to the purchase of the motor car, Governor Nathan in 1901 had indicated the need to build roads<sup>28</sup> good enough for motor cars and light engine. These roads, he argued, would be easy to keep clear and the use of motor vehicles would free, for other occupations, a large

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<sup>26</sup> J. Maxwell, *The Gold Coast Handbook*, 1928. London, 1928, 124; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1926-1927*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1927, 27.

<sup>27</sup> See, Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016, 1; Simon Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39,” *The Journal of Transport History* 11, 2, 1990, 19–37.

<sup>28</sup> Before this period, all references to roads were merely in reference to footpaths and not motorable roads. These supposed roads were footpaths with forest on both sides and chiefs were granted annual stipends to organise communal labour for the clearance of these roads.



proportion of the country's labour force employed for the slow and uncertain work of carrying stores into the interior.<sup>29</sup>

In considering the kind of transport infrastructure to put up, colonial officials were mainly influenced by trade or the economic value of the production of the areas involved. Thus, while Governor Nathan used the first motor vehicle and acknowledged the advantage it conferred by freeing labour from head portage, he did not favour the development of road transport over railway. To him, the declining palm oil trade did not merit the expense of road-construction.<sup>30</sup>

As a result, the government invested very little in the construction of motor roads. As already noted, although the position of the colonial government was to cheapen transportation so as to compete favourably with other nations that were exporting similar items as the Gold Coast, the government favoured railway transport. This notwithstanding, by the start of the First World War, that is, 1914, several roads had been completed in the Gold Coast. When Frederick Gordon Guggisberg took over the governorship of the Gold Coast in 1919, he as governor, set out to develop various aspects of the economy.<sup>31</sup> Under Governor Guggisberg's Ten Year Development Plan of 1919 for the Gold Coast, transportation was "the first plank in the policy of progress."<sup>32</sup> The development plan envisaged a total expenditure of about £24.5 million, two thirds of which was

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<sup>29</sup> Kwabina B. Dickson, "The Development of Road Transport in Southern Ghana and Ashanti since about 1850," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 5, 1, 1961, 33–42.

<sup>30</sup> Oil palm was the major export item up to the first decade of the eighteenth century. Anthony P. Haydon, "The Good Public Servant of The State—Sir Matthew Nathan As Governor Of The Gold Coast 1900-1904," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 11, 1970, 105–121.

<sup>31</sup> See Francis Agbodeka, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg's Contribution to the Development of the Gold Coast, 1919-27," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 1, 1972, 51–64; Brukum, "Sir Gordon Guggisberg And Socio-Economic Development Of Northern Ghana, 1919-1927."

<sup>32</sup> Heap, "The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39," 25.

earmarked for harbour and railway projects.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, under Guggisberg's direction, a lot was done to expand the transport infrastructure of the Gold Coast. While transportation was the first plank of Guggisberg's development agenda, the policy on transportation did not change. Apart from railways, Guggisberg favoured water transport and that explains the huge investment made in the construction of the Takoradi harbour.<sup>34</sup>

In 1923, Governor Guggisberg articulated the necessity of expanding the transport infrastructure of the Gold Coast in the legislative council, that:

If we are to increase our trade to secure the necessary funds for progress we must cheapen and extend our means of transport. More than that, and I say this with all the emphasis at my command, the future existence of our trade is seriously imperiled unless we can cheapen and extend our transport system<sup>35</sup>

The transportation policy of the colonial government was to improve and extend railway and road systems and the facilities at the seaports in order to make transportation cheap, increase trade and ensure improved agricultural production against world competition. For colonial officials, "railway is the cheapest form of transport, and in addition it covers all the expenses of maintenance and capital cost."<sup>36</sup> The railways also offered direct revenue to the colonial government through taxation. To bolster trade, particularly, in cocoa, against competition from other cocoa-producing countries such as Brazil, Nigeria and, Cameroon, the Gold

<sup>33</sup> Tsey, "Gold Coast Railways," 76.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* ; David Meredith, "The Construction of Takoradi Harbour in the Gold Coast 1919 to 1930: A Case Study in Colonial Development and Administration," *Transafrican Journal of History* 5, 1, 1976, 134–149.

<sup>35</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government printer, 1923, 42.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

Coast colonial government focused on railway development.<sup>37</sup> In making a case for the development of railways, Governor Guggisberg argued that the railways would put the Gold Coast in a better position than other colonies. He noted that, “There is a small cloud on the horizon, a very small storm cloud that promises to grow steadily and steadily until the whole sky is over-cast. Like trader who are compelled to sell their goods in the open, we must put up our awnings against the coming rain. These awnings are railways.”<sup>38</sup>

The colonial government’s investment in road building was limited. In Guggisberg’s Ten Year Development Plan £1million was earmarked for road construction and development under the direction of the Public Works Department (PWD).<sup>39</sup> Even in constructing roads, the colonial government’s policy was to give first priority to roads that fed the railways, followed by those which served other useful purposes and, lastly, to those which were required for purely political reasons.<sup>40</sup> In effect, new roads were built to feed the railway network and not to run parallel to them. In several communities the chiefs and their people participated actively in road building in the Gold Coast.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government printer, 1923, 42.

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

<sup>39</sup> Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39,” 25.

<sup>40</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1926, 78.

<sup>41</sup> See Elizabeth Wrangham, “An African Road Revolution: The Gold Coast in the Period of the Great War,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 32, 1, January 2004, 1–18; Dickson, “The Development of Road Transport in Southern Ghana and Ashanti since about 1850”; Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39.”

In the Eastern Province, for example, the Gold Coast population employed Italian and Greek contractors to build a 25 mile finely-- engineered motor road.<sup>42</sup> A section of the road between Aburi and Akropong was built to connect with the main Adwaso-Mangoase road which had been built by the Public Works Department (PWD).<sup>43</sup> Governor Hugh Clifford was full of praise for such an initiative which was at no cost to the Gold Coast colonial government.

Again, in 1919, Governor Guggisberg applauded a similar effort by two chiefs in the Eastern Province, the Omanhene of Kwahu and the Benkumhene of Akyem Abuakwa, in road construction.<sup>44</sup> The Omanhene of Kwahu succeeded in building a motor road through the Kwahu scarp, while the Benkumhene of Akyem Abuakwa opened up the rich cocoa district around Begoro by building a motor road to Bosuso station.<sup>45</sup> Officially the roads constructed through the initiative of chiefs and their people were referred to as pioneer roads.<sup>46</sup>

By 1921, the Gold Coast could boast of about 3000 miles of road suitable for light motor lorries and open for traffic. Out of the 3000miles, 1000 miles were roads constructed by the government through the PWD. The rest was pioneer roads.<sup>47</sup> The PWD roads included the Great North Road from Kumasi to Tamale via Salaga, which was completed in 1920.<sup>48</sup> When the colonial government later

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<sup>42</sup> Wrangham, "An African Road Revolution," 11.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>44</sup> Geoffrey B. Kay, ed., *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana: A Collection of Documents and Statistics, 1900-1960*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972.

<sup>45</sup> Heap, "The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900-39," 30.

<sup>46</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1922, 23.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*; Sebastiaan Robbert Soeters, "Tamale 1907-1957: Between Colonial Trade and Colonial Chieftainship" PhD Dissertation,



decided to abandon the extension of the railway line to the north, this road became the only link between the Northern Territories and the southern part of the Gold Coast. Increasingly, the road played a major facilitating role in trade and helped provide access to the groundnut and shea nut industries in the Northern Territories.<sup>49</sup> The completion of this road inspired indigenous transport entrepreneurs and the Levantine group to quickly extend their transportation business to the Northern Territories.<sup>50</sup>

### **Lorries on the road and their model**

The type of vehicles imported and used was also important in the Gold Coast. In the Gold Coast, American vehicle manufacturers dominated, first the motor cycle market and later the motor car market.<sup>51</sup> Until the beginning of 1913, motor vehicles imported into the Gold Coast were heavy. In 1913, the light American Ford was introduced into the Gold Coast.<sup>52</sup> The American Ford revolutionized the motor transport industry since it was well suited for road conditions in the Gold Coast and West Africa as a whole. Indeed, “the ford could

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Institute for History, Faculty of the Humanities, Leiden University, 2012; Brukum, “Studied Neglect or Lack of Resources?” 126

<sup>49</sup> Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu, “The Road to Development: The Construction and Use of ‘the Great North Road’ in Gold Coast Ghana,” *African Studies Centre*, Leiden, 30, 2014.

<sup>50</sup> Ntewusu, “The Road to Development: The Construction and Use of ‘the Great North Road’ in Gold Coast Ghana,” 12.

<sup>51</sup> The use of vehicles include motor cars and motor Lorries. Motor Lorries will be used in the literature to refer to vehicles that were used for commercial purposes, that is, for either carrying goods or passengers. Throughout the colonial period several different models of vehicles were imported into the Gold Coast. The motor car model included Alvis, Armstrong Siddeley, Arrol Aster, Auburn, Austin, Bean, Bentley, Buick, Cordillac, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Citroen, Crosseley, Delage, Dodge, Donnet, Fiat, Ford, Graham, Hillaman, Humber, Isotta Franchini, Lanchester, Magna, Morris, Plymouth, Renault, Reo, Riley, Rover, Singer, Standard, Studebaker, Sunbeam, Talbot, Triumph, Vauxhall, Wolseley. Motor Lorry imports included, Bedford, Chevrolet, Chrysler, Commer, Dodge, Foden, Ford, International, Morris, and Studebaker. See *The Gold Coast Gazette, Trade supplement 1935*. Accra: Government Printer, 238; *Gold Coast Blue Book 1933-34*. Accra, Government Printer, 182; Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39,” 24.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

travel over poorly stumped roads, through quagmire in the rainy season, and be fixed easily if it broke down far from the main centers.”<sup>53</sup> For this reason, in 1918, Governor Hugh Clifford applauded the Ford vehicle in relation to the nature of roads that existed that:

the appalling conditions of the road surfaces . . . so shortened the lives of motor lorries which floundered over them that it was . . . a too expensive substitute for head carriage. The introduction of the light Ford chassis, however, has completely revolutionized the position. The standardization of their parts and the simplicity of their construction render it easy and cheap to maintain these vehicles in a good state of repair.<sup>54</sup>

Table 2. 1 Motor vehicles in the Gold Coast between 1924 and 1930

Year	Motor Vehicles on Register	No. of Lorries on Register
1924-25	3,828	2,200
1927	7,137	4,250
1930	8,921	4,987

Source: *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book 1920*, Accra: Government Printer, 1921-1930

Table 2. 2 Motor vehicle import and country of origin, 1918-1930

Year	British	American	Total	Value
1918	8	52	61	64,059
1919	13	518	532	284,445
1920	121	1,575	2,040	1,063,771
1921	18	225	304	265,183
1922	33	200	225	80,398
1923	71	399	550	137,291
1924	211	548	783	212,566
1925	227	993	1,291	308,856
1926	303	1,080	1,453	350,161
1927	290	2,261	2,914	690,822
1928	282	1,704	2,579	518,870
1929	315	1,816	2,207	415,625

<sup>53</sup> Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, 66.

<sup>54</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative council debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1918-19; see also George Edgar Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana: Documents of Ghana History, 1807-1957*. London: Ipswich Book, 1964, 569.

1930	272	1,442	1,861	263,031
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Source: *Gold Coast Colony Blue Book 1920*, Accra: Government Printer, 1921-1930

Motor vehicle imports for 1916 totalled 398.<sup>55</sup> The economic boom that followed World War One led to an increase in the number of vehicles to 523 in 1919, with an estimated value of £284,445.<sup>56</sup> Out of the total number of vehicles 518 were imported from the USA.<sup>57</sup> By 1920 motor vehicle imports had more than doubled to 2,040 with an estimated value of £1,063,771.<sup>58</sup> Out of the 2,040 vehicles imported in 1920, 1,575 were imported from the USA. By the end 1928, Ford had lost a big part of its market share in the Gold Coast.<sup>59</sup> However, other American motor car manufacturers like Chevrolet, Reo, International and Dodge increasingly dominated the market.<sup>60</sup>

These American vehicles were marketed by both Gold Coast and European companies. Gold Coast companies like the Ocanseys, R. L. Cofie Allotey and the Colonial Motor Company became agents for American Lorries.<sup>61</sup> F & A Swanzy Limited and W. Bartholomew & Co. Limited are examples of European companies that imported and marketed American Lorries.<sup>62</sup> The inability of British manufacturers to compete with American companies in the production of vehicles was a major source of concern to the Gold Coast colonial

<sup>55</sup> Wrangham, "An African Road Revolution," 14.

<sup>56</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Blue Book 1920*. Accra: Government Printer, 1921. 20.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Wrangham, "An African Road Revolution," 14.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

government. On 6<sup>th</sup> March, 1924, Governor Guggisberg notified the legislature that he had asked;

the Association of British Motor Manufacturers to send a representative to visit the Gold Coast in order that he may see for himself the unsuitability of the present British design of light and medium lorries to this country. That this is the case is, I regret to say, the consensus of opinion of all our motor engineers, both Government and private, and is proved by the popularity of American cars, which form 90 per centum of our lorry imports. In view of unemployment in England, the loss of an annual order of some 500 cars is serious.<sup>63</sup>

Earlier in 1922, the Gold Coast colonial government had attempted to limit the importation of American vehicles, through policy, by prohibiting the importation of left-hand drive vehicles into the Gold Coast.<sup>64</sup> The American motor manufacturers reacted by manufacturing and sending right-hand drive vehicles.<sup>65</sup> In addition, a policy of levying duty on the American vehicles was viewed by the Gold Coast colonial government as detrimental so long as the British manufacturer failed to produce vehicles adapted to colonial conditions.<sup>66</sup> It was not until the 1940s that British Bedford became the ideal lorry for commercial transportation in the Gold Coast.

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<sup>63</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1924, 64.

<sup>64</sup> Heap, "The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39." This prohibition was strictly enforced in the case of vehicles imported for retention in the Gold Coast but it was not enforced in the case of motor vehicles crossing the frontier which do not remain in the Gold Coast. In the latter case, owners of vehicles with a left-hand drive are provided with a temporary permit authorizing them to use their vehicles during their temporary stay in the Gold Coast. See, PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/649 AG Commissioner Central Province to The District Commissioner, Motor Vehicles with Left-hand Drive. 19<sup>th</sup> September 1930.

<sup>65</sup> Heap, "The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39," 25; Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1920–21, 54.

<sup>66</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1924, 64.



Although by the 1930s the British Bedford had made an appearance in the Gold Coast, the list of vehicle imports was still dominated by American lorries. Out of the 638 lorries imported into the Gold Coast in 1934, a total of 532 came from the USA and 104 from the United Kingdom.<sup>67</sup> For the year 1936, of the 1,498 lorries imported into the Gold Coast, 1,203 came from the USA and 149 from the United Kingdom.<sup>68</sup> Throughout British West Africa, American lorry imports dominated the motor market.

Generally, the American lorries had several advantages that made them attractive for use in the Gold Coast and in West Africa. In terms of cost the American lorries were cheaper and durable. When Ford arrived in the Gold Coast it was the cheapest vehicle available and also lasted longer. It was projected to last at least for about three years.<sup>69</sup> In 1915 for instance, a one-ton Ford cost £140. This was about half the cost of the nearest comparable.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, unlike British lorries, American lorries and spare parts were readily available on the Gold Coast market. For example, in the 1920s, W. Bortholomew & Co. Ltd, the sole agent for the distribution of Ford in the Gold Coast, always advertised the Ford lorry with a wide range of spare parts.<sup>71</sup> The lack of spare parts and after-sales service for British lorries, meant private operators purchased more American Lorries.

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<sup>67</sup> A total of 886 motor vehicles were imported in that year. 579 were supplied by the United States of America while the United Kingdom supplied 191. See Gold Coast Colony Blue Book 1933-34, Accra: Government Printer, 1935, 182.

<sup>68</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Blue Book 1936*. Accra: Government Printer, 1936, 119.

<sup>69</sup> Philip Drummond-Thompson, "The Rise of Entrepreneurs in Nigerian Motor Transport a Study in Indigenous Enterprise," *The Journal of Transport History* 14, 1, March 1993, 46–63.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

<sup>71</sup> "Ford Wins Again," *The Gold Coast Independent*, August 21, 1926, 1005.

American lorries were also light in weight than British lorries. British lorries like Albion and Thornycroft were heavy, chain-driven and run on solid tyres. The American Ford and all the other American models came in chassis forms.<sup>72</sup> Their light chassis enabled them to be used on all manner of roads in the Gold Coast. The weight-carrying capacity of American vehicles was extraordinary and the trucks got away easily with a heavy load.<sup>73</sup> In effect, owners found American vehicles a more profitable investment. It was light on tyres, economical in the use of petrol, and sufficiently speedy for all ordinary truck requirements.

Figure 2. 1 Ford lorry, Accra, c. 1923



Source: Basel Mission Online Archive, QU-30.003.0235

<sup>72</sup> Drummond-Thompson, "The Rise of Entrepreneurs in Nigerian Motor Transport a Study in Indigenous Enterprise," 50.

<sup>73</sup>

Figure 2. 2 Daimler lorry in Accra, c. 1914



Source: Basel Mission Online Archive, Qu-30.003.0229

Figure 2. 3 Advertisement of Ford Lorry and Spare Parts

**FORD WINS AGAIN**  
**BUY A FORD TON TRUCK AND LORRY A PAYING LOAD**

*It does not matter how much you pay for a Lorry or how well you treat it, the time will come when you will have to buy spares.*  
**THAT IS THE TIME THE FORD OWNER WINS AGAIN.**

**LOOK AT THESE PRICES.**

	Light Lorry.	Ford Lorry.
Fan Assembly	£4 9 0	0 7 1
Electric Starter	11 15 0	4 18 4
Dynamo	9 4 6	4 16 4
Cylinder Head	9 7 4	1 14 0
Gasket	0 7 0	1 1 9
Cylinder Block	24 0 0	7 2 0
Crankcase, Top half	25 18 0	
Crankcase, Bottom half,	12 7 0	2 15 7
4 Pistons, complete	5 18 6	1 18 4
4 Connecting Rods	11 5 8	1 8 0
Camshaft	5 11 0	14 2
Starting Handle	1 1 0	1 5
	<b>£123 18 0</b>	<b>£25 14 10</b>

The light lorry Spare part prices were taken from a price list in England, the Ford are the standard selling price in Accra.

**NOW LOOK AT THE FIRST COST**

FORD half ton Chassis	£ 122	Does not require a governor.
Ford Ton Chassis	£ 142	Runs at 28 miles per hour without a governor
FORD Ton Truck with steel body	£ 210	and 25 miles per hour with one.

**Call at**

**W. Bartholomew & Co. Ltd., Accra**  
**for a trial run.**

Source: *The Gold Coast Independent*, August 21, 1926, 1005.

## The System of Tarmet in the Gold Coast

Initially, the motor lorries were very heavy and quickly tore up the road surface, making repairs an expensive and unending task.<sup>74</sup> With an increasing number of motor vehicles coming into the Gold Coast, the colonial government began to wonder about the nature of roads in the Gold Coast. As has been outlined already, the construction of roads in the Gold Coast was a parallel development, that is, some roads were constructed and maintained by the government through the PWD while the 'pioneer roads' were constructed and maintained by the chiefs and people of the Gold Coast.

The motor roads constructed from the beginning of the 1900s were not all-weather roads. They became highly un-motorable during the rainy season and, to save most roads, the colonial government, from 1917, instituted policies that closed roads to heavy traffic during the rainy season.<sup>75</sup> In special cases, road permits were granted to lorry owners to use the road but with care so as not to cut the surfaces of the roads.<sup>76</sup> Also, firms like the West African Lighterage & Transport Co. Ltd., Abraham & Co., and Swanzy's Transport Co. Ltd., carted at cost price, suitable materials for repairing deteriorated roads as long as their lorries were going up to the interior empty and the colonial government supplied labour to load and unload the materials.

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<sup>74</sup> Antony G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*. London: Longman Group Ltd, 1973, 196.

<sup>75</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/2127 Roads Closing of. 18/5/17

<sup>76</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/2127 The Provincial Engineer, Cape Coast to the District Commissioner, Saltpond, Roads-Permits for use of. 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917.



By the beginning of the 1920s, the Gold Coast colonial government was concerned about the rate of deterioration of roads constructed by the PWD and the increasing expenses made in maintaining or reconstructing the roads. The motor roads were generally constructed using gravel and throughout the Gold Coast it became apparent that the roads could not withstand the annual increase in traffic. Various experiments were conducted to make the roads better and last longer. Experiments were conducted by the PWD on the use of tar macadam on a foundation of 9-inch rubble, water-bound macadam, reinforced concrete, and concrete tracks.<sup>77</sup> While the use of tar macadam and reinforced concrete were successful, the cost was found to be prohibitive.<sup>78</sup> Eventually, the PWD developed a local system of tarred and metalled road which became known as “Tarmet.”<sup>79</sup> Tarmetting involved a layer of granite or quartzite laid on the old graveled surface and rolled with a motor roller down to a thickness of 4inches, then blinded with quarry screenings. It was then tar-sprayed by a pressure spraying machine and, finally sanded.<sup>80</sup>

When tarmetting became a success, £400,000 was devoted by the colonial government for the conversion of the main traffic routes of the southern part of the Gold Coast and Asante.<sup>81</sup> Tarmet conversion was particularly targeted on the main trade roads of the Gold Coast converging on Nsawam, Koforidua, Cape

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<sup>77</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1927, 111.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 111; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1922-1923*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1924, 50; Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana*, 610.

<sup>80</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1926-1927*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928, 29; Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1927. 111.

<sup>81</sup>

Coast and Kumasi.<sup>82</sup> In 1924, the colonial government approved the tarmetting of the main feeder roads to the railways from Asuboi and Asamankese to Nsawam and from Bisa to Koforidua in the Eastern Province.<sup>83</sup> The main feeder roads from Mampong, Ofinso, Kunso and Nkawiekuma to Kumasi were also targeted for tarmetting.<sup>84</sup> While a start was made, by the PWD, on the programme of tarmet conversion of these main roads at the beginning of 1925, progress was not satisfactory due to undelivered rollers, stone crushers and general plants. Another factor that delayed the work was the difficulty that Crown Agents experienced in engaging engineers and foremen for the project of tarmetting of roads. Regardless of these delays, by the end of the year 1925, a lot had been achieved by way of tarmetting.

Tarmetting had several advantages in the Gold Coast. The programme of tarmetting enabled fleets of heavier lorries to use the roads throughout the rainy season.<sup>85</sup> Motor roads before the development of the tarmet system could not carry loads heavier than 15cwt and about 10cwt in a trailer. Tarmetting enabled the roads to take heavier loads and also continue to be functional throughout the rainy season. In terms of the cost of maintenance, tarmetted roads were more economical than gravelled roads. While the average cost of maintenance of a tarmetted road was £90 per mile, a gravelled road cost £120 per mile to

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<sup>82</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925, 44.

<sup>83</sup> Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, 68.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 68; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1923-1924*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925, 51.

<sup>85</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1923, 52; Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1926, 81.

maintain.<sup>86</sup> Tarmetting also reduced the cost of transportation on these roads. The cost of hauling by lorry on these roads was cut in half from two shillings six pence (2s 6d) per ton mile in 1920 to one shilling three pence (1s 3d) in 1925.<sup>87</sup> It also reduced considerably the nuisance of dust associated with gravel roads in the major towns.<sup>88</sup> By the end of the 1926 financial year, the £400, 000 allocated for the construction of tarmet roads had been exhausted.<sup>89</sup> Two hundred and sixty miles of roads were completed at an average cost of £1,500 per mile, including an appreciable amount of re-alignment, easing of curves and replacement of temporary bridges with permanent ones.<sup>90</sup>

Figure 2. 4 Gold Coast workers at a tarmet quarry in Asante, c. 1923



Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Public Works Department, 1925-1926*, Accra: Government Printer, 1926.

<sup>86</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1927, 111.

<sup>87</sup> Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, 68.

<sup>88</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1926-1927*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1928, 29

<sup>89</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1927, 112.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.



Figure 2. 5 “Tarmet” Stonebreaker at work, Kumasi, c. 1923



Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Public Works Department, 1925-1926*, Accra: Government Printer, 1926.

Figure 2. 6 Tarmet – Construction work on Road A7. Asante 1923



Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Public Works Department, 1925-1926*, Accra: Government Printer, 1926.



Figure 2. 7 Tar metaling Gang at work 1923



Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Public Works Department, 1925-1926*, Accra: Government Printer, 1926.

Figure 2. 8 Labadi Road, Christiansborg, c. 1923



Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Public Works Department, 1925-1926*. Accra: Government Printer, 1926.

## The Government Motor Transport Department

Prior to the introduction of motor vehicles, the Gold Coast colonial government maintained a Transport Department which supplied carriers to government officers.<sup>91</sup> These carriers facilitated the movement of government officers, their luggage's, mail and other loads arriving at Sekondi to other parts of the Gold Coast. These carriers also provided the same services from the railhead in Kumasi to other places in Asante and the Northern Territories. In 1914, as motor vehicles came into general use, "a new motor service was introduced by the transport department between Kumasi and Ejura, a distance of 61 miles."<sup>92</sup> As motor transportation became the ideal form of transportation as compared to the use of carriers, the colonial government expanded the services of the newly created motor division. In 1916, this motor division conveyed 425 passengers between Kumasi and Ejura.<sup>93</sup> By 1917, the number of passengers transported from Kumasi to Ejura had more than doubled to 925.<sup>94</sup>

Regardless of the success of the motor division, the Gold Coast colonial government complained about the cost of the new motor division. On 27 February 1922, Governor Frederick Gordon Guggisberg bemoaned the expense incurred in maintaining motor transport services in his annual address to the legislative

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<sup>91</sup> The Transport Department was part of the Public Works Department (PWD) until 1922, when the colonial government separated it from the PWD.

<sup>92</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1914*. London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1915, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1916*. London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1918, 44.

<sup>94</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1917*. London, His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1919, 49.

council.<sup>95</sup> As he put it, “I regret that I am forced to the conclusion that the cost of this service [motor] was unduly high,” especially, in training drivers and repairing vehicles.<sup>96</sup> Furthermore, Governor Guggisberg indicated that;

In the case of the allocated cars, governments hand was forced. There were certain officers whose duties necessitated the issue of cars. It would have been far better to have given the majority of these officers a motor car allowance, under the old regulations, but the latter was so small that such a course would have led to injustice to the officers concerned. It was not until comparatively recently that we received sanction for the new rates. Allocated cars have, therefore, from the 1<sup>st</sup> April, been reduced to eight; for the Governor, Colonial Secretary, the Chief Commissioners and the Medical officers of Health.<sup>97</sup>

Notwithstanding the cost, the alternative method of providing motor transport services to government departments, which is, hiring from private firms, was more expensive.<sup>98</sup> According to Governor Guggisberg, between 1919 and 1920 “private firms charged the Government rates up to £30 a day for the use of a small lorry. Any attempt at bargaining was met by the flat refusal to hire.”<sup>99</sup>

As such, in 1922, the colonial government created a new department of government, the Government Transport Department (GTD), by separating the transport section from the PWD.<sup>100</sup> The GTD provided the transport requirement of the various government departments. The GTD also carried mails throughout the Gold Coast and played an important part in the general development of the

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<sup>95</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debate, 1921-22*. Accra: Government Printer, 1922, 3.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 16

<sup>97</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debate, 1921-22*. Accra: Government Printer, 1922, 16-17.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1922-1923*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1924, 50; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1937-1938*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939, 70.

Gold Coast by hauling heavy loads for the construction of bridges, roads and buildings throughout the country.<sup>101</sup> Facilities that the GTD could not provide, by way of motor transport, were hired from contracting firms like Messrs. F. & A. Swanzy Limited and the West African Lighterage Company.<sup>102</sup>

The GTD assumed the responsibility for training drivers and mechanics, and received hundreds of applications from Gold Coasters.<sup>103</sup> As unpaid apprentices, Gold Coasters were extraordinarily eager to obtain certificates of competency in driving.<sup>104</sup> A system of indentured apprenticeship was introduced from 1928.<sup>105</sup> Through this, a number of selected African youths, with seventh standard examination certificate at the primary school, were trained by this Department as fitters and fitter-drivers.<sup>106</sup> The training consisted of a three years' course of instruction in the workshop in the repair of petrol and compression ignition engines and in general repairs to cars and lorries, followed by a course of instruction in driving.

Besides training prospective drivers and mechanics, the transport department supervised the general administration of the provisions of motor traffic regulations.<sup>107</sup> The Chief Transport Officer of the transport department became the Principal Certifying and Testing Officer and, with the assistance of

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<sup>101</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1923-1924*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1925, 51.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>103</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1937-1938*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939, 71.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>107</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1938-1939*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939, 86.



officers appointed from other departments, was responsible for the testing of all motor vehicles and the examination of all applicants for driving licences.<sup>108</sup>

Kenda Mutongi and Rizzo Matteo point out the fact that in the East African countries of Kenya and Tanzania, the colonial government took the lead in providing public road transport services.<sup>109</sup> However, these early colonial bus services served the needs of the European community.<sup>110</sup> In the Gold Coast, in the absence of a racially segregated society, the GTD, as discussed above, provided road transport service to colonial officials and departments. The closest the Gold Coast colonial government came to providing public road transport service was when from 1927, beginning with Accra, and later, Kumasi and Sekondi-Takoradi, the municipal councils started running a motor omnibus service.<sup>111</sup> In Accra, the omnibus service extended to the suburbs of Teshie (through Christiansborg and Labadi), Achimota, Abose Okai and Korle Gonno.<sup>112</sup> The omnibus service at Kumasi extended to Amako and other outlying villages, and that of Sekondi operated as far as Takoradi, seven miles distant.<sup>113</sup> These routes were appropriated through bye-laws, to the use of the public omnibuses belonging to the Municipal Omnibus Services. As such, other public vehicles plying for hire

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<sup>108</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1938-1939*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1939, 86.

<sup>109</sup> Kenda Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transportation in Nairobi*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017, 75-78; Matteo Rizzo, *Taken for a Ride: Grounding Neoliberalism, Precarious Labour, and Public Transport in an African Metropolis*. Oxford University Press, 2017, 2.

<sup>110</sup> Mutongi, *Matatu: A History of Popular Transport*, 78; Rizzo, *Taken for a Ride*, 2.

<sup>111</sup> The noun "omnibus" originated in the 1820s as a French word for long, horse-drawn vehicles that transported people along the main thoroughfares in Paris. But in Latin, "Omnibus" simply means "for all". Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1947*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948, 84.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

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

were excluded from the use of such routes, roads and streets.<sup>114</sup> In Accra, omnibuses were available on the principal municipal routes from 5a.m till 11 p.m.<sup>115</sup> Hours of operation were shorter in the other two municipalities.<sup>116</sup> In spite of these efforts, the bulk of public motor transportation was in the hands of private commercial transport operators.

### **‘Pirates’ in the Colonial Economy**

With an emerging road transport sector, commercial road transport became an area for profitable investment in the Gold Coast. Early initiatives and investments in the commercial road transport sector were made by European and Asian firms in the Gold Coast. European firms established large number of motor transport companies to take advantage of the growing road transport sector. These included Elder’s Road Transport Ltd., F and A. Swanzy Ltd., Bartholomew & Co. Engineers, and Cadbury.<sup>117</sup> These lorry firms were attached to large trading firms in the Gold Coast, and they primarily conveyed agricultural produce from the various parts of the hinterland to the coast for export.<sup>118</sup> Apart from these Europeans firms, Lebanese and Syrian companies, such as A. Chedid & Co.

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<sup>114</sup> “Accra Town Council Notice,” *The Gold Coast Gazette*, August 20, 1927, 1778.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>117</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. VI of 1928-29, Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee, appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider and make recommendations regarding i) Central Province Railway Rates; ii) the treatment of the ports of Cape Coast and Saltpond on the opening of Takoradi*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, “Race, Identity and Citizenship in Black Africa: The Case of the Lebanese in Ghana,” *Africa* 76, no. 3, 2006, 297–323.

Transport Company and Sangari Transport Company, also participated in the commercial motor transportation in the Gold Coast.<sup>119</sup>

Although motor vehicles were introduced in the Gold Coast from 1903, driving did not become an occupational category until 1921. The population census of 1911 did not capture motor driving as an occupational category.<sup>120</sup> However, throughout the course of the First World War the interest in the development of driving as an occupation grew gradually. By 1921, motor driving had become an occupational category and the report of the 1921 population census indicated that there were 536 motor drivers in the Gold Coast.<sup>121</sup> Ten years later the number of motor drivers in the Gold Coast had increased considerably, that is, over 100 percent. The Eastern Province had the highest number of drivers.

Table 2. 3 Statistics on Motor drivers in the Gold Coast for 1921 and 1931

	1921	1931
Western Province	95	360
Central Province	219	742
Eastern Province	76	2,234
Ashanti	128	813
Northern Territories		51
Mandated Area of Togoland	19	59
Total	536	4,260

Source: The figures were extracted from Government of the Gold Coast: *Census report 1921 for the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, the Northern Territories and the Mandated Area of Togoland*, Accra: Government Press, 1923; The Gold Coast, *Appendices Containing Comparative Returns and General Statistics of the 1931 Census*, Accra: Government Printer, 1932

<sup>119</sup> PRAAD Kumasi ARG6/1/19 Yaw Mainu to His Honour, The Chief Commissioner, Kumasi, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1941; PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM23/1/649 AG. District Commissioner to the Honourable Commissioner, Central Province, Strike by Motor Driver, Saltpond, 16<sup>th</sup> October, 1940.

<sup>120</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Census Report*. Accra: Government Printer, 1911.

<sup>121</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Census Report 1921 for the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, the Northern Territories and the Mandated Area of Togoland*. Accra: Government Press, 1923.

The development of driving as an occupational category could be linked to two developments on the Gold Coast, namely, the First World War and the subsequent cocoa boom of the 1920s. At the start of the First World War, Britain like most European nations established motor transport squadrons which dealt with land transport supplies. The Gold Coast Regiment which served in Togoland, Cameroon and later East Africa had a motor transports division attached to it.<sup>122</sup> In East Africa, motor transport formed the first line of transport to the regiment.<sup>123</sup> Throughout the duration of the war, about 993 motor drivers were enlisted into the Gold Coast Regiment.<sup>124</sup> Elizabeth Wrangham indicates that the response of motor drivers to the recruitment for war service represented an encouraging interest in motor transportation.<sup>125</sup> In essence the war provided an avenue for training a lot of people to become motor drivers. After the First World War, economic restrictions were lifted and major European markets were once again opened. This ushered in the cocoa boom of 1919-1920, which brought prosperity to the Gold Coast as cocoa prices soared. From an average price of twenty-seven shilling (27/-) per cwt in 1918, cocoa prices rose to forty-seven shilling (47/-) in

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<sup>122</sup> It is estimated that about 9,890 African troops were employed in the Gold Coast Regiment of the West African Frontier Force. See Roger Thomas, "Military Recruitment in the Gold Coast during the First World War (Recrutement Militaire En Gold Coast Pendant La Première Guerre Mondiale)," *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 1975, 57–83.

<sup>123</sup> Hugh Clifford, *The Gold Coast Regiment in the East African Campaign*. London: John Murray, 1920.

<sup>124</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/5/123 Governor to the Secretary of State 12 Aug. 1918. David Killingray provides a slightly different figure of 1,350. It is not clear if his figure includes non-enlisted motor drivers since proper documentation was not kept for the non-enlisted. See David Killingray and James Matthews, "Beasts of Burden: British West African Carriers in the First World War," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 13, 1/2, 1979, 5.

<sup>125</sup> Wrangham, "An African Road Revolution," 12.



1919 and as high as one hundred and twenty-seven shillings (127/-) in 1920.<sup>126</sup> Money was made by a cross section of the population, including marketing firms, brokers, farmers and lawyers. With the increased wealth from these high prices, “motor cars were purchased right and left.”<sup>127</sup> Polly Hill has argued that aside motor vehicles, which facilitated the movement and transportation of cocoa to the shipping ports, farmers also invested their profits in expanding their cocoa farms, building houses in Accra for rent and also educating their children.<sup>128</sup> The cocoa boom and the consequent investment of farmers and other members of the population in motor vehicles meant that most of the trained drivers found jobs in the nascent motor transport sector in the Gold Coast.<sup>129</sup>

Figure 2. 9 Cocoa lorries waiting to load in the mid-1920s



Source: Government of the Gold Coast: *Visit of His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales to the Gold Coast Colony*, Accra: Government Printer, 1925, 104.

<sup>126</sup> Roger J. Southall, “Farmers, Traders and Brokers in the Gold Coast Cocoa Economy,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 12, 2, 1978, 185–211.

<sup>127</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1920.

<sup>128</sup> Polly Hill, *The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963.

<sup>129</sup> Soeters, “Tamale 1907-1957,” 86.

Accompanying an expansion of the motor transportation and the building of roads good enough for motor vehicles was a fierce competition between road and the rail transport. This was termed the road-rail competition in colonial discourse.<sup>130</sup> The competition was between European and Asian lorry firms owned by the several trading companies in the Gold Coast and the railways. Indeed, the 1924 budget session reported that Rickaby's Transport Company had beaten the Government in lorry competition with the railway on the Accra-Nsawam road.<sup>131</sup> By the middle of the 1920s, a third major contender had appeared on the commercial transportation scene. These were individual African lorry owners, who were labelled 'pirates' in the colonial economy.<sup>132</sup>

Commercial motor transportation offered Gold Coast Africans an opportunity to display their entrepreneurial abilities. This was viewed by the colonial officials as something to be commended and encouraged.<sup>133</sup> Throughout the period of European contact, the Gold Coasters functioned as a change agent who combined effectively the factors of production. This is visible in the trading and agricultural sectors. Raymond E. Dumett's writings about some of these early African entrepreneurial activities offer some understanding about this

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<sup>130</sup> Soeters, "Tamale 1907-1957," 86.

<sup>131</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925, 36.

<sup>132</sup> They were labelled 'pirates' by their European counterparts and it found expression in the various report at the time. 'Pirates' because they were on the look out to convey anything that needed to be moved from one place to the other.

<sup>133</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debate*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925, 36. In the early phase of the development of road transportation, the colonial administration sought to encourage the development of road transportation. However, as the African entrepreneurs undercut the other participants in the road transportation and also undercut railway rates and freight they were labelled pirates in the colonial economy.

phenomenon.<sup>134</sup> With the introduction of motor vehicles, Gold Coasters took part in offering commercial motor transport services. The Gold Coasters who participated in motor transportation did so as owners or, owner-drivers or drivers of motor lorries.<sup>135</sup>

Many of these private African lorries were owned by small cocoa-brokers. Some of these individuals had only one lorry or managed a fleet of lorries. In the Eastern Province, for instance, the Gold Coast lorry owners controlled about half of the lorries operating in that province by 1918. As most of the owners owned other businesses, colonial officials maintained that the losses they made in motor transportation were compensated for by the good price of cocoa.<sup>136</sup> These small private transport owners succeeded in limiting the participation of the big transport companies with huge price cuts.<sup>137</sup> The major items of the competition included the major export crop, cocoa, which was transported to the coast, and the imported items, were transported from the coast.

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<sup>134</sup>See Raymond E. Dumett, "African Merchants and Trader's Agents of the Major Towns of Ghana During the Late Nineteenth Century," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 2, 1972, 261–264; Raymond E. Dumett, "African Merchants of the Gold Coast, 1860–1905—Dynamics of Indigenous Entrepreneurship," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 25, 4, 1983, 661–693; Dumett, "John Sarbah, the Elder, and African Mercantile Entrepreneurship in the Gold Coast in the Late Nineteenth Century"; Raymond E. Dumett, "Tropical Forests and West African Enterprise: The Early History of the Ghana Timber Trade," *African Economic History*, 29, 2001, 79.

<sup>135</sup> The owners were those who purchased motor vehicles for others to operate as drivers: the owner-drivers were those who owned and operated their own vehicles: and drivers were those driving the vehicles of other persons.

<sup>136</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. VI of 1928-29, Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee, appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider and make recommendations regarding i) Central Province Railway Rates; ii) the treatment of the ports of Cape Coast and Saltpond on the opening of Takoradi*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 9.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

Whereas the big European and Asian transport companies moved their lorries in search of cocoa coffee, kola and other crops for onward transport to the coast, the Gold Coast lorry drivers conveyed passengers and anything that needed to be moved from one point to the other. Thus, while the big companies complained of not having cargo on their return journey from the coast, the Gold Coast lorry driver moved cargo both ways.<sup>138</sup> This eventually became the reason for heavy taxation of the motor transport industry by the colonial government from 1925.<sup>139</sup>

The Gold Coast lorry owners owned motor lorry through various purchasing schemes organised by some expatriate firms. The popular avenue to a Gold Coaster to access and own a lorry was through hire-purchase schemes offered by Syrians to Gold Coasters.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, the hire-purchase arrangement

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<sup>138</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. VI of 1928-29, Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee, appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider and make recommendations regarding i) Central Province Railway Rates; ii) the treatment of the ports of Cape Coast and Saltpond on the opening of Takoradi*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 9.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>140</sup> Hire purchase is an arrangement for buying consumer goods, where the buyer makes an initial deposit and pays the balance plus interest in instalments over a period of time. While paying the instalments, the buyer gets to use the items but the seller owns the items until the buyer makes the final payment. This system developed in 19<sup>th</sup> century Britain to allow customers with cash shortages to make an expensive purchase they otherwise would have to delay or forgo. In the Gold Coast, this system came into wide use in the purchase of motor vehicles from the 1920's, and as indicated, it is credited for rapid development of motor transportation in the Gold Coast. However, the system was fraught with several challenges, particularly with the involvement of middlemen, Syrian or Lebanese. One such difficulty was with regards to the price of vehicles and the rates with regards to the interest on the actual cash price. There was no control of prices of vehicles in the Gold Coast, neither was there legislation in relation to high purchase and its interest rates. As such middlemen bought lorries from the firms, sometimes without paying spot cash for them and sold them on hire-purchase. Again, a vehicle that may cost about £850 was sold by the middlemen at about £1400 or £1500. Since recognized importers were far more selective in their hire-purchase transaction, the middlemen took greater risks and thereby also charge a hirer rate of interest in order to offset any losses. The second difficulty under the hire purchase in the Gold Coast was in relation to default. If the customer was able to pay up to seventy or eighty per cent of the hire purchase price but defaults once, the middleman at once seized the vehicle and he does not



was the key factor in increasing the Gold Coaster's access to lorries.<sup>141</sup> In some cases prospective lorry owners paid as low as £20 as the first payment for a £200 lorry.<sup>142</sup> Some of the firms facilitated the payment of the subsequent instalments by selling petrol to their customers at reduced price and also provided them with goods and produce to carry.

As Gold Coaster's accessed more commercial lorries through the high-purchase arrangement, they engaged in a fierce competition with the already established transport companies. As a result of the fierce competition on the roads most of the large expatriate transport companies were either forced to relocate or pushed out of motor transportation totally.<sup>143</sup> For instance, some of the motor transport companies relocated from Kumasi to areas in the Central Province where there were prospects of getting profitable freight. Many of the large Syrian lorry owners also disposed of their fleet of lorries as they were unable to compete with Gold Coast lorry owners.<sup>144</sup> Noteworthy, the African lorry owners also made it difficult for the railways to compete.<sup>145</sup>

Contrary to the assertion by Francis Agbodeka that "Guggisberg failed to see that road transport was on the way to undercutting rail transport," the colonial

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give any opportunity to the customer to find money to pay the instalments. Thus, the customer was likely to lose both the vehicle and his money, without any redress.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. III of 1932-33. Report of the Railway Revenue Committee (Road V. Rial.)*. Accra: Government Printer, 1932, 11.

<sup>143</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. III of 1932-33. Report of the Railway Revenue Committee (Road V. Rial.)*. Accra: Government Printer, 1932, 12.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

government was well aware of the growing motor transport sector.<sup>146</sup> However, colonial officials did not view road transport as a major threat to the Gold Coast railways. Indeed in 1925, Governor Guggisberg was hopeful “that our railway can compete favourably between Accra and Nsawam with the company [Rickaby’s Transport].”<sup>147</sup> The Accra-Nsawam road was one of the busiest, especially, for cocoa traffic. In the view of colonial officials, unless the Gold Coast lorry driver was setting aside funds to purchase new lorries when their old ones were worn out, they would come to grief financially.<sup>148</sup>

### **Rail Versus Road Competition in the Gold Coast**

Notwithstanding the optimism of Governor Guggisberg, of the ability of the railway to compete favourably with road transport, this competition became a source of concern from 1926. As already indicated, the railways were built to make transportation inexpensive. As compared with head loading, it was economical to forward goods via the railways at 2/6d per ton mile.<sup>149</sup> In the period up to 1920 the railways enjoyed a near monopoly in transportation. The growth of road transportation started to change the situation. At the completion of the Sekondi-Kumasi railway line, there were no roads paralleling it, except the length between Bekwai and Kumasi, which except for passenger traffic did not materially affect the railway. The situation was different in parts of the Central and Eastern Provinces where road development preceded, and in some cases developed simultaneously with the construction of the railways. The Central

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<sup>146</sup> Agbodeka, “Sir Gordon Guggisberg’s Contribution to the Development of the Gold Coast,” 1919-1927,” 54.

<sup>147</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative council debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Tsey, “Gold Coast Railways,” 97.

Province railway which was designed specially to feed the port of Takoradi also had no roads paralleling it. However, the Central Province railway line was constructed in an area with an already established motor road network. Thus, according to the General Manager of the Gold Coast railways, the Central Province railway was “up against established [motor road] competition.”<sup>150</sup> The roads feeding Foso, Achiase and Oda had connections with the ports of Cape Coast, Saltpond and Winneba. As such, the feeder roads to the Central Province railway line became feeder roads to these ports. The Accra-Kumasi railway line in the Eastern Province was paralleled for practically its whole length by a road. As motor transportation grew in the Gold Coast and rivalled railway transport, it thus offered fierce competition to other forms of transportation in the Gold Coast. Peter Gould suggests that inland water transportation was also affected by road competition in the Gold Coast. He notes that:

in 1920 it was cheaper to ship to Apinso from Accra by Sea to Ada, thence by schedule steam launch up the Volta to Ajena, and finally by head carrier, then it was shipped by rail to Koforidua and then by lorry. This held until 1926, when, surprisingly road competition knocked the water traffic out once and for all.<sup>151</sup>

Notwithstanding the competition offered to inland water transport by road transportation, colonial officials were more concerned about the competition between the railways and road transport. Road competition affected the railways, particularly, the Central and Eastern Province railway lines. Regardless of the optimism of Governor Guggisberg, in 1925, that the railway could compete with road transportation, the colonial government began paying attention to the

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<sup>150</sup> Tsey, “Gold Coast Railways,” 97.

<sup>151</sup> Gould, *The Development of the Transportation Pattern in Ghana*, 53.

competition between the railways and motor transportation.<sup>152</sup> In December 1926, Governor Guggisberg set up a committee consisting of the Director of Public Works, General Manager of the Railways, Comptroller of Customs, and Chief Transport Officer to advise on the competition between railway and motor transportation in the Gold coast.<sup>153</sup> The committee recognized that motor transport had one definite advantage against the railway. That is, the railways had to bear the full cost of providing the tracks whereas the cost of roads was only partially borne by motor transport. While discussing the issue of the competition between the two systems of transport, the committee considered the rates charged for each form of transport. While the rate per ton mile by road was more difficult to ascertain, the general opinion of the representatives of the merchants who gave evidence was that the road transport agencies could not profitably transport merchandise at a rate lower than nine pence (9d) or ten pence (10d) per ton mile. The representative of the larger motor transport companies argued that the Gold Coast transport owners however were able to run profitably at seven pence (7d) per ton mile.<sup>154</sup>

To address this competition, rates on the railways were reduced in 1927 to make them more competitive. For example, for the rate for the transportation of cocoa see table 2.6 below;

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<sup>152</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Colonial Secretary to The Honourable The General Manager of the Government Railway.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*



Table 2. 4 Comparative rates for railway and roads in the Central Province (C.P.)

Place	If transported by road to nearest port	If transported to Takoradi via the C.P Railway	If transported to Takoradi or Accra by road
Asikuma	16/- (Saltpond)	37/- (Via Achiase)	52/- (To Takoradi)
Essiem	8/6 (Saltpond)	44/6 (Via Achiase)	44/6 (To Takoradi)
Swedru	7/6 (Winneba)	50/9 (Via Oda)	30/- (To Accra)
Akroso	17/6 (Winneba)	40/9 (Via Oda)	40/- (To Accra)
Anyinabrim	21/9 (Cape Coast)	32/- (Via Foso)	49/- (To Takoradi)
Edibiasi	24/9 (Cape Coast)	29/- (Via Foso)	52/- (To Takoradi)
Asene	26/9 (Winneba)	31/9 (Via Oda)	49/- (To Accra)
Fante Nyankumasi	12/- (Cape Coast)	41/9 (Via Foso)	39/- (To Takoradi)

Source: PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Report by the Acting Director of Public Works

Table 2. 5 Comparative rates via railway and roads

Station	Distance by rail	Rail freight per ton on cocoa	Equivalent rail rate per ton mile	Distance by road to nearest port	Freight by road at 6d per ton mile	Freight by road
	miles	shillings	pence	miles	shillings	shillings
<b>Takoradi-Kumasi Line</b>						
Takoradi to Tarkwa	42	26/3d	7.5			
Takoradi to Huni Valley	57	34/9d	7.3			
Takoradi to Insu	67	39/9d	7.1			
Takoradi to Opon Valley	78	45/3d	7.0			
Takoradi to Dunkwa	103	57/5d	6.7			
Takoradi to Jym Abrufu	118	63/-	6.4			
Takoradi to Akrokerri	137	70/2d	6.1	110.5	55/3d	41/6d
Takoradi to Bekwai	151	75/3d	6.0			
Takoradi to	171	80/3d	5.6	180	90/-	67/6d

Kumasi						
Takoradi to Juaso	216	89/-	5.0	139	69/6d	52/-
<b>Central Province Line</b>						
Takoradi to Twifu	87	26/-	3.6			
Takoradi to Foso	108	26/-	2.9	52.5	26/3d	19/8d
Takoradi to Achiasi	133	26/-	2.3	50	25/-	18/9d
Takoradi to Oda	138	27/-	2.3	58	25/-	22/9d
Takoradi to Kade	156	38/3d	3.0			
<b>Accra-Kumasi Line</b>						
Accra to Nsawam	25	9/-	4.3	22	11/-	8/3d
Accra to Mangoase	39	22/6d	6.9	44	22/-	16/6d
Accra to Koforidua	52	27/-	6.2	48	24/-	18/-
Accra to Tafo	65	35/6d	6.5	64.5	32/3d	24/2d
Accra to Anyinam	86	41/-	5.7	82	41/-	30/9d
Accra to Jyajete	97	55/-	6.8	92.5	46/3d	34/8d
Accra to Nkwakaw	110	65/-	7.1	105	52/6d	39/5d
Accra to Kwahu Prahsu	124	74	7.2	119	59/6d	44/7d

Source: PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Report by the Acting Director of Public Works

Table 2. 6 Gold Coast Government Cocoa reduction rates

Station from	Station to	Present rate per ton		Rate as from 19 <sup>th</sup> Sept.1927	
		S	d	S	d
Kwahu-Prahsu	Accra station	84	10	74	0
Akwaseho		80	9	70	0

Nkwakaw		76	8	65	0
Asubone		72	0	61	0
Jyajate		68	10	55	0
Kankang		65	6	52	6
Anyinam		61	6	41	0
Osino		56	10	38	0
Bosuso		52	2	38	0
Tafo		47	6	35	6
Jumapo		43	6	31	6
Koforidua		38		27	0
		10			
Mangoase		29		22	6
		3			
Pakro		25		20	0
		6			
Nsawam		12	6	9	0
Prah River	Sekondi Station	95	0	84	0
Bompata		92	6	84	0
Juaso		91		89	0
		0			

Source: The Gold Coast Gazette, September 17, 1927.

To further tilt the competition in favour of the railways, Governor Guggisberg, in 1927, instituted the policy of “road gaps” on certain roads that competed with the railways.<sup>155</sup> The policy entailed leaving gaps on stretches of roads that competed with the railways for traffic. This was done by leaving those sections of roads untarmetted and allowing them to deteriorate to the extent of discouraging motor transportation. The first area where the “road gap” policy was applied was on the Accra to Kumasi road, a road that competed effectively with the eastern railway line for both passengers and goods. Under the “road gap” policy a portion of the road was “gapped” between Anyinam and Jejeti and

<sup>155</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Colonial Secretary to The Honourable The General Manager of the Government Railway.

Kwahu Prahsu and Bompata.<sup>156</sup> Attempts were also made to force traffic onto the railway at Nsawam by allowing the Nsawam-Accra road to deteriorate. In all, sixteen of such roads were affected by the “road gap” policy.<sup>157</sup>

The “road gap” policy proved to be ineffective in limiting the competition between the railways and the road transport. It was only able to force traffic on to the railway during the rainy season when those “gapped” sections were totally unmotorable. Additionally, the policy of “road gaps” did not only inconvenience the Gold Coast lorry owners and drivers but also the merchant firms and the colonial government itself. In the case of the “gap” on the Accra-Kumasi road between Anyinam and Bompata, inspecting officers of the merchant firms had to spend 3 or 4 days when travelling by railway to carry out work that could have been done in one day by lorry.<sup>158</sup> Consequently, political and departmental officers of the colonial government complained about this situation.<sup>159</sup> By 1929 the “road gap” policy had been abolished due to its ineffectiveness and the extent to which it inconvenienced the work of political officers of the colonial government and inspectors of merchant companies, who had to travel.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Colonial Secretary to The Honourable The General Manager of the Government Railway.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>158</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO14/2/23 AG. Director of Public Works to the Hon. Colonial Secretary, 19<sup>th</sup> March 1930.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM 23/1/762 Colonial Secretary’s confidential despatch; Although the colonial government abolished the road gap policy, it did not mean the government was going to proceed to tarmet the road from Accra to Kumasi. Governor Ransford Slater did not regard it as reasonable that the government should make the Accra-Kumasi road, which runs parallel with the railway, a road for heavy goods traffic. It was going to be improved as funds become available for passenger traffic. See Metcalfe, *Great Britain and Ghana*, 624.



Before abolishing the “road gap” policy in 1929, the colonial government was already in search of a more effective policy in curbing the competition between railway and road transport. In 1928 Governor Ransford Slater reiterated the need to find a permanent solution to the competition between road and the rail transport. He noted in the summary report of the Colonial Office Conference thus:

It should be borne in mind that Colonial Governments have very heavy commitments in their railways... It is difficult to see how they could afford to let their railways become unremunerative. In order to prevent such a misfortune without unduly crippling road motor development it is imperative that roads should be planned wherever possible in such a way as to cooperate and feed, rather than compete with the railways.<sup>161</sup>

The Colonial Office Conference report also acknowledged the special nature of the problem in the Gold Coast by further indicating that:

In a new country it is possible to design the lines of communication by rail and road with the same degree of care as is devoted nowadays to town planning, but in the Gold Coast it is necessary to face the fact that a network of railways and roads has already been constructed and the problem is to make the best of these. We have roads already constructed running parallel to the railway, thus duplicating the means of communication along the same route, which is obviously as wasteful and uneconomic as if two separate lines or railway were built parallel to each other.<sup>162</sup>

As colonial officials debated the issue, road transportation improved considerably, making it more competitive and the ideal form of transport. For instance, better and more efficient lorries and trailers were manufactured which reduced the cost of maintenance. General reduction in the price of lorries and also

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<sup>161</sup> Kay, *The Political Economy of Colonialism in Ghana*.

<sup>162</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Acting Director of Public Works to The Hon. Colonial Secretary.

transport agencies organised themselves well so as to maximize profits. Thus, by 1930, the rates that were used for analysis in 1927 had been reduced further by road transport. In 1930, the large motor transport companies could operate profitably at six and half pence (6½d) or even six pence (6d) per ton mile, and that the rates charged by the Gold Coast owners of lorries was four and half pence (4½) per ton mile.<sup>163</sup>

The reduced rates made road transport very attractive. However, apart from the rates there were several other factors which favoured road transport as against rail transport. The Acting Director of Public Works did not mince words in acknowledging road transport advantages when he indicated that;

A convenience for the consignor of produce to be able to use his own motor transport. He is not tied down to definite times of delivery, he can choose the most suitable moment for dispatching his goods to the port, the risk of pilfering enroute is less, and there is a saving in the labour of handling the goods.<sup>164</sup>

As the debate on how to protect the revenue of the railway raged on, the world experienced an economic depression in 1929. This depression affected trade and the colonial government's revenue in the Gold Coast.<sup>165</sup> It also led to a slump in world market prices of cocoa.<sup>166</sup> For instance, in 1930, cocoa prices at Koforidua was between six shillings (6s) and eight shillings six pence (8s 6d) per

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<sup>163</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/2/23 Acting Director of Public Works to The Hon. Colonial Secretary.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>165</sup> PRAAD, Accra, Adm 23/3/54 Letter from Governor Sir Ransford Slater to Lord Passfield 16 August 1931.

<sup>166</sup> Stanley Shaloff, "The Income Tax, Indirect Rule, and the Depression: The Gold Coast Riots of 1931 (Impôts Sur Le Revenu, Administration Indirecte et Crise Économique: Les Émeutes de 1931 En Gold Coast)," *Cahiers d'études Africaines*, 1974, 359–375.

load.<sup>167</sup> This price fell drastically to five shillings three pence (5s 3d) per load of cocoa by June 1931 in the Eastern Province.<sup>168</sup> The government railways saw its revenue plummet as cocoa, which had become the mainstay of the Gold Coast economy and the main export item carried by the railways lost revenue due to the economic depression.<sup>169</sup>

By 1932, the threat posed by the independent Gold Coast lorry owners to the railway had become a serious drain on the revenue of the railways. Indeed, the colonial annual report for the period observed that “road transport gives employment to many,” however, “the African lorry owner-driver is becoming a problem on account of his successful competition with the railway.”<sup>170</sup> Thus, the government began to reconsider its strategy of ensuring that the railways survived the competition. Through Government Gazette No. 10 of February, 1932, the Governor, “in view of the serious losses suffered by the Railway during recent

<sup>167</sup> Sam Rhodie, “The Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1930-31,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 9, 1968, 105–118.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>169</sup> The Gold Coast had nine main port towns: Half Assini, Axim, Sekondi, Cape Coast, Saltpond, Winneba, Accra, Ada and Keta. While the railways and road transportation competed for cocoa which was the major export item, there were other items that were moved by these systems of transportation to the coast. The items included gold dust, ivory, dye woods, palm oil, groundnut, Kola nuts, skins, and palm kernel. From the coast the railway and road transport moved items including ale, beer and porter, apparels and boots, shoes, caps and hats, bags, sacks, beads, beef and pork, brass and copperwares, bread and biscuits, building materials, cement and lime, enamelware, flour, firearms (flintlock guns and ammunition), furniture, glassware, hardware and cutlery, machinery, minerals and aerated waters, oils, kerosene and other lubricating oils, perfumery, provisions rice, silk goods, spirits, tobacco, cigarettes, cigars, wines, lead, pipes, rum, iron and copper bars, soap and tallow. See Gold Coast Gazette, *Trade Supplements*. Accra: Government printer, 1922, 1923, 1924 and 1928.

<sup>170</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic progress of the Gold Coast 1932-1933*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1934, 27. The report further maintained that the lorry owner could always rely on his family and his friend for shelter and sustenance, and his clothing needs could be reduced to a minute sum. He did not necessarily work every day; he was almost entirely without overhead charges, and except for the payment of the instalments on his lorries and of his running charges, he had no need for money. Consequently, road transport on the Gold Coast was exceedingly cheap and is actually run on an uneconomic basis.

years mainly owing to road competition, losses which continue and constitute a growing burden on the revenue of the Colony [Gold Coast] i.e. on the general taxpayer," appointed the Railway Revenue Committee "to consider and make recommendations as to what steps should be taken to meet the situation."<sup>171</sup> Against the large expatriate firms the view was that the Gold Coast independent lorry operators were engaged in huge price cuts that pushed most of these companies out of business. However, while the rates offered by the railways were relatively cheaper than that of the lorry operators, the railways lost revenue considerably. That notwithstanding, the colonial government engaged in further rate cuts to ensure that the railways competed effectively with road transport.<sup>172</sup>

The advantages of motor transportation were numerous and that is what the Gold Coast lorry owners and drivers fully exploited. The lorry was able to stop at more convenient points for passengers. It was capable of more frequent departures and able to accommodate a given volume of traffic and it was able to provide a pleasant means of travel. For the Gold Coast market traders and itinerant sellers who travelled to sell their merchandise, travelling by lorry was so flexible that the individual could travel with the goods in the same space.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. III of 1932-33. Report of the Railway Revenue Committee (Road V. Rial.)*. Accra: Government Printer, 1932, 1

<sup>172</sup> "Railway fares and freight charges," *The Gold Coast Independent*, September 27, 1924, 790; "The position of the Gold Coast Railway," *The Gold Coast Independent*, September 11, 1926, 1093.

<sup>173</sup> This was the case for large traders as well. For example, if a man who had large estate between Nkawkaw and Anyinam wanted to go to Koforidua to replenish his stocks he would have to take it to Nkawkaw. On getting there, as the passenger train would not take his cocoa, he has got to wait for the goods train, which may not travel that day, to bring the cocoa down to Koforidua, and as he is not allowed to travel on the goods train, he has to wait for the next passenger train; all this means delay. At Koforidua he sells his cocoa, makes his purchases of goods. These he cannot take by lorry, so he has to wait until there is a goods train going, by which he will consign the goods,



Comparatively, most railway stations were difficult to access. The lorry, which could be easily accessed, took advantage of that lack to its benefit. The *Gold Coast Independent* published a couple of articles in defence of road transportation. The newspaper particularly took issue with the increasing taxes which the ordinary person had to pay as a result of the railways.<sup>174</sup> In 1924, the newspaper recounted the abysmal nature of the services of the railways that:

it is only pertinent to recall the experiences of the traveler during a journey between Accra and up-country, when through pressure of business, he happens to lose his train. It of course means that perforce he must remain where he had got to! Again if by accident the train is delayed and does not arrive at its destination before it is dark, it means this that the trains having no lights the rest of the journey is to be done in pitch darkness, excepting there is moonlight. Even some of the engines have no head light and the driver is left to depend on his second sight. But the traveler's experiences do not end there, for when at last the train rolls into the station, the only light placed at his disposal to stumble off his way through the many "barriers" of the Railway premises is a dim flare of light which is all that an old kerosene lamp is capable of generating.<sup>175</sup>

The *Gold Coast Independent* also encouraged the colonial government not to strangle private road transport sector.<sup>176</sup> The paper argued that while the Gold Coast lorry owners had to endure many hardships on the road, their European counterparts moved around freely.<sup>177</sup>

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after which he takes the passenger train himself, whereas by a lorry he could take accompany his products and do it all in one day.

<sup>174</sup> "Railway fares and freight charges," *The Gold Coast Independent*, September 27, 1924, 790

<sup>175</sup> "The Gold Coast Railways," *The Gold Coast Independent*, September 9, 1922, 395

<sup>176</sup> "Treat the Native Lorry Owner's Fairly," *The Gold Coast Independent*, September 4, 1926, 1061.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

Interestingly, the problems that emerged from the relationship between the two systems of transportation, road and rail, were not confined to the Gold Coast alone. The competition between these two systems of transport was wide spread within the British Empire.<sup>178</sup> Even at the seat to the British Empire there was competition between road transport and the railways. However, the nature of the problem was different from country to country. As such, solutions that could resolve the problem in one country were not necessarily successful in another country. This was the problem the Committee tasked to investigate the nature of the problem in the Gold Coast faced. The Rail Road Committee considered solutions that applied in other places as they tried to address the issue in the Gold Coast. They considered solutions adopted in places like Nigeria, Sierra Leone, and Union of South Africa. The solutions included scheduling of road, encouraging the railway administration to operate its own road transport system and imposing more taxes on petrol and spare parts.<sup>179</sup>

The Gold Coast colonial government explored varied options, including the possibility of imposing special charges on motor lorries for using public roads

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<sup>178</sup>See: A. M. Hay, "The Development of Road Transport in Nigeria 1900–1940," *The Journal of Transport History*, 2, 1971, 95–107; Onwuka N. Njoku, "Development of Roads and Road Transport in Southeastern Nigeria, 1903–1939," *Journal of African Studies* 5, 4, 1978, 471; Olasiji Oshin, "Road Transport and the Declining Fortunes of the Nigerian Railway, 1901–1950," *The Journal of Transport History* 12, 1, 1991, 11–36; John F. Due, "The Problems of Rail Transport in Tropical Africa," *The Journal of Developing Areas* 13, 4, 1979, 375; Amarjit Kaur, "Road or Rail?—Competition in Colonial Malaya 1909–1940," *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* 53, 2, 238, 1980, 45–66; Josiah Stamp, "The Railway Situation in Great Britain," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 187, 1, September 1936, 169–72; Gilbert Walker, "The Economics of Road and Rail Competition," *The Economic Journal* 43, 170, June 1933, 217; C.N. Vakil, "Railways and Roads in India," *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 233, 1, May 1944, 187–92.

<sup>179</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1937–38*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1938, 88.

or removing all subsidies on petrol and spare parts.<sup>180</sup> In 1936, the Gold Coast colonial government settled on passing the Carriage of Goods Road Ordinance.<sup>181</sup> This Ordinance provided for the carriage of specified goods over scheduled roads.<sup>182</sup> The purpose of the Ordinance was to help prevent the “loss of railway revenue resulting from the carrying out of the new programme of road construction which had been planned for the improvement of communications within the Gold Coast.”<sup>183</sup> This Ordinance prohibited the carriage of cocoa to the coast and the carriage of imported goods on certain roads.<sup>184</sup>

### **Regulating the Motor Transport Industry**

During the course of the development of motor transportation, the colonial government tried to encourage the use of motor vehicles in the Gold Coast. To this end, imported motor vehicles, spare parts and petrol were heavily subsidized and were duty free. The colonial government was also interested in regulating road transportation as accidents became rampant as a result of dangerous and furious driving by both Gold Coasters and European drivers. For example, as early as 1908, the colonial government passed the Motor Traffic Ordinance “to protect the public from incompetent and careless driving.”<sup>185</sup> The Ordinance

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<sup>180</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1937-38*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1938, 88.

<sup>181</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Supplement to The Gold Coast Gazette No. 57*. Accra: Government Printer, 1936.

<sup>182</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1936-37*. Accra: Government Printer, 1937, 78.

<sup>183</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1937-38*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1939, 88.

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

<sup>185</sup> Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39,” 21. See also; Government of the Gold Coast, *Ordinances of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Northern Territories*. Accra: Government Printer, 1915 No. 28.

defined who could drive through licensing of drivers of motor vehicles and setting speed limits for the various public thoroughfares.

The cocoa boom in 1920 and subsequent investment in motor vehicles by private individuals increased motor traffic in the Gold Coast. This was accompanied by an increase in motor accidents. In 1922, the police reported 8 fatal and 31 non-fatal accidents.<sup>186</sup> By 1929 these figures were 85 and 431 respectively. These accidents and the rising operational power of motor transport, which challenged the railways, pushed the colonial administration to adopt stricter road traffic policies. Thus, motor traffic regulations from the 1920s had a dual purpose. First, they were to make the roads safer and, second, to make motor transport less profitable to compete with the railways. Taxation became one of the means of controlling the competition between the rail and road transport.

The Gold Coast colonial government argued that motor vehicles contributed little to the revenue of the Gold Coast. Consequently, petrol, which had been duty free from 1915 started to attract an import duty of three pence (3d) per imperial gallon at the end of the First World War.<sup>187</sup> Up to 1925, the colonial government was still hopeful of the survival of the railways because the colonial government argued the Gold Coast lorry owners could not survive in the road transport business as they operated their vehicle uneconomically. However, in reviewing the circumstances the government considered “an enhanced petrol

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<sup>186</sup> Heap, “The Development of Motor Transport in the Gold Coast, 1900–39,” 21.

<sup>187</sup> J. Maxwell, *The Gold Coast Handbook*, 1923. London, 1923, 196.



duty” and “imposed without further delay.”<sup>188</sup> As a result, the duty on petrol doubled to six pence (6d) per imperial gallon in 1927.<sup>189</sup> By 1936 it had reached ten pence (10d) per imperial gallon.<sup>190</sup>

While motor vehicles and spare parts were still free of import duty, licensing became the other avenue to make motor vehicles contribute to government revenue. From 1915, applicants requiring driver’s licence were charged five shilling (5s) each for a licence valid for twelve months.<sup>191</sup> Vehicle owners were also required to licence their vehicles at a fee. This fee ranged between 10 shilling (10) and 3 pound 3 shillings (£10 3s) depending on the weight of the vehicle.<sup>192</sup> In 1925, the colonial government again passed a new Motor Traffic Ordinance. Apart from increasing the fees charged on the licensing of lorries in the Gold Coast, the Ordinance also made governing of vehicles compulsory.<sup>193</sup> While the law aimed to help the government check over speeding

<sup>188</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928-29, 68.

<sup>189</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1932-33*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1934, 50; Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1934-35*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1936, 51. Mr. Frazer of Messrs. Elder’s Road Transport Ltd. described this increase as “a mere fleet-bite”, as lorries were getting bigger every year, maintenance were coming down and running cost were not appreciably higher. He argued that a moderate increase in licence fees on vehicles would not affect the cost of running. See Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Sessional papers No. VI of 1928-29, Report of the Central Province Trade Routes Committee, appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider and make recommendations regarding i) Central Province Railway Rates; ii) the treatment of the ports of Cape Coast and Saltpond on the opening of Takoradi*. Accra, Government Printer, 1928, 9.

<sup>190</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1935-36*. London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1936, 49.

<sup>191</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Ordinances of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Northern Territories*. Accra: Government Printer, 1915, No. 28.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>193</sup> Governors were speed limiters or controllers used to measure and regulate the speed of a vehicle. They were used to set the required engine speed and the vehicle throttle and timing were adjusted by the governor. Governors were also there to protect the engine and the car itself. An engine’s lifespan drops significantly if it’s running at maximum speed at all time because it is

on the roads, it also made motor transport very unprofitable.<sup>194</sup> Fixing the speed of lorry carrying passengers to as low as 16 miles per hour made travelling uncomfortable for passengers. As such, it was designed with the aim of preventing such vehicles from earning sufficient revenue to make passenger-carrying profitable.<sup>195</sup> Consequently, Gold Coast lorry drivers responded to the increasing pressure of taxes in varied ways.<sup>196</sup> The governors that were fixed on motor lorries were tampered with by the drivers. Beyond police check points the drivers operated their vehicles beyond the specified speed limit. The drivers also indulged in overloading of their vehicles so as to earn enough for themselves.<sup>197</sup>

On 15 September 1927, his Excellency, Sir Ransford Slater, appointed a committee headed by C. W. Leese to consider a Fourth Schedule to the Motor Traffic Ordinance No. 1 of 1925 with respect to licence fees on motor vehicles.<sup>198</sup> The Leese Committee considered whether to differentiate between fees payable by private cars and commercial lorries and also whether the existing rates for the various classes of vehicles were appropriate. The members of the Committee were unanimous in their view that the “the present fees are too low, and that the present scale bears no true proportion to the annual charges for maintenance and upkeep

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being made to work much harder than it normally would. Government of the Gold Coast, *Ordinances of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Northern Territories and The British Sphere of Togoland*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925 No. 1.

<sup>194</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Ordinances of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Northern Territories and The British Sphere of Togoland*. Accra: Government Printer, 1925 No. 1; Government of the Gold Coast, *Report of a Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider the Licence Fees on Motor Vehicles and to make recommendations in regard to the Motor Traffic Ordinance or Regulations*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>198</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *The Gold Coast Gazette*. Accra: Government Printer, October 29, 1927.

of roads.”<sup>199</sup> Thus, the committee recommended inter alia, that a distinction be made between private motor vehicles and motor vehicles used for commercial purposes. Thus, generally the rates on motor lorries should be increased, and that on lorries carrying fare-paying passengers should attract additional rates.<sup>200</sup>

Following the report of the Leese Committee, in 1928, the colonial government differentiated between the licence fees payable in respect of private motor vehicles and motor lorries used for commercial purposes as shown in Table 2.7 below. Seeking to generate revenue for road maintenance, the Committee argued “that motor lorries carrying passengers should contribute an additional quota to the cost of maintenance of the roads both on account of the greater earnings of such vehicles and their continuous use while cocoa-carrying lorries are laid up after the [cocoa] season.”<sup>201</sup> A new licence fee for carrying passengers was also introduced in the Gold Coast.<sup>202</sup>

Table 2. 7 Licence Fees on Motor vehicles

	<b>Per Annum</b>	<b>Per Quarter</b>
Motor Cycle with or without sidecar	£1	10/-
Motor car not exceeding 15 cwt. net weight	£2	£1
Motor car exceeding 15 cwt. net weight but not exceeding 25cwt. net weight	£5	£2
Motor car exceeding 25 cwt. net weight	£8	£3
Motor Lorry not exceeding 25cwt. net weight	£12	£4
Motor Lorry exceeding 25cwt. net weight but not exceeding 35cwt. net weight.	£16	£5
Motor Lorry exceeding 35cwt. net weight	£20	£6

<sup>199</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928-29, 77.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>201</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928-29, 77.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*



Source: *Report of a Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider the Licence Fees on Motor Vehicles and to make recommendations in regard to the Motor Traffic Ordinance or Regulations*, Government Printer, Accra, 1928.

Table 2. 8 Licences to carry passengers for fare.

	Per annum	Per Quarter
For a licence to carry not more than 10 persons	£6	£2
For a licence to carry more than 10 persons and not more than 20 persons	£12	£4
For a licence to carry more than 20 persons	£20	£6

Source: *Report of a Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider the Licence Fees on Motor Vehicles and to make recommendations in regard to the Motor Traffic Ordinance or Regulations*, Government Printer, Accra, 1928; Government of the Gold Coast: *Ordinances of the Gold Coast, Ashanti, Northern Territories and The British Sphere of Togoland*. Accra, Government Printer, 1925 No. 1

In arriving at the above rates in table 2.7 and 2.8, the Committee considered the question of mechanical governing of speed. Representatives of the motor transport firms who attended the meetings of the Committee argued strongly for an increase in the governed speed from 16 miles to 25 miles per hour.<sup>203</sup> However, the Committee, headed by C. W. Leese, found the governing of vehicles ineffective in preventing over speeding as drivers were tampering with the governors.<sup>204</sup> Thus, the committee proposed to abolish the governing of vehicles. As the abolishing of governors entailed some extra degree of wear and tear of the roads and an increased amount of police supervision, the new licence fees for

<sup>203</sup> During the committee's meetings the following individuals representing motor transport firms in the Gold Coast offered their opinions as witnesses. R. Sharpe (Comptroller of customs), Col. R. A. de Rose (Swanzy's Motor Transport Department), F. Booth (Messrs Bartholomew & Co.), Frazer (Messrs Elders' Road Transport), and Ocansey (Transport Contractor). Col. De Rose, Booth, Frazer and Ocansey represented large large transport companies attached to trading firms in the Gold Coast. There was no indication that an African Lorry operator attended the committee's meeting to provide information.

<sup>204</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report of a Committee appointed by His Excellency the Governor to consider the Licence Fees on Motor Vehicles and to make recommendations in regard to the Motor Traffic Ordinance or Regulations*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928.



lorries were justified, the Committee argued. Indeed, higher rates had been imposed in Nigeria with the same purposed and applied from 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1928.<sup>205</sup>

Further efforts by the colonial government to tighten control over the motor transport sector led to the promulgation of a new Motor Traffic Ordinance in 1934.<sup>206</sup> By 1934, drivers had already begun forming themselves into commercial motor unions. The MTO 1934 made the motor unions more visible in colonial archives as almost all the motor unions in the Gold Coast objected to certain parts of this ordinance.<sup>207</sup> The issue of the rise of commercial motor unions and their activities at both local and national level will be a matter that will be revisited in the next chapter. However, one aspect of the Motor Traffic Ordinance 1934 that attracted the anger of many prospective and actual drivers was the rule for them to have some literacy competence in order to drive.<sup>208</sup>

### Conclusion

Transportation infrastructure became important in the Gold Coast from 1900 as the colonial government sought to export more resources in order to increase revenue. To the colonial government, the most effective mode of transportation was railway. As such the colonial government invested in the development of railways and owned the government railways. The colonial government also invested in harbour development and owned it. The investments

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<sup>205</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928-29, 77.

<sup>206</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Executive Council paper, Motor Traffic Regulation.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

were managed through government-owned transport departments that were to ensure that the colonial government recouped its investment.

As the colonial government focused on railway and harbour infrastructure, road, the third mode of transportation enjoyed minimal investment. Thus, local people, particularly, chiefs, invested in road building and these roads became known as pioneer roads. In the absence of a major government institution to actually take charge of the movement of people and goods from one place to the other, road transportation was dominated by several private entrepreneurs who owned commercial lorries. Gold Coasters eventually dominated road transportation and were labelled 'pirates' in the colonial economy by their European competitors. Pirates because, the Gold Coast entrepreneurs, when on the road, were always on the lookout for passengers, goods and anything that needed to be moved from one place to the other.

Since the development of these modes of communication, railway, water and road, was not directly coordinated by the colonial government there was duplication of transportation services in the Gold Coast. This triggered uneconomic competition, particularly between railway and road transportation. From 1925, the colonial government sought to resolve this rail versus road competition in the Gold Coast in favour of the railway. In other words, the colonial government sought to protect the railway as it had invested heavily in railway infrastructure. Thus, from 1925 the colonial government's policies for regulating road transportation always had a secondary objective, the protection of the railways from competition from road transport.

Gold Coasters who had dominated road transportation began forming associations to protect their economic livelihood as colonial policies were enacted to regulate road transportation. The history of the creation, organisation, activities, struggles, achievements, lifespan and significance of these associations in the Gold Coast from 1930 to 1950 form the subject matter of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER THREE

### TRADE UNIONISM IN THE MOTOR TRANSPORT INDUSTRY, 1930-1950

#### Introduction

The early decades of the twentieth century saw the development of motor transport in the Gold Coast. As discussed in chapter two, colonial official's conceptualized 'development' as synonymous to improvement in railway infrastructure and much attention was paid to the construction of railways. Regardless of the focus on railway infrastructure, the colonial government provided some infrastructure of roads that facilitated road transportation in the Gold Coast. Commercial motor transportation developed outside the direct influence of the colonial government. Belatedly, the colonial government began providing the regulatory framework to control road transportation.

Jennifer Hart's 2011 article, *Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana*, argues that Gold Coast drivers adopted trade unionism in an effort to best protest their interest, in relation to road traffic laws, to the colonial government.<sup>1</sup> While this is true, in forming trade unions, the motor drivers were more concerned about the ruinous competition among themselves, a competition for passengers and goods for which they flouted road traffic regulations. The chapter focuses on the emergence of several motor unions in the Gold Coast, their effort to standardize fares and define routes for their

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Hart, "Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana," *International Review of Social History* 59, 22, December 2014, 185–209.



members, their protest against colonial motor traffic ordinances and the eventual amalgamation of these motor unions into one national union.

### Lorry Parks

As the use of motor lorries increased, the colonial government was bedevilled with congestion in the major cities of the Gold Coast. From the latter part of the 1920s, the colonial government began considering the suitability of creating lorry parks at several places in the cities of the Gold Coast in an effort to decongest them through the various Town Councils.<sup>2</sup> James William Jordan defines a lorry park as “a large empty field, often an acre or more in sizeable towns, near the centre of the town. In smaller villages it may simply be an open place near the gas pumping station. Typically, there is no shelter from the sun or rain but women and children could be found selling food to passengers.”<sup>3</sup> The Gold Coast colonial government on the other hand considered a lorry park as “an area declared by a transport control officer to be an official parking place for motor vehicles.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Town Councils Ordinance was first applied to Accra in 1898. Subsequently, town councils were established in Cape Coast and Sekondi and they were charged with the management of these towns. They derived their revenue from house and land rates, various licences and an annual grant-in-aid from government. The councils were invested with powers undertake all such acts as may be necessary for the conservancy of the town and for the preservation of public health. See Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1932-33*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1934, 7. For detailed discussion of opposition to the formation of the town councils see Dominic Fortescue, “The Accra Crowd, the Asafo, and the Opposition to the Municipal Corporations Ordinance, 1924-25,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines*, 24, 3, 1990, 348–375.

<sup>3</sup> James William Jordan, “Role Segregation for Fun and Profit: The Daily Behavior of the West African Lorry Driver,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 48, 1, 1978, 30–46.

<sup>4</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO17/1/57, Scheme for the Control of the Operation of Motor Vehicles, 1942.

On 2 September 1929, the first lorry park, the Rowe Road Lorry Park or the Central Lorry Park, was opened in Accra.<sup>5</sup> Subsequently, other central lorry parks were opened in Sekondi and Koforidua in 1929, Kumasi in 1930 and Cape Coast in 1931.<sup>6</sup> The lorry park was a “means of relieving congestion of traffic in parts of the town where the lorries previously congregated.”<sup>7</sup> The location of the lorry parks, close to the various central markets explains the functional nature of the lorry parks. The lorry parks were purposely established near central markets, primarily, to facilitate the easy movement of goods and passengers in the cities. This is what informs Michael Stasik view that lorry parks were “gateways between urban and rural areas and interregional and international intersection.”<sup>8</sup> Indeed, when the Rowe Road Lorry Park was opened, the Accra Town Council immediately reported that the lorry park had contributed to decongesting the city, particularly the area around Station Road.<sup>9</sup>

By 1934, the spatial growth of the cities necessitated the need for extra lorry parks in other parts of the cities. Accra, for instance, had experienced an increase in population from 18,574 in 1911 to 38,049 in 1921 and 61,556 in

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<sup>5</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Accra Town Council 1929-1930*. Accra: Government Printer, 1930. For a brief account of how Rowe Road came by its name see Samuel Aniegye Ntewusu, “Settling in and Holding on. A Socio-economic History of Northern Traders and Transporters in Accra’s Tudu: 1908-2008,” PhD Dissertation, Leiden University, Leiden, 2011, 56.

<sup>6</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 20/1/20 Accra Town Council Annual Reports 1929-1930; CSO 20/1/16 Municipal Annual Reports 1930-31.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Michael Stasik, “Roadside Involvement, Or How Many People Do You Need to Run a Lorry Park?,” in Kurt Beck, Gabriel Klaeger and Michael Stasik, (eds.), *The Making of the African Road*. Leiden: Brill, 2017, 24–57.

<sup>9</sup> Station Road is now Kwame Nkrumah Avenue.

1931.<sup>10</sup> The increasing population pushed a lot of people to live outside the central points close to the central lorry parks, and without lorry parks, drivers engaged in street parking. As such, motor drivers called for the establishment of more lorry parks, even though the central lorry parks were not being utilized fully. The colonial government appreciated the need for more lorry parks, however, officials wondered why the existing lorry parks were not fully used.<sup>11</sup> In 1938, the commissioner of the Gold Coast police, Louis S. D. H. Venour, responded to the concerns of the colonial government by expressing the views of lorry drivers. He pointed out that;

The Lorry drivers object, not to the size of the present lorry park, but to the fact that there are no lorry parks in the other parts of the town. They claim that passengers from Jamestown, for instance, will not walk all the way to Rowe Road to board a lorry. They are quite prepared to go on using the present park for the purpose of picking up the passengers who assemble there - but people living in other quarters of the town expect to be able to jump a lorry at the nearest street corner - and so the practice of street parking has gone up.<sup>12</sup>

The lorry parks became the central point from which drivers operated. As such, the town councils, in consultation with the drivers, formulated bye-laws to regulate the behaviour of lorry drivers.<sup>13</sup> While the town councils worked to decongest the cities, drivers aimed at ensuring fair competition among

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<sup>10</sup> Samuel S. Quarcoopome, "The Impact of Urbanisation on the Socio-Political History of the Ga Mashie People of Accra: 1877-1957," PhD Dissertation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, 1993, 75.

<sup>11</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO14/1/270 AG. Commissioner, Gold Coast Police to the Honourable Colonial Secretary, 3/3/1938.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Accra Town Council 1929-1930*. Accra: Government Printer, 1930. 13.

themselves. Thus, as part of the town council bye-laws, drivers of lorries were to begin and end their journeys in the lorry parks.<sup>14</sup> The town councils also defined the entry points and exit points at the various lorry parks so as to ensure orderliness. The town council lorry park bye-laws also made smoking or the use of naked light at the lorry parks an offence.<sup>15</sup>

The lorry parks were created with public funds, as such, it became one of the revenue generating avenues, in addition to revenue from house and land rates, and various licences, for the town councils. The town councils charged fees for the use of the lorry parks by drivers. For instance, when the lorry park bye-laws came into effect from 1929, a fee of six pence (6d) per lorry and eight pence (8d) per trailer was payable to the attendant at the entrance of the park for each day which the lorry park was used by the motor car and trailer.<sup>16</sup>

While the lorry parks functioned as an active space for commercial transport providers, it also attracted hawkers and porters against lorry park bye-laws.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the lorry parks, served as an interactive space for several groups, including passengers, drivers, mates, hawkers and porters.<sup>18</sup> Even at the lorry

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<sup>14</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO14/1/270, Gold Coast Colony, Bye-Laws made under section 38(2) (a) (iv) and (ix) of the Town Councils Ordinance as enacted by section 20 of the Town Councils Law Amendment Ordinance, 1927. See also, Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Accra Town Council 1929-1930*. Accra: Government Printer, 1930. 13.

<sup>15</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM23/1/836, Lorry Parks- C.P.

<sup>16</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO14/1/270, Gold Coast Colony, Bye-Laws made under section 38(2) (a) (iv) and (ix) of the Town Councils Ordinance as enacted by section 20 of the Town Councils Law Amendment Ordinance, 1927

<sup>17</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO14/1/270, Gold Coast Colony, Bye-Laws made under section 38(2) (a) (iv) and (ix) of the Town Councils Ordinance as enacted by section 20 of the Town Councils Law Amendment Ordinance, 1927.

<sup>18</sup> Not many studies have been done on lorry parks and its interactive spaces. Paul Stoller writing on Niger gives a glimpse of the social and cultural interaction at a bush taxi station. see Paul Stoller, *The Taste of Ethnographic Things: The Senses in Anthropology*. University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989.



park, Paul Nugent suggests that a prospective passenger was “likely to be accosted not just by traders, but also by billboards proclaiming the virtues of Maggie cubes or Club Tonic,” as the lorry park became a place for companies to advertise their products.<sup>19</sup>

For the lorry drivers, the lorry parks became the rallying point, where they shared ideas and met to discuss issues pertaining to their economic wellbeing. It became the formative grounds for the lorry unions and as such they had their offices, mostly kiosks, at the lorry parks. The lorry parks discussed above were established and maintained by town council officials from the beginning. While the town councils managed the lorry parks, the solicitation of passengers for lorries was not part of their business. One of the major groups at the lorry park was the Motor Transport Union. Since the beginning of the establishment of the motor transport unions, they operated with three divisions, that is, the transport owners, the drivers, and the lorry park “Bookmen.”

Figure 3. 1 Lorry Park, Kumasi 1925



Source: Basel Mission Online Archive, Qu-30.012.0084.

<sup>19</sup> Paul Nugent, “Do Nations Have Stomachs? Food, Drink and Imagined Community in Africa,” *Africa Spectrum*, 45, 3, 2010, 87–113.

Figure 3. 2 Bus Stop at Odumase-Krobo, Gold Coast, 1945



Source: Information Services Department (ISD), Accra, Ghana.



Figure 3. 3 Lorry Park Kumasi

Figure 3. 4 Tamale Lorry Park 1955



Source: Information Services Department, Accra Ghana.

### **Motor Unions in the Gold Coast**

Following the establishment of the first lorry park in 1929 and the subsequent development of others in the 1930s transport operators began forming motor unions. The motor unions operating in the Gold Coast in the early 1930s included Drivers Association of the Western Province, Gold Coast Drivers and Mechanics Association, based in Saltpond, Cape Coast Motor Drivers Associations, and Gold Coast Motor Unions, headquartered in Koforidua.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent of these early motor transport trade unions was the Motor Transport Union in Asante (MTUA). According to the Chief Inspector of Labour, Captain J.R. Dickinson, this MTUA was formed in 1931 with a membership of

<sup>20</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM23/1/649 Motor Traffic and Drivers.



1,500.<sup>21</sup> This MTUA represented all the motor drivers and owners in Bekwai, Sunyani, Wenchi and Kumasi.<sup>22</sup>

The motor unions were organised like the guilds that dominated the early phase of trade union development in the Gold Coast from 1910.<sup>23</sup> In 1931, the Attorney-General of the Gold Coast, S. S. Abrahams, expressed the view that the Gold Coast people were able to combine effectively when he was tasked to draft the Trade Unions Ordinance for the Gold Coast.<sup>24</sup> He indicated among other things that;

There are in existence to my knowledge a Carpenters' Association and a Motor Drivers Association... The Cocoa Federation whose activities have been so prominent recently is of course an association which falls within the definition of a trade union in the English Acts as it was formed for the purpose of imposing restrictive conditions on the business of cacao-selling. There have been in the past, and perhaps there still exist, other Associations of a trade protection quality which equally with the Cocoa Federation are trade unions. For instance the *Gold Coast Spectator* in October 1928 contained a paragraph to the effect that "the Shopkeepers Association had passed a by-law forbidding the crediting of goods to clients". I am of the view that the African has an instinct for combination. During the recent cocoa war the local press stated more than once that the native had learned the value of combination, and certainly the duration of the hold-up seems an indication that he possesses cohesiveness.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>21</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department*. Accra: Government Printer, 1938-39, 12.

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/3/54 Memorandum on suggested Trade Union Legislation.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*



When the labour department was established in 1938, one of its functions was to report on the development of trade unions in the Gold Coast. In his preliminary report on trade unions and labour issues, Captain J.R. Dickinson, the Chief Inspector of Labour acknowledged that “the people of the Gold Coast had always possessed a capacity for organisation and collective bargaining seems to come naturally to the people of this country.”<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Dickinson suggested in his report that “even Thieves and blind men were also able to organise under their own “head thief-man” and chief blind man respectively.”<sup>27</sup>

The motor unions were governed by well-crafted constitutions. The constitutions opened up membership for any individual with vested interest in motor transportation. This notwithstanding, the motor unions came to be defined by three groups. Drivers formed the nucleus of the motor unions that emerged. There were owner-drivers and paid drivers. Owner-drivers owned the lorries they drove and were responsible for all aspects of the operations. They were accountable to themselves and all profits earned accrued to their purse. Paid-drivers on the other hand, engaged in commercial transportation on behalf of the real owners, who may or may not be members of the union.<sup>28</sup> The arrangement

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<sup>26</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/3/54 Memorandum on suggested Trade Union Legislation.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> In 1983, King Ampaw documented the life of a lorry driver in his film ‘Kukurantumi- Road to Accra.’ Kukurantumi was a small village in Ghana, and in local dialect, it means ‘the place where everything is too heavy to pick up.’ In Kukurantumi, there was very little in the modern sense to hold a person, no bright lights, no discos or money, none of the enticements of the city. The main character in the film was Addey, a lorry driver who plied his trade between Kukurantumi and Accra. As Hart argues, the lorry, as a sign of modernity, conferred a certain social status on drivers, in this case Addey among his kinsmen. His movement between Kukurantumi and Accra indicated interaction between the city and the village, as city dwellers constantly sent messages and other items of modernity to Kukurantumi. Addey and his lorry owner, Alhaji, had several disagreements over the daily sales. As such, when Addey had an accident with the lorry he loses his job. The only alternative was to return to his previous life as a farmer, eking out subsistence

between owners and the paid-drivers varied, mostly defined by the relationship between the two parties. Initially, attempts were made by the motor unions to define the relationship along wage work. That is, where drivers were paid wages at the end of the month. However, the most dominant arrangement was for the paid-driver to make daily payment or sales to the owner.<sup>29</sup> Thereafter, whatever was left belonged to the paid-driver, after the cost of petrol had been deducted. Again, these payments were either collected daily or at the end of the week depending on the relationship between the lorry owner and the paid driver.<sup>30</sup>

At the lorry parks, passengers were mostly met by some people who posed the same question; “Where are you going?” These people were not gangsters trying to snatch luggage of the passenger away but they are “touts,” the third group in the driver unions.<sup>31</sup> They energetically went about their business of looking for passengers for a particular lorry.<sup>32</sup> Sometimes they shared the loads of

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level existence from the soil. Regarding farming as a reduction in his social status, Addey opted to relocate to Accra and find another lorry to work with. See “Kukurantumi – Road to Accra,” *West Africa*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1984, 1303-1304.

<sup>29</sup> See the film “Kukurantumi – Road to Accra,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZPVKfb0iz4I>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> They are also known as Overseers or Touts. Touts are free-lance workers at railway stations, airports, ferry points, and especially motor-parks, who undertake the self-imposed responsibility of recruiting and organizing passengers who wished to travel by road, and for this work they receive a fee, or more appropriately, a ‘commission’, that is generally paid by drivers of the vehicles just before their departure. See Enoch E. Okpara, “The Role of Touts in Passenger Transport in Nigeria,” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26, 2, 1988, 327–335; Daniel E. Agbiboa, “Informal Urban Governance and Predatory Politics in Africa: The Role of Motor-Park Touts in Lagos,” *African Affairs*, 117, 466, 2018, 62–82. See also Enrique Martino, “Touts and Despots: Recruiting Assemblages of Contract Labour in Fernando Pó and the Gulf of Guinea, 1858-1979,” Unpublished PhD Thesis, Berlin: Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 2015. While the archives presents evidence of the names, touts, bookmen, and overseers, being used interchangeably, this study will adopt “Bookmen” since it is easy to relate and identify these group by this name within the Ghanaian context.

<sup>32</sup> Okpara, “The Role of Touts in Passenger Transport in Nigeria,” 330.

luggage of the passenger and end up picking quarrels among themselves.<sup>33</sup> They did not drag the passenger into this brawl.

The role of “booking” developed as commercial vehicles became abundant and there was fierce competition among driver for passengers. The “bookmen” were mainly responsible for getting passengers and loading the vehicles with goods by shouting out the destination of the vehicle they were loading. They also functioned by ensuring that the lorries were arranged properly at the lorry parks and loaded on first-come, first-served basis. In some instances, the activities of the “bookmen” extended to the collection of fares and the handling of luggage.<sup>34</sup> Thus, in most cases the driver’s only business was to relax and wait for the lorry to get full so he could drive. Throughout the development of the motor unions, the lorry park “bookmen,” I demonstrate in later pages, has been a major source of instability to the motor unions. Although they worked under the cloak of the motor union(s) they were uncontrolled by it. The issues pertaining to the “bookmen” will be discussed fully throughout the next chapter.

When these mostly self-employed men, drivers and lorry owners, joined together to form their motor unions, they were concerned not only about colonial policies, but about the unhealthy competition that existed among themselves. A competition for which reason they were tagged by their European competitors as ‘pirates’ in the colonial economy.<sup>35</sup> These indigenous transport operators were always on the lookout for passengers and goods on the roads. Indigenous motor

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<sup>33</sup> Okpara, “The Role of Touts in Passenger Transport in Nigeria,” 330.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> See Chapter two, page 64.

operators were flexible with their routes, schedules and the type of goods they transported. They were also able to vary their fares so as to beat any competition. By the 1930s, when the motor unions began to emerge, most of the big European transport companies were out of the competition. As such, the Gold Coast lorry owners were interested in having a governing body which would aim to maintain internal control of members and regulate the activities of drivers. This, the lorry owners and the colonial government anticipated would help curb driver offences against the Motor Traffic Ordinance (MTO) and reduce the number of motor traffic cases at the courts. Thus, the motor unions found solace in operating within the bye-laws of the lorry parks and required all motor drivers to load specifically from designated lorry parks and to end their journeys in the lorry parks.<sup>36</sup>

The formation of the motor unions was also to protect the interest of its members internally. This was the concern of the lorry driver representatives from Accra, Ho, Cape Coast, Koforidua and other areas, with the exception of Keta and Asante, when they met on the compound of one Martin Adu on 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1938.<sup>37</sup> After extensive deliberation, members agreed to standardize the pay of their employed drivers in the Gold Coast.<sup>38</sup> Thus, members agreed that “every lorry owner paid his driver £4. 10/ a month without chop money.”<sup>39</sup> For lorry owners concerned about the honesty of their drivers, in terms of revenue generated, the motor unions provided an avenue to monitor the activities of

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<sup>36</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 14/1/270 Lorry Parks, Accra.

<sup>37</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 29/6/13 E. K. Aning, Sergeant in Charge/Suhum to the Senior Assist. Superintendent, Eastern Province, 18<sup>th</sup> September, 1938.

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

<sup>39</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 29/6/13 Commissioner, Eastern Province to Colonial Secretary, 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1938.



drivers. The unions also aimed at building trust between passengers and themselves. Thus, the security of passengers and their merchandise were taken into consideration, as punitive measures were put in place for driver's mates who misbehaved. Per the rules of the unions, any driver's mate who took items belonging to passengers was to be fined 10/.<sup>40</sup>

In unionizing, the motor drivers and owners also sought to protect themselves from emerging colonial policies that were detrimental to their economic survival.<sup>41</sup> As a result, one of the purposes of the motor unions was to advise and guide lorry drivers on new legislation that the colonial government promulgated. Indeed, one of the most significant provisions of the constitutions of the motor unions was providing free legal representation to motor drivers who infringed the MTO. To this end, every driver who contravened the law was represented by a lawyer at the expense of their unions. Their fines were also paid by the unions.<sup>42</sup>

### **Motor Transport Union of Asante (MTUA) in focus**

This section will discuss briefly the Motor Transport Union of Asante (MTUA), as a model union whose organisation and activities illustrated the nature of motor unions in the Gold Coast.<sup>43</sup> Two reasons account for this. First, of all the

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<sup>40</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 29/6/13 Commissioner, Eastern Province to Colonial Secretary, 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1938.

<sup>41</sup> Jennifer Hart, "Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana," *Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis*, 59, 2014, 185-209.

<sup>42</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG/1/10/7 Motor Transport Union Ashanti, Bye-Laws, Rules and Regulations.

<sup>43</sup> I acknowledge that Ashanti is the anglicized pronunciation of Asante which is the proper pronunciation. Documents relating to this union all use Ashanti instead of Asante. Throughout this write up Asante will be used unless in cases where I am quoting or making reference to a specific document with Ashanti as the title.

motor unions that existed during the 1930s, MTUA was the only motor union that more primary documents were discovered. Two, it had a wider coverage than all the unions that existed in the 1930s. The MTUA was already operating along provincial boundaries with membership throughout Asante and the Northern Territories.

Asante was one of the areas where motor lorries and motor transport quickly became popular among the people. Although Asante had no overseas trade apart from the southern part of the Gold Coast, it maintained a large overland trade through the Northern Territories to the Western part of the Sahara. This early Sahara trade was conducted through the use of large numbers of donkeys in conveying kola, salt and other merchandise goods.<sup>44</sup> When motor vehicles came into general use from 1920, commercial road transportation became a very important industry in Asante. Motor lorries became very instrumental in this inland trade and ensured growth and prosperity, by redefining trade through the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast.<sup>45</sup> For instance, a journey that took one month was being completed in just three or four days with lorries.<sup>46</sup> The 1925-26 annual report of the Government of the Gold Coast on Asante captured this development succinctly;

With the extraordinary development of Roads that has taken place in Ashanti during the last few years it is pleasing to note that the Native of Ashanti is reaping the full benefit. He is going in for Motor Transport himself in

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<sup>44</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on Ashanti for the year 1925-26*. Accra: Government Printer, 1926, 7.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

increasing numbers every year and of course is getting his commodities cheaper and realising a much better price for his produce.... Roads also are now being more consolidated enabling heavier loads to be hauled with the result that Motor Transport is now being carried on under very competitive rates which in turn reflects very much in favour of the Native generally.<sup>47</sup>

Subsequently, the 1927-28 annual report on Asante on the other hand observed that “the number of African owner drivers increases daily, likewise the passenger traffic.”<sup>48</sup> The increasing participation of Asante people in commercial motor transportation contributed enormously to the general competitiveness of motor transportation as the ideal form of transportation. The competition was so fierce that by 1925 “a large European motor transport company ceased operating in Ashanti and many of the larger Syrian lorry owners are disposing of their fleets presumably due to the fact that they are unable to compete with the ever-increasing African owner-driver.”<sup>49</sup>

As a consequence of the increased participation of Asante people in motor transport, the MTUA from its inception in 1931 had about 1,500 members.<sup>50</sup> The MTUA was formed with the Asantehene, Nana Sir Osei Agyemang Prempeh II, as the patron. This was not surprising as most early unions were mainly associated

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<sup>47</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on Ashanti for the year 1925-26*. Accra: Government Printer, 1926, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on Ashanti for the year 1927-1928*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 6.

<sup>49</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on Ashanti for the year 1927-1928*. Accra: Government Printer, 1928, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department*. Accra: Government Printer, 1938-39, 12.

with and established under the Asante paramount chieftain.<sup>51</sup> At its inception the MTUA had Kofi Norno as the first president, and L. S. Gruchy, Codjoe Ayittey Yawson and Kwabena Ansah as the first three vice presidents. The first treasurer was Amadu Baba, while the first secretary was William Winful Taylor. The union had about thirty councillors who offered legal services to members.<sup>52</sup> Thus, members enjoyed free legal advice on matters arising out of use or ownership of motor vehicles or trailers and also free legal defence when charged under the MTO.<sup>53</sup> Every member of the MTUA was entitled to free bail when charged under any section of the MTO. The union also provided welfare benefits, mostly financial support, to members in times of bereavement, marriage, childbirth, and ill health. Soft loans were also granted to members in cases of accidents and misfortune.<sup>54</sup>

Membership of the MTUA was opened to any lorry owner, driver, or any other person who by reason of their position or experience in matters relating to the motor transport industry appeared to be able to render assistance in promoting the objects of the union.<sup>55</sup> Membership was subject to the payment of a membership fee of five shilling (5s), and a monthly subscription of ten shilling (10s).<sup>56</sup> A tax of six pence (6d) was collected from lorries belonging to non-

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<sup>51</sup> The Ga Mantse (Ga Paramount Chief) and Okyehene (Akyem Paramount Chief) appear frequently in documents relating to the strike action of the motor unions in the Gold Coast. This strike will be discussed in the subsequent pages.

<sup>52</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG/1/10/7 Motor Transport Union Ashanti, Bye-Laws, Rules and Regulations.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*



paying members anytime they entered Kumasi.<sup>57</sup> General meetings were held at irregular intervals, sometimes monthly, at which members from outside branches were welcomed.<sup>58</sup>

In forming the MTUA, members were conscious of the ruinous competition that existed among drivers, a competition for which they flouted most of the provisions of the MTO. Thus, the MTUA aimed at helping members to understand and navigate provisions in the MTO through education. The MTUA worked to make competition fairer among the drivers through standardization of rates charged for road transport. In 1934, the MTUA expressed the view that:

at the present highly competitive rates of road transport a lorry owner who does not encourage his drivers to carry on his vehicles either an overload or several persons in excess of the lawful number is certain to lose money on every trip made by those vehicles: and that could a standard minimum rate of say one penny per mile be sanctioned by law, with penalties against infringements of that minimum rate, it would be possible for the owners and drivers to earn a livelihood without breaking the law as regards overloading and carrying persons in excess.<sup>59</sup>

The MTUA also argued that standardizing fares would help check overloading and over speeding. Since the major cause of infringement of the MTO was huge under-cutting of fares and charges by drivers as they competed for both passengers and goods.<sup>60</sup> To this extent, every member was required to adhere strictly to the standard rates as may be in force from time to time, and no member

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<sup>57</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG/1/10/7 Motor Transport Union Ashanti, Bye-Laws, Rules and Regulations.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> PRAAD Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Senior Commissioner of Police/Northern to the Acting Chief Commissioner of Ashanti, 22nd July 1934.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

was to undercut such standard rates. Infringement of this bye-law on standardized rates attracted a fine not exceeding one pound one shilling.<sup>61</sup> Members were barred from taking passengers of other union members when driving a commercial vehicle. A breach of this bye-law by any member rendered the offender liable to a fine not exceeding one pound one shilling.<sup>62</sup> Notwithstanding these efforts by the MTUA, the union lacked the backing of the colonial government in enforcing some of its policies, particularly for non-union members. Indeed, when the union sought the colonial government's backing for some of its bye-laws, one commentary read as follows:

As far as I am aware the Motor Transport Union (Ashanti) is merely a number of Transport owners and drivers who have got together and elected a President, Secretary etc. It is not by law established and only recognized by courtesy. There is no reason why many a dozen such unions should not be formed in Ashanti. Authority could not be given such a body to issue licence to those carrying on the calling of "Collector" or to penalize others who wish to carry on this business but are not members of the union or licenced by it.<sup>63</sup>

Meanwhile, the MTUA began issuing tickets to passengers and had collectors and inspectors who ensured that members charged the minimum rates agreed upon.<sup>64</sup> The MTUA operated from several lorry parks in the city of Kumasi and its outskirts. This allowed it effective control over the drivers and the goods they carried. Indeed, on several major roads the MTUA had temporary

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<sup>61</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast, ADM23/1/649 District Commissioner, Saltpond to the Commissioner of the Central Province, Cape Coast, Saltpond Lorry Drivers Association, 18<sup>th</sup> March 1938; PRAAD, Kumasi ARG/1/10/7 Motor Transport Union Ashanti, Bye-Laws, Rules and Regulations.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> PRAAD Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Chief Commissioner Ashanti, 17<sup>th</sup> May 1935.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

structures from which they carried out a system of “road checking.”<sup>65</sup> This system of road checking allowed them to verify the amount of fares collected by their drivers, so as to discourage dishonesty on the part of drivers. Interestingly, one of these checkpoints on the Mampong road became a source of great discomfort for the MTUA from 1934, as the Kumasi Public Health Board (KPHB) refused to grant lease for the use of a land opposite its vaccination station.<sup>66</sup> The KPHB, which was the equivalent of the town councils that operated in other provincial towns, started functioning from 1 July 1925 and one of its duties was to grant and lease Government land in Kumasi and collect the rents thereof.<sup>67</sup> In the ensuing confrontation, the KPHB argued that the presence of the MTUA’s inspection post and the creation of a lorry park in the vicinity would cause traffic congestion at the vaccination station.<sup>68</sup> This, led to friction between the lorries halted by the union and those halted by the medical authorities, hindering the work of the medical authorities at the vaccination station, which included not only medical examination and vaccination but also the bathing and shaving of some 800/900 kaya-kaya boys each month.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> PRAAD Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Secretary Motor Transport Union Ashante to His Honour, The Chief Commissioner of Asante, Kumasi 26<sup>th</sup> September 1937.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Kumasi on the Kumasi Public Health Board*, Accra: Government Printer, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1927.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>69</sup> Kaya in Hausa language means luggage, load or goods. Kayakaya in this context refers to mainly freelance head porters who operated at market centres and lorry parks. With more goods and passengers coming into the city centres from the hinterland, the activities of these Kayakaya boys increased in the city centres. Kayayo refer to their female counterparts.

## The Motor Traffic Ordinance 1934

As indicated in chapter two, the motor unions protested the MTO 1934. The MTO of 1934 brought stricter control to road transportation than the previous ones. The legislation aimed at curtailing gross overloading of vehicles. For instance, Regulation No. 31 of 1934 which aimed at stopping gross overloading read that, “No motor vehicle shall carry any goods or persons on its roof, canopy or tailboard.”<sup>70</sup> Again, Regulation 23(1) and the seventh schedule to Regulation No. 24 imposed restrictions on the carrying capacity of commercial vehicles and use of roads.<sup>71</sup> Four-wheeled commercial vehicles were not to carry loads not more than 80 per cent of their net weight.<sup>72</sup> This meant that a lorry of 31cwts net weight which from 1925 was allowed to carry 39cwts maximum load had its maximum load cut down to 24cwts.<sup>73</sup>

Furthermore, to curb abuse, with regard to overloading, the colonial government through the MTO of 1934 adopted a new system of taxation for commercial vehicles.<sup>74</sup> By this system, licence fees payable on vehicles for registration were charged on the gross weight of the vehicles.<sup>75</sup> For most commercial vehicles this amounted to a doubling of their licence fees. Trailer on

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<sup>70</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Motor Traffic Ordinance, 1934.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Director of Public Works to the Hon. Ag. Colonial Secretary, 1<sup>st</sup> October, 1934.

<sup>73</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Motor Transport Union Asante to His Excellency, The Acting Governor, Accra, Petition against certain sections of the Motor Traffic Regulation 1935, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1934.

<sup>74</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 “The Overloading Bogy may soon be eliminated,” *Motor Transport*, September 8, 1934; Editorial, Eliminating “Overloading” by change in Taxation system.

<sup>75</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 R. Harris, General Manager, The United Africa Company Limited to The Honourable, The Director of Public Works, Motor Traffic Ordinance 1934, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1934.



the other hand paid six times more.<sup>76</sup> On 24 September 1934, the MTUA wrote to Acting Governor of the Gold Coast, Geoffrey Northcote, and pointed out that “great hardship will be placed on owners with consequent loss to many people who are now depending on the Motor Transport Industry.”<sup>77</sup> MTUA further indicated that “recently, licence [fees] on vehicles and petrol duty have been increased and we are now paying over 120 per annum for each vehicle in licence and petrol duties alone, which together with the depression in trade, make any further measures calculated to reduce the earning capacity of vehicle very burdensome to us.”<sup>78</sup> Indeed, R. Harris, General Manager of the United Africa Company Limited, also complained that “this increase constitutes an additional burden on motor vehicle owners at a time when everything possible was being done to reduce transport charges.”<sup>79</sup>

The motor unions deemed several sections of the MTO 1934 detrimental to their economic survival and the unions articulated their grievances through several petitions to the colonial government between 1935 and 1937.<sup>80</sup> The motor unions argued that over 52,000 inhabitants of the Gold Coast were dependent on commercial road transportation for their livelihoods. These comprised lorry owners, drivers, mates, fitters, clerks and dependents of all these people. In their petitions, the unions complained of weighing machines, the arrest of motor

<sup>76</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Motor Traffic Ordinance, 1934.

<sup>77</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Motor Transport Union Asante to His Excellency, The Acting Governor, Accra, Petition against certain sections of the Motor Traffic Regulation 1935, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1934.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 R. Harris, General Manager, The United Africa Company Limited to The Honourable, The Director of Public Works, Motor Traffic Ordinance 1934, 5<sup>th</sup> December, 1934.

<sup>80</sup> See PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/24 Motor Traffic Ordinance and Regulations 1934, Petitions against, 1935 to 1937.

drivers, hardships arising from the regulation relating to overloading, high court fines and increase import duty on petrol.<sup>81</sup>

However, what got the motor unions most agitated were the literacy requirements as specified in section 29(3) of the MTO 1934.<sup>82</sup> The section stipulated that from December 1935, the licensing authority would issue driver's licence to only persons who demonstrated a good ability to read, unless such persons had previously held a driver's licence.<sup>83</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that this section applied to new applicants, right from the first day of January 1936, motor drivers who previously held a licence for driving but had allowed the renewal date to elapse were refused renewal of their licence base on this provision. The licensing authority required all drivers to submit to a fresh test which included the literacy requirement. As the number of persons affected by this procedure was so considerable as a result of the worldwide economic depression of the early 1930s, the motor unions throughout the country met at Cape Coast on the 24 and 25 April 1936 to consider the issue.<sup>84</sup> Following the unanimous protest of the conference, a letter was addressed to the Principal Licensing Authority of the Transport Department asking for reconsideration of the holders of driving licences prior to the first day of January, 1936.<sup>85</sup> When the response was not forthcoming

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<sup>81</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/13 Motor Transport Union Asante to His Excellency, The Acting Governor, Accra, Petition against certain sections of the Motor Traffic Regulation 1935, 24<sup>th</sup> September, 1934; PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/24 Motor Traffic Ordinance and Regulations 1934, Petitions against, 1935 to 1937.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>84</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/24 Gold Coast Motor Union to The Honourable, The Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1937.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

from the Principal Licensing Authority the motor unions addressed their protest to the Governor.<sup>86</sup>

The issues were not solved until they reappeared in 1937, when the motor unions organised their first coordinated strike action. Before discussing the 1937 strike, it is important to understand driver training in the Gold Coast and why the unions had an issue with the enforcement of the literacy requirements of the MTO 1934.

Table 3. 1 Number of motor vehicles licenced between 1932 and 1936

Year	Private cars	Motor lorries	Motor cycles	Trailers	Total
1932	2,036	5,022	464	595	8,177
1933	1,752	4,818	649	571	7,795
1934	1,772	4,513	557	787	7,629
1935	1,818	4,990	475	1,198	8,481
1936	1,862	5,481	280	1,691	9,414

Source: Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast*, London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1931-32; 1933-34; 1934-35; 1935-36.

### Training as a Driver

The task of the professional driver involved a lot of work, and that was the subject of Nana Kwame Ampadu's song, 'Driver'.<sup>87</sup> In the song, he purposefully

<sup>86</sup> PRAAD, Accra, CSO 17/1/24 Gold Coast Motor Union to The Honourable, The Colonial Secretary, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1937.

<sup>87</sup> Nana Kwame Ampadu's song, driver, basically describes the nature of driving as a profession. According to the song, driving is an enjoyable profession which needs patience and hard work. When the driver sets off in his vehicle in the morning, all his senses and limbs are engaged. He has to keep his eyes on the road to avoid fatal accidents. While his hands are engaged with the steering

outlined the fact that the drivers' work was no mere task. A driver, while at the wheels, must be alert as driving engaged all the senses, every part of the body is engaged in one activity or the other. To become a driver involved a long process of training, mostly informal. The motor unions used the indigenous system of apprenticeship as had been used over the years by craftsmen.<sup>88</sup> This system of apprenticeship, used by craftsmen from the earliest time, was regulated by the Master and Servants Ordinance of 1877.<sup>89</sup> By this system of apprenticeship a carpenter, for example, having a son or relative who was old enough took them as a learner. The young apprentice lived with the master, although the apprentice made occasional visits to their own parents.<sup>90</sup> The training was very gradual and the apprentice began by carrying tools and doing odd jobs. The master provided the apprentice with food, accommodation, clothes and other necessities of life throughout the training process.<sup>91</sup> Indeed, in some cases, the master's responsibility extended to obtaining a spouse for the apprentice, albeit with the

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wheel, traffic indicators and the crutch, his legs are occupied with the accelerator and the brake. While on the road drivers greet each other with their head lights. The song also describes the relationship between drivers and the police on the road. When a driver points his finger downwards, he has signalled his colleague drivers that the police are on the road. For the driver, even if his car breaks down, he will still earn a living. All he has to do is to be at the lorry park. He can act as a bookman or drive a colleague's lorry. Listen to the song Nana Kwame Ampadu I—Drivers, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UssNHp9MBSU>.

<sup>88</sup> See: Margaret Peil, "The Apprenticeship System in Accra," *Africa*, 40, 2, April 1970, 137–50; A. B. Quartey-Papafio, "Apprenticeship Amongst The Gãs1," *African Affairs*, XIII, LII, July 1914, 415–422.

<sup>89</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 4/1/6 An Ordinance for regulating the relations between Employers and Employed under contract, 23 July, 1877.

<sup>90</sup> Quartey-Papafio, "Apprenticeship Amongst The Gãs1." 420.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*



knowledge and consent of their parents.<sup>92</sup> This system as applied to many trades was what drivers used in training upcoming drivers.<sup>93</sup>

As driving was considered as a dangerous and an adventurous activity, it was mainly boys who took to apprenticeship as drivers. A young boy entered into driving apprenticeship as a driver's assistant and trained over the years to become a driver.<sup>94</sup> The work of the apprentice during the early phase of his training was to make sure the lorry was cleaned, serviced and in good condition for the day's work.

The case of Yaw Mainu offers a good illustration about how the system of apprenticeship worked and how long it took for apprentices to become drivers.<sup>95</sup> Mainu, who hailed from Serwuah, was resident in Kumasi.<sup>96</sup> He started his apprenticeship as a fitter in A. Chedid's Motor Transport in 1928.<sup>97</sup> After four years, in 1932 Mainu joined the United Africa Company Ltd. Motor Workshop to continue his apprenticeship as a fitter for another two years.<sup>98</sup> Later, Mainu moved to the Ivory Coast where he obtained a driving licence because of his previous apprenticeship in the Gold Coast.<sup>99</sup> This system of apprenticeship was

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<sup>92</sup> Quartey-Papañio, "Apprenticeship Amongst The Gãsl." 420

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> They are popularly referred to as drivers' mates.

<sup>95</sup> PRAAD Kumasi ARG6/1/19 Yaw Mainu to His Honour, The Chief Commissioner, Kumasi, 14<sup>th</sup> October 1941.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

effective to the extent that colonial government accepted it as a normal practice in public service departments.<sup>100</sup>

### **Motor unions and strike in the Gold Coast.**

It was as a result of this long process of training and the fact that most apprentices were not literate that the motor unions protested the literacy provision of the MTO1934. The displeasure of the motor unions eventually led to a strike in 1937. For the purpose of this study a strike<sup>101</sup> is defined as “any action by two or more workers acting in concert which is intended by them to restrict in any way the service they normally provide to the employer or diminish the output of such service with a view to applying coercive pressure upon the employer.”<sup>102</sup> The strength of every trade union lies in the size of its membership, ability to limit the supply of labour to the extent of crippling a particular service or industry.<sup>103</sup> Strikes represented one of the early tools available to workers and their organisation for the promotion and protection of their economic and social interest.

Popular protest for political, economic and social change was not new in the Gold Coast. Through the 1920s and 1930s such protests were exhibited through mass boycotts, newspaper critiques by Gold Coast professionals, violent

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<sup>100</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department*. Accra: Government Printer, 1938-39, 18.

<sup>101</sup> The word strike, which now means a cessation of work, has maritime origins: it once meant to take down a sail. Its meaning to designate cessation of work became general from 1768 onward when English Sailors frequently immobilized merchant ships by taking down the sails. See Pablo E. Pérez-Mallaína and Pablo Emilio Pérez-Mallaína Bueno, *Spain's Men of the Sea: Daily Life on the Indies Fleets in the Sixteenth Century*, JHU Press, 2005.

<sup>102</sup> Cowan, “Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana.”

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

outbursts, at times featuring the members of the asafo, and workers' strikes.<sup>104</sup>

The most prominent of these protests, in the 1920s and 1930s, was the cocoa hold-ups. These hold-ups were economic strikes by farmers or producers for better prices for their cocoa.<sup>105</sup> In October 1937 the last cocoa strikes occurred in the Gold Coast and lasted to the end of April 1938. The Cocoa hold-up was an act of economic opposition by farmers, chiefs and cocoa brokers against European cocoa-buying firms which "pooled" to control prices paid to cocoa producers.<sup>106</sup> The genesis of the strike lay in the fall in cocoa prices at the beginning of the 1937/38 cocoa season.

The hold-up lasted throughout the cocoa season and ended in April 1938. The cocoa hold-up disrupted economic activity in the Gold Coast, as cocoa export and cocoa revenue was the backbone of the economy of the Gold Coast. The threat posed by the strike eventually led to the appointment of the Nowell Commission of Enquiry to look into the grievances of the cocoa farmers.<sup>107</sup> The commission recommended among other things the withdrawal of the pool and the

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<sup>104</sup> The asafo is an organisation of young men and women with military influence. The origin of the asafo companies is believed to be indigenous but its activities and expansion was as a result of contact with Europeans on the coast from the fifteenth century. See: Ansu Datta, "The Fante Asafo: A Re-Examination," *Africa* 42, 4, 1972, 305–315; Ansu K. Datta and Robert Porter, "The Asafo System in Historical Perspective," *The Journal of African History* 12, 2, 1971, 279–297; Stanley Shaloff, "The Cape Coast Asafo Company Riot of 1932," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 7, 4, 1974, 591–607; Jarle Simensen, "Rural Mass Action in the Context of Anti-Colonial Protest: The Asafo Movement of Akim Abuakwa, Ghana," *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 8, 1, 1974, 25–41.

<sup>105</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 66.

<sup>106</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Africa since 1940: the past of the present*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, 22–23.

<sup>107</sup> A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1975, 148.

sale of cocoa through farmers' cooperatives.<sup>108</sup> Several studies have been done to discuss the nature and influences of the cocoa hold-ups and how the hold-ups fit into the protest movements in general in the Gold Coast.<sup>109</sup>

From 22 November 1937, the motor unions in the Gold Coast organised a strike.<sup>110</sup> This was after a mass meeting on 21 November at Korle Gonno in Accra, behind the town council incinerator.<sup>111</sup> At this meeting, motor union representatives from Asamankese, Suhum, Nsawam, Swedru, British Togoland, Prampram, Teshi and Nungua and other towns were present.<sup>112</sup> The motor union strike coincided with the cocoa hold-up which began in October 1937. As such, much has been lost in understanding the peculiar nature of the motor union strike, as it was always treated as part of the cocoa hold-up. For instance, Rhoda Howard suggests that the lorry strike was part of a set of sympathy strike that was organised by sections of the Gold Coast community including market women and surf boat workers in support of the cocoa hold-up.<sup>113</sup> She further asserts that the

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<sup>108</sup> Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 148; Colonial Office: *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1937-38*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 25.

<sup>109</sup> See for example; Rod Alence, "The 1937-1938 Gold Coast Cocoa Crisis: The Political Economy of Commercial Stalemate," *African Economic History*, 19, 1990, 77-104; Gareth Austin, "Capitalists and Chiefs in the Cocoa Hold-Ups in South Asante, 1927-1938," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, 1, 1988, 63-95; Gareth Austin, "The Emergence of Capitalist Relations in South Asante Cocoa-Farming, c. 1916-33," *The Journal of African History* 28, 2, 1987, 259-79; Josephine Milburn, "The 1938 Gold Coast Cocoa Crisis: British Business and the Colonial Office," *African Historical Studies* 3, 1, 1970, 57-74; John Miles, "Rural Protest in the Gold Coast: The Cocoa Hold-Ups, 1908-1938," *The Imperial Impact: Studies in the Economic History of Africa and India*, 1978, 152-70; Rhodie, "The Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1930-31"; Southall, "Farmers, Traders and Brokers in the Gold Coast Cocoa Economy."

<sup>110</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM 29/6/13 District Commissioner to The Honourable, The Commissioner of the Eastern province, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> Sympathy strike describes stoppage of work or boycotts declared by workers not on account of a dispute in which the strikers are directly concerned, but in sympathy with other workers engaged in a dispute in which the secondary strikers may have no immediate interest or benefit. See Rhoda



motor union strike was because “they [drivers] were afraid that if the European firms got control of the internal marketing of cocoa, there would be less work available for them.”<sup>114</sup>

The motor union strike was unique and independent of the cocoa hold-up. The general reason for the strike was the increased hardship and the economic difficulties that the motor traffic ordinance and other colonial government policies was having on lorry owners and drivers.<sup>115</sup> The immediate cause of the strike was the increase in prices of petrol from 19/6 to 20/- per case, which took effect from 1 November 1937.<sup>116</sup> In Asante, the drivers were paying 30 per cent more than the price charged by the colonial government, as the local firms were retailing a case of petrol in Asante at 22/6.<sup>117</sup>

On the whole, the strike was in reaction to the total neglect by the colonial government of the several petitions the motor unions sent to government right after the passing of the MTO of 1934.<sup>118</sup> While the motor union strike was

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Howard, “Differential Class Participation in an African Protest Movement: The Ghana Cocoa Boycott of 1937–38,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies/La Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 10, 3, 1976, 469–480.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup> In a similar development, in neighbouring Nigeria, the Nigerian Motor Transport Union (NMTU), an organisation of motor transport owners, also organised a strike between 7 and 13 January 1937. The point of contest was the continuous attempt by the colonial government to protect the railways through taxation, which eventually culminated in what G. O. Ogunremi described as double taxation. As a strategy, the colonial government published a schedule by which produce carrying vehicles plying forbidden routes were forced to pay extra fees which was almost the same amount levied as vehicle licence, but the government called it Trading Licence. See G.O. Ogunremi, “The Nigerian Motor Transport Union Strike of 1937,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 9, 2, June 1978, 127-144.

<sup>116</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM29/6/13 Superintendent/Eastern Province to the Ag. Commissioner, Gold Coast Police, Accra 22<sup>nd</sup> November, 1937.

<sup>117</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Notes Taken at a Meeting between the Representatives of the Ashanti Motor Transport Union and His Honour, The Chief Commissioner held at the Chief Commissioner’s office on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1938.

<sup>118</sup> PRAAD, Accra CSO17/1/24 Motor Traffic Ordinance and Regulations 1934, Petitions against 1935-1937.

independent of the cocoa hold-up, the cocoa hold-up presented the drivers with the opportunity to push the colonial government to address their peculiar grievances.<sup>119</sup> The cocoa hold-up meant that majority of the lorries would lack freight any way, since cocoa was the main produce conveyed by the lorries.

As the MTO of 1934 was already in force, the motor unions extended their complaint beyond just the MTO, to include the application of the ordinance. The motor unions articulated their grievances under three sections; against the magistrates in the courts, against police actions and against sections of the MTO 1934.<sup>120</sup> The motor unions accused the Gold Coast magistrates of imposing unrealistic heavy fines on lorry drivers brought to their courts. Kwamina Ward, who spoke for the drivers in the Central Province, asserted that the hardships of court fines were such that, “a lorry driver who receive £3 a month is put before the court for an offence under the Motor Traffic Ordinance and is fined sometimes £10 and above all his licence is forfeited.”<sup>121</sup> Representatives of the MTUA, on the other hand, put the fines for over speeding between £7 and £10.<sup>122</sup>

The motor unions also objected to section 29 (3) of the MTO of 1934 which made it impossible for illiterate apprentice to obtain licence. Kwamina Ward pointed out that “our lorry mates [apprentices] are refused driving licence

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<sup>119</sup> PRAAD, Accra CSO17/1/24 Motor Traffic Ordinance and Regulations 1934, Petitions against 1935-1937.

<sup>120</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Notes taken at a meeting between the representatives of the Ashanti Motor Transport Union and His Honour the Chief Commissioner held at the Chief Commissioner's office on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1938. PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM 23/1/649 Notes of an Interview with Chief Drivers Kwamina Ward and Kwesi Fiitsi on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

<sup>121</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM 23/1/649 Notes of an Interview with Chief Drivers Kwamina Ward and Kwesi Fiitsi on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

<sup>122</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Notes taken at a meeting between the representatives of the Ashanti Motor Transport Union and His Honour the Chief Commissioner held at the Chief Commissioner's office on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1938.

after their training because they are illiterates.”<sup>123</sup> The motor unions further argued that most of their apprentices were already in training before the MTO 1934 came into effect.<sup>124</sup> Furthermore, the motor unions said “many of our best drivers are illiterate and we therefore beg for Government consideration of the matter to enable the unfortunate mates [apprentices] to achieve their ambitions as it is impossible for them to go back to school.”<sup>125</sup>

Against the police, the unions did not complain of police corruption or of severe punishment for dangerous driving and similar offences.<sup>126</sup> The police was accused for constant vexatious persecutions for petty offences like failing to produce licence, number plate obscured by mud or dust, not having a jack, etc.<sup>127</sup> In fact section 43 of the MTO of 1934, which allowed any police officer, on suspicion of an offence (such as over-loading or defective brakes) to order the lorry to be taken to a police station and detained there for examination, was applied without regard to the convenience of passengers or drivers.<sup>128</sup>

In trying to understand the issues raised by the motor unions, the colonial government sought the opinion of various stakeholders on the petitions of the motor unions. In response to the court fines, it was the considered view of

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<sup>123</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM 23/1/649 Notes of an Interview with Chief Drivers Kwamina Ward and Kwesi Fiitsi on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

<sup>124</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Notes taken at a meeting between the representatives of the Ashanti Motor Transport Union and His Honour the Chief Commissioner held at the Chief Commissioner's office on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1938.

<sup>125</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Petition from the Motor Transport Union Ashanti 29<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

<sup>126</sup> A certain amount of corruption the unions regarded as inevitable. They realized that it was in their own interests to suppress these offences.

<sup>127</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Petition from the Motor Transport Union Ashanti 29<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

colonial officials that it was not excessive, particularly so, when the maximum fine possible under the MTO of 1934 was £50 or 6 months imprisonment.<sup>129</sup>

Colonial officials also cited the independence of the judiciary as a reason not to intervene in judicial processes.<sup>130</sup>

Jennifer Hart posits that the literacy requirement of the MTO 1934 was the colonial government's attempt to control "who could and who could not be a driver."<sup>131</sup> To this end, the Chief Transport Officer, Arthur Howard Cruickshank, observed that "illiterate drivers should not be allowed on the roads, as they would be unable to read booklets that provided the limits and requirements of safe lorry operations or road signs that designated safe speeds."<sup>132</sup> This notwithstanding, other officials of the colonial government viewed the literacy requirement as irrelevant. For instance, on 20 December 1937, the District Commissioner for Bekwai, Cecil D. A. Pullan, stated that:

The position of illiterate drivers mentioned in paragraph 14 of the petition is one which has aroused universal dissatisfaction. My own experience is that the illiterate driver is every bit as good as and in many cases preferred to his literate brother. There are few if any road notices in writing which could not more easily be rendered in signs e.g. hill gradients –dangerous corners – danger signals etc. – and my sympathy is with the driver who is failed in his driving test because he is unable to read the Highway Code although he may understand perfectly well its provisions.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG 1/10/7 Notes taken at a meeting between the representatives of the Ashanti Motor Transport Union and His Honour the Chief Commissioner held at the Chief Commissioner's office on the 15<sup>th</sup> February, 1938.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup> Jennifer Hart, "Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana," 200.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>133</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 District Commissioner, Bekwai to the Chief Commissioner, Ashanti, 20<sup>th</sup> December, 1937.



The District Commissioner for Wenchi, John S. R. Robertson, could not “see any good reason why a good driver should be denied a licence because he cannot read! There is very little for him to read in the way of Traffic Notices!”<sup>134</sup>

On the issue of police harassment quiet a number of the colonial official respondents agreed with the motor unions. Some of the arguments of these officials are worthy of outlining at length. For example, the District Magistrate of Koforidua, Guy Cooper, agreed with the position of the motor unions. In a private letter to Duncan Johnstone, Commissioner of the Eastern Province, Cooper indicated that thirty or more drivers were brought before him every morning and he had to dismiss a number of them, as the cases were trivial, but the driver had the trouble and expense of attending a court possibly distant from his residence.<sup>135</sup>

Cooper further reasoned that:

the difficulty is to get the police to act with common sense and discretion: as a matter of fact there is quite a lot of oppression by the police ... the general attitude of the police in enforcing the motor traffic ordinance is not that they are performing a branch of their ordinary duty to protect life and property but they are engaged in a kind of hunt in which the object is to run down the greatest number of drivers ... if the court had power to give costs against the police in cases of vexatious prosecutions there would be fewer of these prosecutions brought.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 District Commissioner, Wenchi to the Chief Commissioner, Kumasi, 30<sup>th</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>135</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM 29/6/13 District Magistrate, Koforidua to Mr. Duncan Johnstone, 22.12.37.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* Cooper’s observation of the police is not surprising considering that the personnel of the Police Force were generally described in the Gold Coast annual reports as illiterate. The Police Force was made up of three branches which had particular duties and drew their recruits from among three widely differing types of African. The general police were generally recruited from the Colony and from Asante. They were mainly employed on such duties as the investigation of crime, the compilation of criminal records, the issue and registration of licences, and the keeping

The acting District Commissioner for Kumasi, Gordon Hadow, also indicated there was a good deal of truth in the drivers' grievances against the police. He mentioned

[t]hat the police go out of their way to harass lorry drivers. The drivers' occupation promotes an independence of spirit which some members of the [Police] Force find extremely irritating, and there is no doubt a tendency on their part to regard drivers as their natural prey, but the root of the trouble lies in the fact that owners will not run their lorries at economic rates.<sup>137</sup>

The Asantehene, Nana Osei Agyemang Prempeh I, through whom the MTUA sent their petition, also had an observation of his own concerning the drivers and the police. Agyemang Prempeh did not see the necessity of the strike since he maintained that the drivers could always submit their grievances in a constitutional manner to the colonial government for redress.<sup>138</sup> However, he was in support of some of the views expressed in the petition, particularly with regards to police harassment. He concluded in his letter attached to the petition that "if the police were as strict and vigilant in detecting and bringing to book burglars and thieves who are doing great havoc in this country as they are towards the motor Drivers, life and property would be safer and more secure."<sup>139</sup>

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of station books and records. They also provide men for traffic control and for other duties. The escort police mostly natives of the Northern Territories. Many time-expired soldiers of the Royal West African Frontier Force were enlisted in this branch of the police, which normally provides escorts for specie and bullion, guards for treasuries and banks, etc. The marine police were recruited from the seaboard towns and villages of the colony. They were employed on port and harbor duties. See; Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1936-1937*, Accra: Government Printer, 1937, 81-82.

<sup>137</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Acting District Commissioner Kumasi to His Honour The Chief Commissioner Kumasi, 22<sup>nd</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>138</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Osei A. Prempeh, Asantehene to the AG. District Commissioner, Kumasi, Petition from the Motor Transport Union Ashanti, 2<sup>nd</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

Unlike the cocoa hold-up which lasted for seven months, the lorry drivers strike did not last long. The strike, which effectively began on 22 November 1937, was called off three days later on 25 November 1937 in Accra.<sup>140</sup> Although the strike was called off local motor unions, particularly in the Eastern Province refused to follow suit, as they claimed the Accra motor unions betrayed them, and threatened to lynch any Accra driver that came to the Eastern Province.<sup>141</sup> Notwithstanding this disagreement, by 10 December 1937, there were indications that all motor drivers had resumed work.<sup>142</sup>

Throughout the duration of the strike, the colonial government was particularly concerned about the likely shortage of food supplies to the major cities.<sup>143</sup> The society, especially the cities, had come to depend on these commercial transport service providers for the supply of foodstuffs. Thus, the plea of provincial commissioners to the motor unions led to the release of some lorries to bring food to the major cities so as to forestall food shortages.<sup>144</sup>

The strike also created a lot of inconvenience for the general public. For instance, at the beginning of the strike passengers were dropped at the outskirts of Accra to find their way into the city because the drivers refused to enter the

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<sup>140</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 District Commissioner to the Honourable the Commissioner of the Eastern Province, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>144</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM 23/1/649 Notes of an Interview with Chief Drivers Kwamina Ward and Kwesi Fiitsi on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1937.

city.<sup>145</sup> In the pages of the dairy of the District Commissioner of Accra, John Robert Eyre-Smith, it is indicated that;

As the result of yesterday's [21 November 1937] meeting no lorries entered Accra from the towns outside. Passengers were deposited at the outskirts and had to make their way to the town on foot. So great was the congestion of passengers for Accra at Labadi that it was considered advisable to post two policemen at the bus station to see that would be passengers were not molested. During the day the Accra streets were picketed with drivers and their mates belonging to the drivers union who spent their time intimidating drivers not members of the union.<sup>146</sup>

The strike, the first of its kind within the informal transport sector, brought to the fore the immobility of colonial officials in the Gold Coast. Captain J. R. Dickinson confirmed the civility of the motor union, particularly the MTUA, for making a lorry available for the transportation of colonial officials who were in the hinterland.<sup>147</sup> The police, official peacekeepers in the Gold Coast, were also immobile when their normal means of transportation was withdrawn.<sup>148</sup> During the strike, the police had to depend on lorries provided by the Public Works Department (PWD) before being moved to places of disturbances.<sup>149</sup> Thus, the strike informed the decision of the colonial government to resource the Police

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<sup>145</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 Continuation of District Commissioner's Notes on the Present situation, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1937.

<sup>146</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 District Commissioner to the Honourable the Commissioner of the Eastern Province, 11<sup>th</sup> December, 1937.

<sup>147</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department*, Accra: Government Printer, 1938-39, 12.

<sup>148</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM 29/6/13 Superintendent/Eastern Province to The Ag Commissioner, Gold Coast Police, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*



Force by making lorries available to it and offering driver training to enlisted police personnel.<sup>150</sup>

There was no political aspect to the motor union strike as it was purely an economic strike. The motor unions at the time of the 1937 strike did not express covertly or overtly any political ideology like the railway men of Sekondi, to whom strikes became part of their “political Sub-culture”<sup>151</sup> and were aimed not just at their occupational interest but to challenge the colonial social, economic and political order existing in the Gold Coast.<sup>152</sup> That notwithstanding, Eyre-Smith, the District Commissioner of Accra indicated that during the course of the strike the two most influential political parties in Accra, that is, the Manbii and Rate Payers, had sought to influence the strike.<sup>153</sup> While the Manbii Party had the bulk of the people desirous of assisting the drivers to go back to work, the Ratepayers’ Party was doing all in its power to agitate the drivers not to go back.<sup>154</sup>

<sup>150</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM 29/6/13 Superintendent/Eastern Province to The Ag Commissioner, Gold Coast Police, 7<sup>th</sup> December 1937.

<sup>151</sup> Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 198.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 197-206.

<sup>153</sup> The introduction of elective representation changed the way politics was done in Accra. The most important change saw the forming of nine political parties between 1927 and 1944. The dominant of these were the ‘Manbii Party’ and the ‘Rate Payers Association’. While the Manbii claimed to represent the citizens, the Rate Payers Association claimed to represent rate payer in Accra. See John Kwadwo Osei-Tutu, *The Asafoi (Socio-Military Groups) in the History and Politics of Accra (Ghana) from the 17th to the Mid-20th Century*. Department of History, Norwegian University of Science and Technology NTNU, 2000; PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 Continuation of District Commissioner’s Notes on the Present situation, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1937.

<sup>154</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 Continuation of District Commissioner’s Notes on the Present situation, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1937.

The strike by the motor unions also brought to the fore issues of unity and solidarity among the motor unions.<sup>155</sup> All lorry drivers in the Gold Coast participated in the strike, except those employed directly by the colonial government and the trading firms.<sup>156</sup> Although all the unions in existence at the time coordinated to organise the strike in 1937, it was visible that the lack of a centralized and structured national union affected the coercion of the motor unions during the strike.

In all, the strike of the motor union was part of a number of industrial actions that occurred in the Gold Coast and throughout colonial Africa in the 1930s. Frederick Cooper argues that, these strikes prompted colonial officials, both French and British, to reconsider the labour question in the colonies.<sup>157</sup> However, the strike of the motor unions is hardly mentioned in academic history accounts of the period because of the nature of the motor unions and the fact that the strike was mainly against colonial policies. In the aftermath of the strike, while the colonial government moved to regularize the activities of trade unions in the country the motor transport unions worked to form a centralized national union.

### **Trade Union Legalization**

In 1938, the Gold Coast colonial government established the Labour Department. The establishment to the Labour department became necessary in

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<sup>155</sup> PRAAD, Accra ADM29/6/13 Continuation of District Commissioner's Notes on the Present situation, November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1937.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 2.

response to the emergence of wage work in the Gold Coast.<sup>158</sup> Owing to the increasing combination of wage workers and their strikes, Lord Passfield, Secretary of State for Colonies, issued the Passfield 'Memorandum' in 1930, to urge colonial governments to grant legal status to trade unions.<sup>159</sup> This followed the agitations by workers and the fear of the colonial government that without appropriate supervision these associations might be used by disgruntled elements in the societies for political gains. Lord Passfield, was therefore, of the view that trade unions should be recognized by the colonial power in the various territories. When this was done, their activities could be directed towards the achievement of the economic goals of the colonial government. Accordingly, Passfield asserted that:

I regard the formation of such associations in Colonial Dependencies as a natural and legitimate consequence of social and industrial progress, but I recognize that there is a danger that, without sympathetic supervision and guidance, organisations of labourers ... may fall under the

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<sup>158</sup> From 1900, wage labour emerged in the Gold Coast, as European mining companies and the Gold Coast colonial government employed wage workers. As a result, a labour class which solely depended on wages for living emerged in the Gold Coast. By the end of second decade of the twentieth century this wage receiving group begun to agitate for better conditions in the various industries that engaged them. For instance, as early as 1918, the mechanics on the Accra government railway had gone on strike. In 1919 the railway employees who had been described as the most belligerent of all the trade unions and the PWD workers went on strike when the colonial administration demanded a reduction of wages as a result of the economic depression that hit the Gold Coast in 1920s. By 1925, boatmen had also agitated for over hundred percent increase in wages, by demanding 1s. 6d instead of 9d. See Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 126; Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana*, 28; Jon Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," in Ukandi Godwin Damachi, Dieter H. Seibel, and Lester N. Trachtman, (eds.), *Industrial Relations in Africa*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, 109, 112; Peter Blay Arthiabah and Harry Tham Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress: The History of the Trades Union Congress of Ghana, 1939-1995*. Accra: Gold-Type Press Publication Ltd., 1995, 56.

<sup>159</sup> He was known in private life as Sidney James Webb. Together with his wife, Beatrice Webb, they published enormously on trade unionism and industrial democracy. See Chapter one of this work for some of their thoughts on trade unions.

domination of disaffected persons, by which their activities may be diverted to improper and mischievous ends.<sup>160</sup>

A year after Passfield's directives, that is, 1931, an order in council was issued by the British government to the British colonies with regards to trade unions.<sup>161</sup> Consequently, the British government implored the colonial governments to encourage the formation of trade unions and focus their activities on wages so that their attention might not be directed towards political demands.<sup>162</sup>

The Gold Coast colonial government responded favourably to these directives and drafted the Trade Unions Ordinance in 1931.<sup>163</sup> However, it took the Gold Coast colonial government over ten years to pass the ordinance into law.<sup>164</sup> Right from the onset, the posturing of the Gold Coast colonial government was that trade unions had not developed significantly in the Gold Coast to merit the passing of the ordinance. Indeed, after drafting the trade unions ordinance, the Attorney-General of the Gold Coast, S. S. Abrahams, wrote a commentary on the development of trade unions in the Gold Coast. Abrahams argued that "trade unions or association of workers formed for the express purpose of regulating the conditions of their employment have not yet been formed in the Gold Coast, although the idea of combination for the purpose of imposing restrictive conditions in the conduct of a trade or business is generally understood and

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<sup>160</sup> As quoted in Ananaba Wogu, *The Trade Union Movement in Nigeria*. London: C. Hurst, 1969, 21.

<sup>161</sup> Timothy Oberst, "Transport Workers, Strikes and the 'Imperial Response': Africa and the Post World War War II Conjuncture," *African Studies Review* 31, 1, April 1988, 117-133.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>163</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/3/54 The Trade Unions Ordinance, 1931.

<sup>164</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941, 43.



appreciated.”<sup>165</sup> While Abrahams acknowledged the existence of several motor unions in the Gold Coast, he maintained that per the English act only the Cocoa Federation was the best example of a combination of workers.<sup>166</sup>

In effect, although reforms had been initiated within the labour system to make it more flexible and responsive to labour disputes, the pace of the reforms was very slow. Despite the evidence that Gold Coast workers were achieving working class consciousness<sup>167</sup> and had demonstrated their ability to organise and maintain a strike for better working conditions, officially, the colonial government viewed trade unionism in its infancy. In 1940, when Major Granville St. John Orde-Brown was commissioned to investigate labour conditions in West Africa, he expressed a similar view about the trade unions. Orde-Brown indicated that “Labour organisation in West Africa is still at an elementary stage and those engaged in it have in almost all instances little practical experience of the inception and management of a trade union.”<sup>168</sup>

These observations notwithstanding, the Gold Coast colonial government established the Labour Department in 1938. In addressing the Legislative Council in 1938, Governor Arnold Wienholt Hodson, while emphasizing the importance of the Department to labour, averred that:

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<sup>165</sup> PRAAD, Accra, ADM 12/3/54 Memorandum on suggested Trade Union Legislation.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> See Jeff Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class: Ghanaian Miners' Struggles 1870-1980*. London: Zed Books Ltd., 2017; Richard Sandbrook and Robin Cohen, *The Development of an African Working Class: Studies in Class Formation and Action*. London: Longman, 1975; Bill Freund, *The Making of Contemporary Africa: The Development of African Society since 1800*. Palgrave: Macmillan, 2016.

<sup>168</sup> G. St J. Browne, *Labour Conditions in West Africa*. London: HM Stationery Office, 1941.

As you are aware, there have recently been several strikes of labour, as a result of which dislocation of business, loss of output to employers and loss of wages to employees have been caused. In each case the reasons for the strike were obscure and no precise grievances of the employees appeared to have been properly ventilated; no convenient machinery exists whereby Government, which cannot dissociate itself from the causes and effect of labour unrest, can investigate such grievances. I have accordingly obtained the sanction of the Secretary of State for the creation of a new department of Government, which will be known as the Labour Department, and for which provision will be found in next year's Estimate.<sup>169</sup>

As a result, on 1 April 1938, the Gold Coast Labour Department was formally inaugurated in Kumasi as an agency of colonial government.<sup>170</sup> The Labour Department was mandated to monitor the relationship between employers and employees; inspect and examine labour conditions; survey legislation relating to labour; and report on the development of trade unions.<sup>171</sup> Also the Labour Department reported on the conduct and relationship between trade unions and employers. In the 1939 annual report of the Labour Department, the Chief Inspector of Labour, Captain J. R. Dickinson, acknowledged the urgency of attending to trade union matters since it was prudent to deal with a recognized reputable and responsible organisation which could collect and articulate workers' grievances.<sup>172</sup> Just like Passfield, Dickinson viewed recognition of trade unions as

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<sup>169</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1938.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>172</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Labour Conditions*. Accra: Government Printer, 1939, 12-13.

important to prevent agitator from taking advantage and exploiting the situation.<sup>173</sup>

The renewed interest of the colonial government in regularizing the activities of trade unions was spurred on by events leading to the beginning of the Second World War and the need to avoid intense labour unrest in the colonies. When the Second World War began, Britain passed the Emergency Powers (Defence) Act 1939, to forestall disputes between employees and employers throughout the empire.<sup>174</sup> In passing the defence regulations and the essential works legislation prohibiting strikes, Britain was ensuring that the war effort was not hampered in any part of the empire.<sup>175</sup> Essential works, as defined by the legislation, practically captured all the working class in the Gold Coast.<sup>176</sup> Indeed, it included railways, road motor transport under contract to the colonial government, shipping, air transport, mining, timber and saw milling industries under contract from the colonial government.<sup>177</sup> Others included the ministry of supply, electricity and waterworks, post and telegraph, telephone and wireless services, public services, engineering or building industries under contract to the colonial government, petroleum and oil storage and supply.<sup>178</sup>

In the course of the Second World War, the colonial government succeeded in passing a lot of legislations to regulate and deal with labour

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<sup>173</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Labour Conditions*. Accra: Government Printer, 1939, 12-13.

<sup>174</sup> David Killingray and Richard Rathbone, eds., *Africa and the Second World War*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 1986, 234.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Laws of the Gold Coast, 1942*. Accra: Government Printer, 1942, 177.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

disputes.<sup>179</sup> On 10 March 1941, the Legislative Council of the Gold Coast enacted the Trades Union Ordinance No. 13, which regularized the activities of trade unions in the Gold Coast.<sup>180</sup> This ordinance came after over six years of consideration by legislators. Indeed, in the British colonies in Africa, the Gold Coast was “the last of the West African colonies to have such a law.”<sup>181</sup> The Trade Unions Ordinance No. 13 aimed at registering, regularizing and regulating the activities of trade unions in the Gold Coast and steering them away from politics. Thus, the ordinance required all trade unions to formally register.

### **The Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU)**

By 1941, when the trade unions ordinance was passed, several trade unions had emerged in the Gold Coast. The Trade Unions Ordinance of 1941 further encouraged the development of several small unions. For instance, section 9 of the ordinance provided that:

Any five or more members of a trade union may by subscribing their names to the rules of the trade union and otherwise complying with the provisions of this ordinance with respect to registration, register such trade union under this ordinance.<sup>182</sup>

This section of the ordinance made it possible for even five workers to register a trade union. The result was the proliferation of trade unions in the Gold

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<sup>179</sup> Some of the legislation include the workmen’s compensation ordinance, the Conspiracy and Protection of Property (Trade Disputes) Ordinance, The Trade Disputes (Arbitration and Inquiry) Ordinance, the Defence ( Rent Restriction) Regulation, The Defence (Settlement of Labour Disputes) Order, and the Defence (Compulsory Civil Employment) Regulation.

<sup>180</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Ordinances*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941 No. 13; Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941.

<sup>181</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Legislative Council Debates*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941. 43. In British West Africa, Gambia was the first colony to pass the Trade Union Ordinance in 1932. Nigeria and Sierra Leone passed their respective ordinances in 1939.

<sup>182</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Ordinances*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941, No. 13.



Coast. Thus, while before the enactment of the ordinance very few trade unions were in operation, several trade unions were formed and registered under the Trade Unions Ordinance after the enactment of the ordinance. Motor drivers were not left out of the burgeoning of small trade unions that emerged in the Gold Coast. Encouraged by section 9 of the Trade Unions Ordinance, drivers formed more unions. Indeed, the motor unions were mainly formed along district lines and included unions like the La Drivers Union, the Teshie Drivers' Union, the Bekwai Drivers' Union, the Koforidua Drivers' union, Cape Coast Drivers' Union, the Saltpond Motor Drivers and Mechanics Union and many others.<sup>183</sup>

Although the Trade Union Ordinance provided the opportunity for the trade unions in the Gold Coast to register and be officially recognized, formal application by trade unions for recognition was very slow. This was partly because the same Trade Unions Ordinance that allowed the formation of trade unions also hedged the freedom of government employees to unionize. Under section 3 of the Trade Unions Ordinance of 1941, it was unlawful for any person in the service of the Gold Coast colonial government to be a member of a trade union except in cases specially approved by the Governor of the Gold Coast.<sup>184</sup> Government employees were further limited in unionizing when the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Ordinance (1940) made strikes in public services illegal. Section 6 of this Conspiracy and Protection of Property ordinance made

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<sup>183</sup> PRAAD, Accra CSO17/1/24 Motor Traffic Ordinance and Regulations 1934, Petitions against, 1935-1937.

<sup>184</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Ordinances*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941, No. 13.

strikes and lockouts illegal and a criminal offence if they were not in furtherance of a trade dispute but aimed at coercing government.<sup>185</sup>

With these limitations on government workers, the first set of certificates of recognition went to trade unions in the informal private sector. On 9 November 1942, the Western Province Motor Drivers' Union (WPMDU) became the first of trade unions, in the trade unions registry, to be issued with a certificate of recognition.<sup>186</sup> It was followed by the Cooks and Stewards' Union of Asante and Northern Territories and, later, the Central Province Motor Drivers' Union (CPMDU).<sup>187</sup> It was not until 1943, through a special certificate of approval by the Governor, that the Gold Coast Railway Employees Union registered as the fourth trade union, but the first trade union of government employees to be recognized.<sup>188</sup>

The motor unions were quick to appreciate the importance of having a large trade union. Members of these unions recognized that organizing broadly was more beneficial than the small unions. In describing the benefits of large

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<sup>185</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Gold Coast Ordinances*. Accra: Government Printer, 1941, No. 12.

<sup>186</sup> The Gold Coast Gazette, 19<sup>th</sup> April, 1946; See also Patrick Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana: The Law and the Practice*. Accra: Ghana University Press, 1991, 7.

<sup>187</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1948-49*. Accra: Government Printer, 1949.

<sup>188</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Year 1950-54*. Accra: Government Printer, 1954. While the colonial government had set in motion the processes for labour reform in the 1930s, it was not until the beginning of the 1940s that legislations came into being. By this time the Second World War had already begun and the exigencies of the war influenced labour legislation to a large extent. Thus, even before the Trade Unions Ordinance was passed in 1941, the Conspiracy and Protection of Property Act had been passed earlier in 1940. This treated strikes by workers as a criminal breach of contract. It was not surprising that the Trade Unions Ordinance, 1941 did not allow Civil Servants to form and register Unions freely without the approval of the Governor. In 1948, an Ordinance to amend the Trade Unions Ordinance of 1941 was enacted and came into effect at the end of the year. By its provision, the prohibition on Civil Servants joining or forming Trade Unions was repealed subject to limitation in the case of Senior Civil Servants. See, Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1948*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950, 13.

trade unions in general, E. A. Cowan has argued that, the power of a trade union lied in its ability to paralyze an industry through strike action.<sup>189</sup> Thus, it was more fruitful to have an industrial or large trade union with such clout than the weak trade unions that existed earlier. For trade unions in industries where there was a clear demarcation between workers and employers, amalgamating and forming an industrial trade union made it easy to engage with management since management would deal with only one trade union instead of several trade unions.

On 8 September 1945, the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress (GCTUC) was inaugurated at Sekondi with fourteen affiliate member unions and an initial membership of 6,030.<sup>190</sup> The GCTUC became the centralized body that represented the labour movement in Ghana. During the inauguration of the GCTUC, Joe Annan, a labour officer at the Labour Department also emphasized the importance of forming large trade unions. Annan indicated that; “In some industries, trades and crafts, what are known as ‘National Federation’ are necessary conditions for securing increased strength and unified leadership.”<sup>191</sup> He further stated that:

As an example of a National Federation all the carpenters unions in the Gold Coast colony, Ashanti and the Northern Territories, say, can hold a conference to elect a national council of the Gold Coast Carpenters. This council will deal with the common problems of the carpentry trade as a whole. Any other trade or craft can combine on a national

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<sup>189</sup> E. Asuquo Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*. Accra: Trades Union Congress, 1957, 20.

<sup>190</sup> Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 8.

<sup>191</sup> Joe Annan, “Our Trade Union Policy and Organisation”, on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress held at Sekondi on September 8, 1945, as reprinted in Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 195.

scale or similar line. This idea of National Federation of workers in the same trade industry and craft will greatly facilitate the management and the work of the congress which we are about to inaugurate.<sup>192</sup>

Regardless of Annan's admonition, the multiplicity of trade unions in the Gold Coast did not cease. At the end of 1946 there were 20 trade unions in the Gold Coast, with a paid-up membership of approximately 7,000.<sup>193</sup> In 1947, the number of affiliates of the GCTUC further increased to twenty-eight with a total paid-up membership of 12,000.<sup>194</sup> Registration documents from the labour Department indicated that by the end of 1947, there were four unions of commercial road transport operators affiliated with the Trades Union Congress. These unions were Western Province Motor Drivers' Union (WPMDU), Central Province Motor Drivers' Union (CPMDU), Eastern Province Motor Drivers' Union (EPMDU) and Motor Transport Union, Asante (MTUA).<sup>195</sup> They had a total paid-up membership of 97, 112, 114 and 870 respectively as at 31 March 1949.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Joe Annan, "Our Trade Union Policy and Organisation", on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress held at Sekondi on September 8, 1945, as reprinted in Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 197.

<sup>193</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1946*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948, 16.

<sup>194</sup> Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1947*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948, 20.

<sup>195</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Year Ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1949*. Accra: Government Printer, 1950.

<sup>196</sup> Paid-up membership refers to members who at the end of the year had paid up all union dues. The Trade Unions Ordinance required trade unions to file their financial documents at the end of each year with the Labour Department. The Labour Department recorded the information in their registry minus members who had not paid their dues for a particular year. Thus, in most cases individual trade unions had more members than what the Labour Department recorded as paid-up members. Government of the Gold Coast, *Annual Report of the Labour Department for the Year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March, 1949*. Accra: Government Printer, 1950; The colonial annual report for the Gold Coast indicated that the various lorry unions, the Mines Employees Union, the Banks Employees Union and the unions in the industrial Departments of Government where the unions which had shown the most activity, both in organizing their internal affairs and in pursuing claims



As already indicated, in passing the trade unions ordinance the colonial government aimed to keep the trade union apolitical.<sup>197</sup> However, the political advantage and power of trade unions as mass organisation was always evident.<sup>198</sup>

Consequently, from 1945 when the Trades Union Congress was inaugurated the trade unions demonstrated interest in political activities in the Gold Coast. Ioan Davies and L. Trachtman have argued that right from the beginning, African trade unions had seen the overthrow of colonial rule as part of their objective.<sup>199</sup> In other words, while the proper object of a trade union was securing high wages and better working conditions for members, in Africa, as a result of the historical and political context of the period, the trade unions engaged in the politics of the day.

Accordingly, the GCTUC did not keep to the colonial objective of keeping trade unions apolitical. In Africa and the Gold Coast in particular, the government was the largest employer of wage labour, and as such, economic demands were mostly inter-twined with politics.<sup>200</sup> Indeed, apart from encouraging the formation of large trade unions, Joe Annan, again advised his fellow trade unionists during the inaugural meeting of the GCTUC, that:

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for improved wages and conditions. See Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1947*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1948.

<sup>197</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Labour Conditions*. Accra: Government Printer, 1939, 12-13.

<sup>198</sup> Ioan Davies, *African Trade Unions*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966, 11.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*; Lester N. Trachtman, "The Labor Movement of Ghana: A Study in Political Unionism," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 10, 2, 1962, 183-200.

<sup>200</sup> As at 1949 the Gold Coast government was employing over 52, 000 wage workers. Another 80, 000 wage workers were employed in the various commercial, industrial and public utility enterprises. However, the majority of the population was self-employed in subsistence farming and it was estimated that 250,000 worked on cocoa farms. See Victor Leonard Allen, "The Study of African Trade Unionism," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 7, 2, 1969, 289-307.

We should engage in the politics of our country and the rest of the world and hasten the day when a strong and virile Labour Party will be the political organ of the Labour Movement in the Gold Coast. We should organise a political fund with which to promote legislation on trade union rights, factory safety, compensation for individual accidents and similar matters; and we should enlarge our interest to extend to the control of industry, general social problems and, indeed, to most questions affecting the public welfare.<sup>201</sup>

With this strong interest in political activities, members of the GCTUC envisioned an organisation of the labour movement along the line of the British system, where labour was fully represented in politics, through a political party.<sup>202</sup> In the years after the Second World War, the labour movement increasingly participated in the politics of the country. In fact, they were at the “forefront of the upsurge of anti-colonial nationalism and played a notable role in the achievement of Ghana’s independence.”<sup>203</sup> The involvement of the GCTUC in politics can be traced to the 1948 riots in the Gold Coast.

In 1948, a series of events ensured that the GCTUC actively indulged in politics. The first of these was the detention of the members of the ‘Big Six’ leaders of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) in the wake of the 1948

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<sup>201</sup> Joe Annan, “Our Trade Union Policy and Organisation”, on the occasion of the inaugural meeting of the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress held at Sekondi on September 8, 1945, as Quoted in *Obeng-Fosu, Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 196.

<sup>202</sup> The British Labour Party was formally constituted in 1906. This was after several attempts have been made to get working-class representation into parliament. The process can be traced back to the 1892 General elections when Keir Hardie, John Burns, Havelock Wilson were voted into parliament. By 1899, the British Trade Union Congress had decided to form a distinct labour group in parliament. They created an association called the Labour Representation Committee (LRC), meant to co-ordinate attempts to support MPs sponsored by trade unions and represent the working class population.

<sup>203</sup> Rolf Gerritsen, “The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party: Towards a Re-Interpretation,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 2, 1972, 229–244; Davies, *African Trade Unions*; Trachtman, “The Labor Movement of Ghana,” 183.

riots.<sup>204</sup> The reaction of the leadership of the labour movement was to demand the immediate release of these political prisoners.<sup>205</sup> The second event, which also began in 1948, showed a more complicated blend of industrial disturbance and a political movement. It began as an industrial dispute between workers of the Meteorological Services Department and their head of department over conditions of service.<sup>206</sup> When government failed in resolving the issue, arguing their conditions of service were favourable, the Meteorological Workers' Union, which registered as a trade union in 1949, declared a general strike on 5 October 1949.<sup>207</sup> The colonial government reacted by dismissing some of the workers of the department. The GCTUC entered this trade dispute and made additional political demands on the government, these demands included the withdrawal of a government circular concerning political activities of civil servants and the granting of dominion status to the Gold Coast.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>204</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Legislative Council Debates, 1941*. Accra: Government Printer, 1942, 25.

<sup>205</sup> Gerritsen argued that the leadership of the labour movement took this step after they realized that neither the Joint Provincial Council of Chiefs nor any other body would call for this. See: Gerritsen, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party," 232 for further insight on the issue.

<sup>206</sup> Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," 164.

<sup>207</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 49.

<sup>208</sup> They expressed deep concern about the effects of the Colonial Secretary's Circular No. 51/1949 (File No. PN.62 of 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 1949) on Government employees. They argued this Circular was a contradiction, and denied the benefits, of the Amendment to the Trade Union Ordinance No. 19 of 1950 to Government employees Unions. See also, Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 54-55.

Table 3. 2 List of registered Trade Unions in the motor transport industry (1941-1947).

Trade Union	Registration Number	Date of registration	Headquarters
Western Province Motor Drivers' Union	1	9-11-1942	Sekondi
Central Province Motor Drivers' Union	3	15-2-1943	Cape Coast
Eastern Province Motor Drivers' Union	15	8-11-1945	Nsawam
Ashanti Motor Transport Union	24	22-3-1947	Kumasi

Source: Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1948-49*, Accra: Government Printer, 1950, 10.

### Conclusion

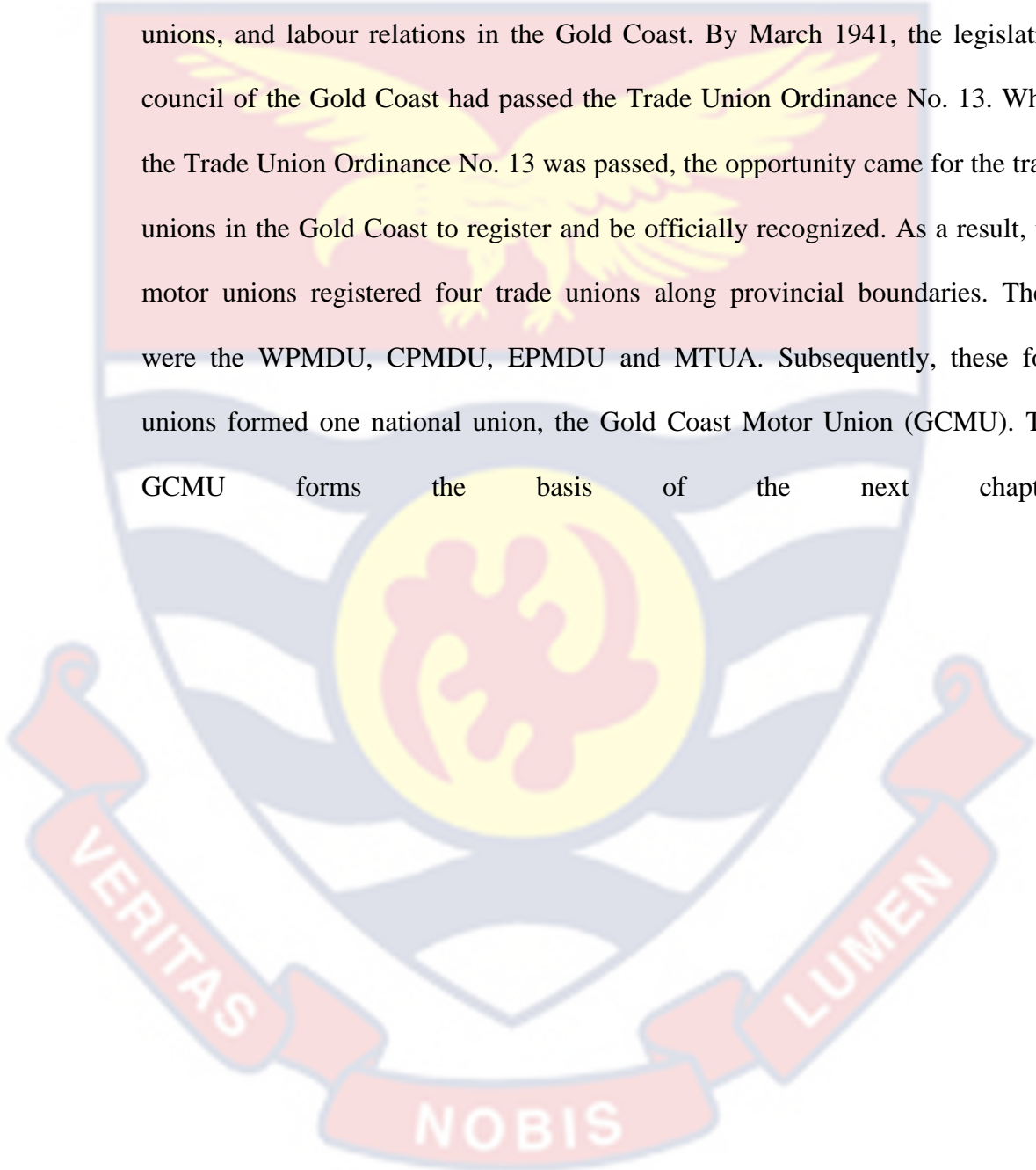
The advent of motor lorry, development of driving as a profession and the increasing number of lorries forced the colonial government to create lorry parks as places for holding lorries in the cities. In 1929, central lorry parks were opened in Accra, Sekondi and Koforidua. By 1931, other central lorry parks had been established in Kumasi and Cape Coast. These lorry parks became the centres for the formation of motor unions as the lorry parks formed the central point from which the motor drivers operated. The motor unions formed included, the Drivers Association of the Western Province, Gold Coast Drivers and Mechanics Association, based in Saltpond, Cape Coast Motor Drivers Associations, Gold Coast Motor Unions, headquartered in Koforidua and Motor Transport Union, based in Kumasi.



In the absence of legislation to guide trade unions, the colonial government tolerated the existence of these motor unions in the Gold Coast. In unionizing, the drivers were concerned about the increasing restrictive control of colonial policies in road transportation, as well as the ruinous competition amongst themselves. It is this competition for passengers and goods that led to infringement of the MTO. To survive, the motor unions identified standardization of fares as crucial to reducing the ruinous competition and infringement of road traffic laws. However, the colonial government did not endorse the issue of standardization of fares as the colonial government hoped for the emergence of more motor unions in the Gold Coast and did not want to empower a particular motor union. Notwithstanding the refusal of the colonial government to endorse standardization, the motor unions, beginning with the MTUA, began enforcing standardized rates among its members.

In 1934, the colonial government passed a new Motor Traffic Ordinance. The motor unions in the Gold Coast protested several portions of this ordinance and sent petitions to the colonial government. Of particular interest to the motor unions was the requirement that drivers should be able to read before they could obtain a driver's licence. This literacy requirement became a major point of disagreement as most driver apprentices were illiterate, and the ordinance made it impossible for them to acquire a driver's licence. When the colonial government failed to respond to the several petitions of the motor unions, at the beginning of the cocoa hold-up in 1937, the motor unions embarked on a strike action to force a response to their grievances.

The colonial government, which had been considering regularizing trade unions in the Gold Coast from the 1930, took active steps in this direction. In 1938, the Labour Department was formed to monitor the development of trade unions, and labour relations in the Gold Coast. By March 1941, the legislative council of the Gold Coast had passed the Trade Union Ordinance No. 13. When the Trade Union Ordinance No. 13 was passed, the opportunity came for the trade unions in the Gold Coast to register and be officially recognized. As a result, the motor unions registered four trade unions along provincial boundaries. These were the WPMDU, CPMDU, EPMDU and MTUA. Subsequently, these four unions formed one national union, the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU). The GCMU forms the basis of the next chapter.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### Gold Coast Motor Union and Ghana Motor Union, 1950-1966

#### Introduction

The ordinance legalizing the activities of trade unions in the Gold Coast engendered the development of a multiplicity of trade unions, as the law permitted even five persons to form and register a trade union. By 1947, the various motor unions in the Gold Coast had crystalized to form and register four provincial union. That is, the Western Province Motor Drivers' Union (WPMDU), Central Province Motor Drivers' Union (CPMDU), Eastern Province Motor Drivers' Union (EPMDU) and Motor Transport Union, Asante (MTUA).

The period between 1947 and 1950 saw active political agitations in the Gold Coast, which eventually led to self-government and independence in 1957. In the agitations and subsequent attainment of independence for the Gold Coast, the national umbrella body of the trade unions, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) played a very active role. This led to a close relationship between the government of the Convention People's Party and the GCTUC. Individual trade unions also participated in the struggle for independence at different levels.

The chapter examines the formation of one national umbrella body, the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU), in 1950. The GCMU remained largely apolitical and from 1950 dealt with its own internal challenges. The major challenge was the GCMUs attempt to control the activities of one of its member groups, the bookmen.

## The GCTUC and the 1950 General strike

On 7 January 1950, the GCTUC called a general strike in support of the Meteorological Workers' Union after failed negotiations with the colonial government.<sup>1</sup> By January 1950, nationalist activities in the Gold Coast had peaked. Nkrumah and the Convention People's Party (CPP) demanded self-government in the wake of its protest against the Coussey Committee's report.<sup>2</sup> While the CPP considered 'Positive Action' as part of its political strategy, it was not until the GCTUC declared its strike that the CPP gave the go ahead for 'Positive Action' on 8 January 1950.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the GCTUC strike coincided with the CPP's call for 'Positive Action.' As a response to the strike, the colonial government declared a state of emergency and arrested a number of GCTUC

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<sup>1</sup> Jon Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," in Ukandi Godwin Damachi, Dieter H. Seibel, and Lester N. Trachtman, (eds.), *Industrial Relations in Africa*. London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, 164; Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, 89.

<sup>2</sup> The Coussey Committee was a constitutional and political reform committee, under the chairmanship of Mr. Justice Coussey. The Coussey Report was published in October 1949. It recommended that the Legislative Assembly should consist of a speaker, elected by the Assembly from among its members or outside it, and eighty-four elected members. Five seats were to be allocated to the municipalities, two for Accra, one each for Cape Coast, Sekondi-Takoradi, and Kumasi; thirty-three rural members were to be elected in two stages, first by direct primary voting and secondly through electoral colleges; nineteen inhabitants of the Northern Territories were to be elected by the Territorial councils of the Colony, Asante and Trans-Volta Togoland; six special members were to be elected in equal proportion by the Chamber of Commerce and the Chamber of Mines and three ex-officio members were to be nominated by the Government. They were the Minister of Defence and External Affairs, the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Justice. The CPP which was formed in June 1949, with the aim of fighting to achieve "Self-Government now," objected to the Coussey Report as it did not grant Self-Government. See, Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*, 85-88. For the full report, see, Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1949*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1950, 78-88.

<sup>3</sup> Positive action was a civil disobedience campaign of agitation, propaganda and 'as a last resort, the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts, and non-cooperation based on the principle of absolute non-violence to try and force the government to call a constituent Assembly. See Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*, 89; Kwame Nkrumah, *Revolutionary Path*. New York: International Publishers, 1973, 89-91; Peter Blay Arthiabah and Harry Tham Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress: The History of the Trades Union Congress of Ghana, 1939-1995*. Accra: Gold-Type Press Publication Ltd., 1995, 143; Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 12.



leaders, including Pobe Biney (President) and Anthony Wood (General Secretary), as well as Nkrumah and other CPP leaders.<sup>4</sup>

The fall out of the fourteen-day general strike, from 7 to 20 January 1950, was severe on the TUC and its affiliate national unions.<sup>5</sup> In fact the general strike left the umbrella body, the GCTUC, and most of its affiliate members totally shattered.<sup>6</sup> Individual unions lost most of their support base, as a result of internal disagreement over the strike action. The disagreement in the labour movement bordered on the issue of “political” strikes in support of the CPP. The rank and file of most of the individual unions questioned the propriety of organizing a “political” strike.

Rolf Gerritsen identified three groups within the labour movement after the 1950 general strike.<sup>7</sup> That is, the right moderates, the CPP loyalists and the left militants.<sup>8</sup> The right moderates led by Tachie-Menson of the Post Office Employees Union, Larbi-Odam of the United African Employees Union and D. K. Foevie of the Mines Employees Union were more accommodating of the colonial government.<sup>9</sup> Members of the right moderates refused to participate in

<sup>4</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 51.

<sup>5</sup> Previous years had seen an increase in workers agitation for better conditions of service. 1946 registered 2 labour disputes involving about 365 men. In 1947 there were 16 strikes involving 43,380 men. The greater proportion of this total was accounted for by two major strikes; one in the mining industry involving 33,000 men for 35 days and the other by the Gold Coast Railway employees, comprising 5,900 men. 15 strikes occurred in 1948 affecting only 3,000 men, while 46 strikes occurred in 1949 in which 34,000 men were involved. Apart from the general strike in 1950, there were 15 stoppages of work which involved about 5,500 men. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1950*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952, 5, 8-9.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> Gerritsen, “The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party,” 233.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Gerritsen, “The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party,” 233.

the general strike. The Loyalist, led by John Tetegah, became accommodating of the colonial government after realizing political power was devolving towards the CPP.<sup>10</sup> The militants, led by Anthony Woode, Turkson Okran and Pobee Biney were major advocates of the strike.<sup>11</sup> In the aftermath of the general strike, two labour centres emerged to represent the labour movement in the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast Trade Union Congress led by the moderates and the Ghana Trades Unions Congress led by the radicals.<sup>12</sup> Since the Gold Coast was too small to effectively have two labour centers, merger talks were organised in 1953 for the two trade union centres.<sup>13</sup> At the unity talks of these labour centres, F. E. Tachie-Menson was elected the president of the TUC. Later he stood for election on the ticket of the CPP and became the Member of Parliament for Denkyira.<sup>14</sup>

The foregoing demonstrates the level of Gold Coast trade union participation in anti-colonial agitation in the period after the Second World War. Since then, the TUC has not been able to throw off this legacy of political involvement. This is understandable as the government represents the largest

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<sup>10</sup> Gerritsen, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party," 233.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>12</sup> The Gold Coast Trades Union Congress was re-established with the encouragement of the colonial government with a new constitution. The Ghana Trades Union Congress was formed initially as the Ghana Unemployed Association, with the sole purpose of agitating for the recovery of lost jobs, it became the Ghana Federation of Trade Unions and, later, the Ghana Trades Union Congress. See Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 143-144; Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 50-51.

<sup>13</sup> See R.B. Davison, "Trade Unions: Their History and Development," *Daily Graphic*, January 10, 1953; "Big Task Ahead For Unions," *Daily Graphic*, January 12, 1953; R.B. Davison, "Growth of Trade Unionism," *Daily Graphic*, January 14, 1953; R.B. Davison, "Gold Coast Trade Unions," *Daily Graphic*, February 11, 1953; "Roper appeals to TUC for strong organisation," *Daily Graphic*, February 26, 1953; A. Allotey Moffat, "Gold Coast Trade Union," *Daily Graphic*, March 18, 1953; V. M. Narr, "Trade Union Congress," *Daily Graphic*, March 21, 1953.

<sup>14</sup> Three other labour leaders joined the Legislative Assembly: C.W. Tachie-Menson, by nomination through the Joint Provincial Council while Anthony Woode and Pobee Biney by election. See Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 52.

employer of wage labour and in demanding better conditions, trade unions have been seen by governments as having political ambition.

As part of the restructuring of the GCTUC and building up individual unions, the four driver unions merged to become the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU) in 1950.<sup>15</sup> The GCMU became the sole representative of motor drivers

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<sup>15</sup> When the regional transport unions merged to form the GCMU, they adopted structures akin to other trade unions affiliated to the GCTUC. The quadrennial delegate's conference formed the highest governing body of the GPRTU of TUC and subject to that authority the Union was governed by the National Executive Council (NEC). The Delegates Conference consisted of two (2) members from each of the 458 branches, three (3) Regional representatives including the Industrial Relations Officer, the National elected officers and all heads of departments at the National Secretariat attend the Conference as ex-officio members. The conference was held once every four years and preceded the congress of the Trades Union Congress (Ghana). At the quadrennial meeting of the conference the delegates performed several functions. These included receiving, discussing and adopting the report on the activities of the National Union for the period under review submitted by the National Executive Council and the report on the audited accounts and financial statement of the National Union over the period under review and considered the state of finances of the national union. Second, the delegates considered and voted on resolutions and other proposals submitted to it. They also dealt with amendments to the constitution. Third, the delegates reviewed the past activities of the national union, planned for the future and adopted general mandates, policies and programmes aimed at advancing the objects of the national union and the well-being of its members. Four, the delegates also elected national officers of the national union. They also nominated candidates for office in the Trades Union Congress of Ghana. They also decided the venue of the next Ordinary Delegates Conference, provided however that the national executive council could change the venue where it considered it necessary in the light of the prevailing circumstances. Apart from the Delegates Conference, the constitution also made provision for an Extraordinary Delegates Conference. An Extraordinary Delegates Conference could be convened at the request of two-thirds of the total number of branches constituting the national union or when the National Executive Council deemed it necessary. The second principal organ of the union was the National Executive Council (NEC) and consisted of the National Officers, National Finance Committee Chairman and 3 representatives from each region, including the Regional Chairman and the Industrial Relation Officers. This council meets at least every four months or whenever the exigency of the situation demanded. The NEC formed the highest organ and the governing body of the National Union in the periods between delegate's conferences. Thus, its decisions were binding on all members and organs of the National Union. The functions of the National Executive Council included formulating policies of the National Union and making decisions and regulations for the management of the affairs of the national union and for execution by the General Secretary and other officers of the national union. It was also to supervise the work of the management and the executive committee. The National Executive Council was also mandated to establish the secretariat of the national union and upon the recommendation of the management committee, set up such departments of the secretariat as may be necessary for efficient administration of the affairs of the national union. The council also received, considered and approved the report of the auditors of the national union as well as the report of the General Secretary. The third major organ of the national union was the Working Committee. The committee was made up of National Officers, 3 Regional Chairmen and Finance Committee chairman. This committee consisted of the national Chairman, the first national vice chairman, the General Secretary, the Deputy General Secretary, the first national trustee, the



in the country.<sup>16</sup> The first major result of amalgamation of the drivers' union was increase in their numerical size. According to the Labour Department report of 1951, the numerical size of the newly-formed GCMU stood at 379 paid-up members.<sup>17</sup> This number increased to 1,750 in 1952 and 1953.<sup>18</sup> By 1956, the membership of the GCMU stood at 6,390.<sup>19</sup>

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second national trustee, chairman of the finance committee. The Working Committee met at least once quarterly and its meetings were presided over by the National Chairperson. The Committee directed the affairs of the national union in between the meeting of the National Executive Council. It supervised the general working conditions of the staff of the Secretariat. It advised the National Executive Council on policy matters delegated to it by the national executive council. The Union also had a Finance Committee composed of the 2 National Trustees and one member from each region. It was responsible for all financial matters of the union, and supervises and controls all financial transactions of the Union. The National Secretariat was made up of elected national officers, namely; National Chairman, National Vice Chairman, General Secretary, Deputy General Secretary Administration, Deputy General Secretary Operations, First trustee and Second trustee. These positions are replicated at the regional, branch and the local. The National Chairman was the chief executive of the Union. He is a full-time officer and elected by a secret ballot at the Delegates conference. The National Chairman was a member of the Executive Board of the TUC and was charged with presiding over National Executive Council and Working Committee meetings. He had a 4-year term of office. The General Secretary conducted the business of the union and carried out decisions of the Delegates Conference and the NLC. He was charged with recording needs of all Executive meetings. He also prepares reports to the Delegates Conference and was also responsible for the monies received and expended on behalf of the Union. There were 2 Deputy General Secretaries – Administration and operation with both serving a 4-year term of office. The Deputy General Secretary act in the absence of the General Secretary. The Deputy General Secretary (Administration) was charged with the office management i.e. correspondence, minutes, reports, records, personnel, welfare and staff matters. The Deputy General Secretary (Operations) was charged with education and public relations, grievance handling and legal matters, locals and branches, he was also responsible for the guards (trained porters and security men). There were 2 trustees, the National 1<sup>st</sup> Trustee and the National 2<sup>nd</sup> Trustee. The Trustees had vested in them the real and personal estates belonging to the National Union and dealt with them in such way as the NEC may direct. Both Trustees were part-time officers. These were made up of the Senior Administrative Secretary, the Senior Public Relations officer, the accountant and the Senior Industrial Relations Officer. A local operated under the jurisdiction and supervision of the branch. A branch operated under the jurisdiction and supervision of a Regional Secretariat. A Regional Secretariat operated under the jurisdiction and supervision of the National Secretariat. One of the salient weakness of the structure of the union, even till today, is the position of the “bookmen” now known as Station masters. The constitution still does not capture the position and function of these groups of individuals.

<sup>16</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1950-51*. Accra: Government Printer, 1951, 25.

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

<sup>18</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1951-52*. Accra: Government Printer, 1953, 32.

<sup>19</sup> Government of the Gold Coast, *Report on the Labour Department for the Year 1953-54*. Accra: Government Printer, 1956, 63.



## The Lorry Park Contest

Notwithstanding the benefits of amalgamation, the GCMU had to contend with its own internal challenges. The most pressing and persistent issue was its conflict with “bookmen” within the union. The bookmen functioned by supervising the orderly loading of vehicles at lorry parks, maintaining a shift system at the lorry parks whereby vehicles were loaded and dispatched in the order in which they arrived at the lorry park.<sup>20</sup> The shift system eliminated scuffles which ensued over the scramble for passengers and the attendant loss of passenger luggage at the lorry parks. Through the shift system, bookmen maintained a standard of discipline among drivers and passengers as well as ensuring the comfort of passengers. Furthermore, bookmen helped to check and uproot the crime of smuggling by travellers as they checked all vehicles prior to the departure of vehicles from the lorry parks.

By the mid-1950s, the lorry parks from which the GCMU operated became contested spaces for all those engaged in transportation. The bookmen had over the years become so influential that they defined practices at the lorry parks beyond their original mandate. The issue of the bookmen represented a major weakness in the organisation of the drivers’ union. Their operations at the lorry park were not inscribed in the lorry park bye-laws, neither were they well defined by the constitution of the GCMU. Their operation was based on some accepted principles of the GCMU, and, consequently, they were allowed to keep whatever money they collected from drivers at the lorry parks. For instance, any

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<sup>20</sup> Mr. James Addo, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, June 12, 2019.

time one took his/her lorry to any lorry park for the first time, bookmen demanded from the owner of the lorry the payment of “*Amantemsa*”, also known as “Footing fee.”<sup>21</sup> As at 1951, bookmen charged a 10% commission on the total fare of a fully loaded lorry and a two shilling (2/) “*ex gratia*.”<sup>22</sup> Any lorry that failed to make such payments was frustrated over future loading at the station.<sup>23</sup>

Indeed, throughout the history of the motor unions, the activities of bookmen had been a great source of discomfort and trouble to the unions that eventually formed the GCMU. For example, in 1935, the MTUA revealed the challenges it was having with its bookmen in a letter to the District Commissioner of Mampong.<sup>24</sup> The MTUA argued:

Many cases of dishonesty on the part of some of the collectors have been reported to us, and we now wish to appoint only men of good character, who will be given certificates by the union ... no commission will be paid to any collector who is without certificate.<sup>25</sup>

Thus, the MTUA, right from the early stages, sought to streamline the activities of this group of individuals who paradoxically operated within the union but stayed outside the control of the union. In other words, while the bookmen participated in activities at the lorry parks by loading vehicles and charging commissions for their services they operated outside the direct control of the union. From 1935, however, the MTUA required all bookmen who wished to load lorries with passengers and goods to be registered with the union.

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<sup>21</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

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

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG1/10/7 Motor Transport Union Ashanti to the District Commissioner, Mampong, Passenger & Goods Collectors (Touts), 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1935.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

When the motor unions in the Central Province constituted themselves into a regional trade union and registered accordingly in 1947, they also had to contend with the issue of bookmen in the region. At the annual conference of the CPMDU held at Saltpond on 15 March 1947, several resolutions were passed unanimously by the delegates who came from Cape Coast, Saltpond and Swedru.<sup>26</sup> One of these resolutions prohibited the activities of bookmen.<sup>27</sup> The resolution indicated that bookmen were not permitted to be at lorry station for the purpose of collecting passengers for a driver.<sup>28</sup> Persons found to be acting as such were to be fined Two pounds Ten shillings (£2.10/-) or, in default, to be handed to the Native Authority to be dealt with.<sup>29</sup> The major complaint against bookmen at lorry parks in the Central Province was not different from what the MTUA complained about.

These early efforts to control the activities of the bookmen were not successful until the formation of the national umbrella body, the GCMU, in 1950. On 26 October 1951, the Kumasi Transport Owners Union (KTOU) set off the new series of attempts to rid the GCMU of bookmen.<sup>30</sup> The KTOU pushed for the abolishment of the services of bookmen.<sup>31</sup> KTOU articulated its grievances in a seven-point resolution to W. H. Beeton, Chief Commissioner of Asante.<sup>32</sup> KTOU's resolution pointed out that the existence of bookmen marred the progress

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<sup>26</sup> PRAAD, Cape Coast ADM23/1/649 Annual Conference meeting of the Central Province Motor Drivers Union, 15<sup>th</sup> March, 1947.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> The Kumasi Transport Owners Union was a branch of an association of transport owners within the GCMU. The Transport owner's union was not a registered trade union.

<sup>31</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> "Lorry Owners Object", *Daily Graphic*, October 26, 1951.

of their business since bookmen always failed to render accurate accounts to the GCMU.<sup>33</sup> The lorry owners decried their inability to pay monthly instalments on lorries taken on hire purchase as a result of what they called “fishy” dealings on the part of these bookmen.<sup>34</sup> Such practices, the KTOU argued, were inimical to their economic wellbeing.<sup>35</sup> For instance, they argued that the bookmen were in possession of printed tickets which they issued to passengers in respect of cargo freight and passengers without recording in the Drivers’ Pass Book the amount collected as being in agreement with the tickets issued.<sup>36</sup> This method, the lorry owners maintained, had been adopted by the bookmen to dupe the transport owners and drivers jointly and severally.<sup>37</sup>

Again, the KTOU pointed out that there were instances when illiterate passengers, seeking a vehicle to travel to a place like Bawku, would be put on a lorry and issued a ticket showing Tamale as the destination by a bookman who would collect the fare for Bawku.<sup>38</sup> This consequently caused passenger-driver conflict at the wrong destination – Tamale leading to reports being made to the police.<sup>39</sup> On the face of the ticket issued to the passenger, however, nothing seemed illegal but the bookmen had pocketed part of the fare and short-changed the passenger by putting him or her on a lorry that did not take the person to the designated final stop. This deceitful and nefarious practice of the bookmen, the lorry owners argued, gave the transport industry a bad name and reduced the level

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<sup>33</sup> “Lorry Owners Object”, *Daily Graphic*, October 26, 1951.

<sup>34</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

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



of confidence of the general public in the motor transport industry. As a result, the KTOU was determined to stop the services of bookmen in its entirety.<sup>40</sup>

Furthermore, the transport owners argued that, when lorries moved from their base in Kumasi to the Northern Territories, the official fare charged per passenger was fifty pounds (£50). Although, the bookmen collected fifty pounds (£50) from passengers, they declared between twenty-five pounds (£25) and thirty pounds (£30) to the GCMU, after which they charged 10% commission on the amount declared.<sup>41</sup> When the bookmen were challenged on these transactions, the lorry of the owner who challenged the bookmen would be unloaded (both goods and passengers) by the bookmen at the station.<sup>42</sup>

Moreover, where a passenger was charged one pound ten shillings (£1.10/-) for a journey, the bookman pocketed ten shillings (10/-). Thereafter, the bookman charged his commission on the one pound (£1) declared to the union. In other instances, a bookman may put a passenger in a lorry and charge him. Later the same bookman begged the driver of the lorry that the passenger was a relative and should be conveyed without a fee.<sup>43</sup>

The bookmen were also accused of duping the transport owners and drivers when goods like bags of kola were loaded onto a lorry.<sup>44</sup> Although, the bookmen charged for these loads, they assigned unsuspecting passengers on the lorry, as owners of the bags of kola. Thus, the money charged for these loads are

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<sup>40</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

used by the bookmen.<sup>45</sup> These problems were in relations to the bookmen operating from the lorry parks and forming part of the GCMU.<sup>46</sup>

Notwithstanding the disagreements between transport owners and bookmen, the GCMU protected booking as an activity to be undertaken by members of the union. In 1956 for instance, the GCMU protested the operations of the International Travelling Booking Company.<sup>47</sup> As the name of the company suggests, its functions were similar to that of bookmen. The GCMU in a terse letter protested against the operations of this company. Sections of the GCMU protest, which needs to be appreciated in full, read as follows:

It has come to the notice of the National Executive of the above-named Union [GCMU] that you are running a kind of “Booking Business” under the registered name of International Travelling Booking Company in Kumasi, and what you actually do is to “Book” lorries as the “Bookers” of the above-named Union do. In fact, what you are

<sup>45</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Extermination of Lorry Collectors Services, 23<sup>rd</sup> October, 1951.

<sup>46</sup> During my field work, in Accra, in June 2018, a second group of “Bookmen” caught my attention. Interestingly, there was another caucus of bookmen that was not necessarily part of the GCMU, but operated from various bus stops. I made an interesting observation when I travelled between Kwashieman and Legon in Accra. At Lapaz, the Benz sprinter bus on which I was traveling stopped to offload passengers and others also got on board. A “Bookman” demanded payment from the mate who refused, claiming that the passengers were already at the station, and the “Bookman” did not offer any service. After a small scuffle between the two, the bus continued on its journey. A young Nigerian on the bus passed a comment that “you cannot do this in Lagos that I load your bus and you refuse to pay me. I will just stab you and nobody can do anything to me”. Soon after, a plain clothed police officer who was on the bus asked the young man to shut up or he would take him to the police station. The comment of the young Nigerian exemplifies what Daniel Agbiboa describes as “the politics of violent patronage and extortion rackets in which they (Bookmen) are popularly implicated.” In the transport space in Lagos the *agbero* (“Bookmen”) were the most visible and violent face of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW). Agbiboa further notes that the *agberos* had converted all bus stops, junctions and motor parks in Lagos into ATMs for collecting money from drivers each day to the extent of physically assaulting them if they refuse to give them money. Indeed, while the second type of “bookmen” demonstrate the aggression that Agbiboa associated with the NURTW, they are not associated with the transport union under discussion. Drivers deal with these individuals at their own discretion, as these types of “Bookmen” operate from illegal bus stops.

<sup>47</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Gold Coast Motor Union, Protest Against Operation of Your Business, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1956.

actually doing is to take away or interfere with the Job of “Bookers” of the Gold Coast Motor Union in Kumasi. This is a very serious interference into the rights and privileges of members of the Union in their peaceful Job.<sup>48</sup>

Furthermore, the letter addressed the past and present challenges of bookmen that:

The Job of “Booking” lorries with loads and passengers by those members of the Union called “Bookers” has had to pass through a very contentious process before it was properly recognized by the Municipal Authorities as well as the Police. These Bookers are registered with their photographs in the office of each branch of the Union, and the Union is held responsible for any acts of criminal nature or otherwise which any member-booker may be involved. It is the duty of the Union to safe-guard the interests of passengers and their properties through the duties of Bookers, and this responsibility will be bound to be greatly disturbed if you are allowed to do the job of “Booking” lorries as are now being done by the Union.<sup>49</sup>

Nevertheless, after several complains about the existing problems that bookmen posed to the transport industry in the country, the Accra Municipal Assembly with the endorsement of the Minister of Interior, the Hon. Krobo Edusei, announced through a radio broadcast in 1958 the prohibition of the practice of booking at the lorry parks in Accra.<sup>50</sup> Following that, the Eastern Regional Commissioner, Hon. E. Nee Ocansey, to whom complains had also been made several times, tried to mediate between the bookmen and the transport

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<sup>48</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Gold Coast Motor Union, Protest Against Operation of Your Business, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1956.

<sup>49</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Gold Coast Motor Union, Protest Against Operation of Your Business, 24<sup>th</sup> April, 1956.

<sup>50</sup> The complains about the bookmen were not limited to only the lorry owners and drivers. Market women and other passengers also complained about being abused by the bookmen at the lorry parks. PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Press Release No.868/58 Prohibition of Bookers from Accra Market.

owners of the Eastern Province in 1958.<sup>51</sup> During one of the arbitration meeting in September 1958, Mr J. N. Ashitey, representative of the transport owners reiterated the allegations against the bookmen.<sup>52</sup> According to the minutes of the meeting, when the Regional Commissioner enquired from the bookmen representatives, whether the allegations made by the representative of the transport owners were true, Gbada Moshie, a representative of the bookmen in the Eastern Province, after initial hesitation, confirmed that all the allegation were true.<sup>53</sup> The Regional Commissioner accordingly informed the bookmen that the practice of booking should cease forthwith.<sup>54</sup>

The Ghana Motor Union (GMU), in a resolution passed on 22 September 1958, also banned the operations of bookers throughout the country.<sup>55</sup> The Office of the Prime Minister, in a press release, affirmed this position. The Office argued that the practice of booking had become an inconvenience to the public.<sup>56</sup> What remained to be done was to find the legal framework to make the prohibition last. Since there were no laws regarding the practice of booking, councils were

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<sup>51</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Minutes of a meeting held on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1958, in the Office of the Regional Commissioner.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> The “Bookers” were represented by Amadu Fulani, Musa Kotokoli, Gbada Moshie Lagos, Mazu Zugu, Issa Dagomba, Zakari Dagomba. PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Minutes of a meeting held on Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> September, 1958, in the Office of the Regional Commissioner. The Regional Commissioner was surprised to see that although the “Bookers” as a whole were non-Ghanaians from Nigeria, yet they had the scruple to maltreat, and molest Ghanaian citizens, in addition to indulging into hardly calculated to enhance peace, law and order. He ordered that they should henceforth remove all their tables and belongings from the lorry park. The Regional Commissioner also made it clear that he expected his decision in the matter to be carried out without delay.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> With the attainment of independence, the union amended its name to reflect the change. Thus, the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU) was now the Ghana Motor Union (GMU). PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Ghana Motor Union Resolution, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1958.

<sup>56</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Bookers and Unemployed drivers at Lorry parks, 22 December, 1958; PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Kumasi to the Town Clerk, Kumasi Municipal Council, Lorry Park “Bookers”, 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1958.



directed by the Convention People's Party government to amend their lorry park bye laws to read, "the practice of collecting or booking of passengers for drivers of motor vehicles in the lorry park is prohibited and no person shall pose as a 'booker' or 'passenger collector' in the lorry park."<sup>57</sup>

### **From 'Bookers' to 'Porters'**

As the CPP government and the GMU tried to find a lasting solution to the issue of booking in 1958, the name "porters" came to replace bookmen. The term porters appear in archival material in place of bookmen.<sup>58</sup> In outlawing the activities bookmen, the GMU was mindful of how important the work of booking was to their members at the various lorry parks. The lorry owners and drivers still needed a group of people to perform the functions that the bookmen used to perform. Thus, in the same resolution banning the activities of the bookmen at the lorry parks, the GMU sought to create another group to perform the same function. The new group was called "porters." According to the GMU resolution:

the Operation of "Bookers" (passenger Collectors) be banned throughout the country and the Union shall have "Porters" who shall have Membership cards and wear Identification Badges, to help Drivers and Transport Owners in loading their vehicles which shall run on shift with effect from the date of this resolution to improve the Lorry Park operation.<sup>59</sup>

Accordingly, when the local units of the GMU tried to implement the resolution by employing porters, the bookmen whose position had been outlawed

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<sup>57</sup> The use of councils refers to City, Municipal, Urban and Local Councils. PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/15 Secretary to the Regional Commissioner, Kumasi to the Town Clerk, Kumasi Municipal Council, Lorry Park "Bookers", 13<sup>th</sup> December, 1958.

<sup>58</sup> See PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Ghana Motor Union Resolution, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1958.

<sup>59</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Ghana Motor Union Resolution, 22<sup>nd</sup> October, 1958.

reacted to their disengagement through petitions and also addressed themselves as “porters.”<sup>60</sup> They couched their petitions in terms that reflected the hardship brought to them by the banning of “booking”, and of their inability to make a living and take care of their various households.<sup>61</sup> From this point forward, the tussle in the GMU became a tussle between other members and the porters. This eventually led to the formation of splinter groups. This phenomenon would be subsequently discussed in chapter 5.

### **Ghana Motor Union Strike in a Post-Colonial State**

Regardless of its internal problems with the activities of the bookmen, the Ghana Motor Union remained the mouthpieces of drivers in the sphere of labour relations with employers of drivers and the government after the proclamation of independence in March 1957. Taking the baton from the Gold Coast Motor Union, which had been an ally of the GCTUC, it also played an important role as a pressure group that supported the TUC for social justice in the realm of work in Ghana. One of the key demonstrations of its power for social justice from government for its members was a strike that it embarked on in 1957. The provenance of this strike dates back into the colonial period, that is, the immediate years after the Second World War.

From the beginning of self-rule under the CPP government the Gold Coast experienced rising cost of living. A situation that had been developing in the aftermath of the Second World War. The GCMU responded to the economic

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<sup>60</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Koforidua Potters Union to the Regional Commissioner, Koforidua, 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1958.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

difficulties in 1952 by increasing passenger fares, by charging one and half pence (11/2d) per mile for the first 100 miles and one penny (1d), a mile after that.<sup>62</sup> The union justified these increases by citing increased lorry park taxes from one shilling six pence (1s 6d) a day to four shilling six pence (4s 6d) per day.<sup>63</sup> Again, members of the union were faced with high workshop charges for vehicle repairs and high cost of vehicles and spare parts. In a meeting with representative of the Ministry of Communication, the union also made reference to the existence of Levantine middlemen who purchased directly from the Big European trading firms and sold to prospective lorry owners on hire-purchase.<sup>64</sup> It is important to note that by the beginning to the 1950s, Levantines focused more on trading in vehicles and spare parts on hire-purchase with their Ghanaian counterparts and also running private taxis.<sup>65</sup>

The GCMU maintained, “they would continue to charge those rates ... until such time as the Government would intervene on their behalf and control the prices of motor vehicles and accessories.”<sup>66</sup> While the government agreed that the cost of operation of commercial motor transportation had increased, it urged the GCMU to consider reducing fares.<sup>67</sup> E. J. Prah, the Chief Transport Officer of the Government Department, argued government’s position by making reference to

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<sup>62</sup> “Union Refuse to Cut Down Fares,” *Daily Graphic*, September 24, 1952, 1; “Drivers Discuss Increased Fares” *Daily Graphic*, October 1, 1952, 11.

<sup>63</sup> “Drivers Discuss Increased Fares” *Daily Graphic*, October 1, 1952, 11.

<sup>64</sup> See Chapter two, footnote 144.

<sup>65</sup> Keith Hart, “Small scale Entrepreneurs in Ghana and Development Planning,” *The Journal of Development Studies* 6, 4, July 1970, 104–20,

<sup>66</sup> “Union Refuse to Cut Down Fares,” *Daily Graphic*, September 24, 1952, 1.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

the Lidbury-Gbademah wage-salary recommendation of 1952.<sup>68</sup> Prah argued, it should be possible for the GCMU to maintain the old fares since transport owners paid their drivers and drivers-mates at Lidbury rates, insurance premiums had not increased and also transport owners purchased only two sets of tyres per year.<sup>69</sup> However, for a union that operated wholly in the private sector, the Lidbury recommendation held no value. What the GCMU needed was government intervention in the control of prices of vehicles, spare parts and petrol.

In 1952, before the lorry fare issue could be resolved, the government introduced in the Legislative Assembly a new Motor Traffic Ordinance.<sup>70</sup> For 5 years, between 1952 and 1957, this ordinance became a source of protracted negotiations between the government and the GCMU. At a delegates' conference of the GCMU held at Winneba on Sunday, 9 November 1952, a 16-member

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<sup>68</sup>As a result of post-war economic hardships, in November 1950, Sir David Lidbury, assisted by Mr. A. R. Macdonald was appointed "to investigate and report on changes which, in order to improve efficiency and economy of administration and to secure elimination of waste, are necessary in relation to organisation, staffing and cadre and operative methods of all Government departments, and to make recommendations; and further to investigate and report on changes in remuneration of all grades of public service which are necessary to secure more efficient and economic administration and to make recommendation." The Lidbury Commission finished its deliberations in April, 1951, and rendered its report in September. As a result of the commission's work, revised scales of salaries and wages were introduced throughout Government service with effect from 1<sup>st</sup> April, 1952. Government employees, especially, unskilled labourers, received increases over previous basic wages and temporary allowances varying up to 25 per cent in the main towns to 65 per cent in the North. These increases granted by government were matched by most other employers. See Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Gold Coast 1950*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1952; "Select Committee on Lidbury Completes its Job," *The Accra Evening News*, April 15, 1952, 1; "Reflecting on Lidbury," *The Accra Evening News*, April 19, 1952, 2; "Gbademah Moves for Acceptance of Lidbury," *The Accra Evening News*, April 23, 1952, 1; Kwadwo Tsibo, "Lidbury and the Man on the Street," *The Accra Evening News*, April 24, 1952, 3; "Union Refuse to Cut Down Fares," *Daily Graphic*, September 24, 1952, 1. See also, Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," 130.

<sup>69</sup> "Union Refuse to Cut Down Fares," *Daily Graphic*, September 24, 1952, 1; "ATC Cancel Meeting with Taxi drivers," *Daily Graphic*, September 13, 1952, 5; "Taxi Fare Row Fakes New Turn," *Daily Graphic*, September 19, 1952, 1; "Motor Drivers will Protest," *Daily Graphic*, September 23, 1952, 7.

<sup>70</sup> "New Rule for Motor Drivers," *Daily Graphic*, September 17, 1951, 1; "Stricter Control for Road Transport," *Daily Graphic*, October 5, 1952, 1.



delegation headed by K. Ward, president of the GCMU, was appointed by the delegates, to meet Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah on 10 November, 1952 to discuss the new Motor Traffic Ordinance.<sup>71</sup> Before this proposed meeting, the drivers threatened to resort to strike action, in case their meeting with the premier ended in a deadlock. Indeed, transport owners of the GCMU promised to subsidize their drivers while on strike until such time that their demands were met.<sup>72</sup> The new bill, the GCMU argued, placed them entirely at the mercy of the police and the various councils. A case in point was when the Accra Town Council (ATC) tried to enforce one of its bye-laws pertaining to taxi licensing fees and also attempted to regulate taxi fares in 1952.<sup>73</sup> In 1952, the ATC imposed a yearly tax of £10 on the taxi operators and also attempted to regulate the fares charged by taxi drivers.<sup>74</sup> Taxi drivers who were charging two shillings per mile of service and about five shillings extra for every hour of waiting had this reduce by the ATC bye-law to eighteen pence for the first mile of service and one shilling for each additional mile.<sup>75</sup> Taxi drivers and their employers argued that, this increased tax and the attempt to regulate taxi fares was unreasonable, as the price of cars and their spare parts just like anything else in the world had risen.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, they contended that, the motor garages in Accra had increased their

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<sup>71</sup> "GCMU will Meet Premier Tomorrow," *Daily Graphic*, November 11, 1952, 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>73</sup> "ATC Cancel Meeting With Taxi-drivers," *Daily Graphic*, September 13, 1952, 5; "ATC Modified Taxi Bye-Law," *Daily Graphic*, October 25, 1952, 1; "Taxi Deadlock," *Daily Graphic*, October 25, 1952, 5; "120 Taxi Drivers in Court," *Daily Graphic*, October 28, 1952, 1; "ATC Amend Taxi Bye-Laws," *Daily Graphic*, December 27, 1952, 11; "Government Rates Taxi Fares," *The Accra Evening News*, July 30, 1952; "Taxi Drivers Protest Against ATC Decision," *Daily Graphic*, August 4, 1952; "Taxi Fare Row Takes New Turn," *Daily Graphic*, September 19, 1952, 1.

<sup>74</sup> "ATC Amend Taxi Bye-Laws," *Daily Graphic*, December 27, 1952, 11.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

hourly charge for servicing from four shillings to ten shillings.<sup>77</sup> As Taxi drivers kicked against the bye-law, the GCMU intervened to negotiate with government on the situation. Indeed, the major point of contention against the new regulation was that the powers the bill conferred on the police to revoke driving licence was liable to abuse.<sup>78</sup>

In October 1956, the TUC passed Resolution Number Eleven in support of the GCMU petition to the Chief Justice of the Gold Coast.<sup>79</sup> The grievances of the entire rank and file of the union were in three areas. The first was that when arrested drivers pleaded not guilty to motor charges preferred against them, they were remanded into custody until the next court day.<sup>80</sup> This, the TUC and the GCMU, contended, brought hardship upon the drivers and their dependents. Second, the police arrested drivers, especially, those running Northern Territories from Kumasi and charged them for carrying one or two persons while loaded with freight. The GCMU and the TUC argued the Gold Coast Police were misinterpreting the law on carrying passengers and freight. Third, the GCMU complained about exorbitant court fines ranging from £15-50 being imposed on the Motor Drivers committing motor offences such as not securing loaded goods properly and £3-10 for causing obstruction to other lorries.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> "ATC Amend Taxi Bye-Laws," *Daily Graphic*, December 27, 1952, 11.

<sup>78</sup> "GCMU Will Meet Premier Tomorrow," *Daily Graphic*, November 11, 1952, 1; "Taxi Licence Fee Reduced," *Daily Graphic*, November 18, 1952, 1.

<sup>79</sup> The Gold Coast Trades Union Congress, *A Programme for Congress. Executive Board's Report to the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress Held at Sekondi-Takoradi From 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1956*. Accra: GCTUC, 1956.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

On 22 July 1957, the GMU, together with the Ghana Taxi Drivers' Union, embarked on a nationwide strike over the enforcement of the new Road Traffic Regulation.<sup>82</sup> This was after a 12-man delegation of the union met the Minister of Interior and Justice, Ako Adjei, and the Minister of Education, C. T. Nylander, to discuss their concerns.<sup>83</sup> Apart from union concerns with sections of the New Road Traffic Regulation that had come into effect on 1 July 1957, they were also bothered by a proposed third party insurance scheme which the Government was yet to roll out.<sup>84</sup>

This third party insurance scheme, provided that the owner of every motor vehicle, take out an insurance policy against claims by third parties, in respect of bodily injury or death.<sup>85</sup> That is, if any person was killed or injured as a result of an accident, the third party, which included passengers riding in the vehicle covered by the policy, would be able to make claims against the owner.<sup>86</sup> The owner on the other hand, will not, however, have to pay such an insurance claim as he had insured against such a contingency with an insurance company.<sup>87</sup> The insurance claim, therefore, was passed onto the insurance company who were

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<sup>82</sup> The Ghana Taxi Drivers' Union Emerge and Affiliated with the TUC in 1956. "Drivers' Strike," *Daily Graphic*, July 22, 1957, 5; "Drivers Say: No One Will be Forced," *Daily Graphic* July 22, 1957, 12.

<sup>83</sup> "The Main Causes of the Strike," *Daily Graphic*, July 23, 1957, 7; "Motor Unions Secretary Explains- Why We Took Our Trucks off the Road...", *Daily Graphic*, July 27, 1957, 1.

<sup>84</sup> "The New Road Traffic Regulation," *Daily Graphic*, July 27, 1957, 8&9; "Why the New Road Laws are Good...", *Daily Graphic* July 30, 1957, 8&9.

<sup>85</sup> The third-party insurance scheme had been on the statute book since the 1940s, but was never passed into force. Ghana was one of the very few countries on this African Continent which did not, at the time, have a law making third-party insurance compulsory for all motor vehicles. In deciding to make insurance compulsory, the Government updated the old ordinance, even though the bill varies little from the original Ordinance. Ghana, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November-19<sup>th</sup> December, 1958. Accra: Government Printer, 1959, col. 130.

<sup>86</sup> Ghana, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November- 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1958. Accra: Government Printer, 1959, col. 130.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 131.

legally responsible for settling the claims. Thus, when an accident occurred the injured party could obtain damages irrespective of the financial standing of the driver who caused the accident. The third party insurance scheme, the government argued, was a protection not only to the owners of vehicles but to all persons who used the roads, and this was later acknowledged by the GMU and GTDU.<sup>88</sup> The enactment of this legislation meant that all vehicle owners were to obtain, from the insurance companies, a certificate to the effect that they were insured against third party risks and this certificate was to be presented to the licensing authorities before a licence was first issued or renewed.<sup>89</sup> In respect of passenger carrying vehicles, certificates were to be printed on green paper, so that the police would be able to tell at a glance whether a lorry has merely paid the lower premium, as a goods carrying lorry, or the higher premium which is required for lorries carrying passengers.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, col. 131. In spite of this realization, the bill had some challenges. For instance, a driver who was driving an insured car and who may sustain an injury or suffer death as a result of accident will not be compensated and his relatives will not be compensated because he is in employment. As there was no compulsory Workmen's Compensation in the country, it was queer that the driver who was in charge of the vehicle and who may suffer loss arising out of an accident will not receive any compensation, whereas those who are on the vehicle will be compensated. Again, the insurance companies had, by this time already, formed themselves into a pool, and they decided what the premiums should be. The question was how the general public would be protected against such a pool of insurance companies. Insurance premiums were already on the rise in the country and one of the reasons why insurance premiums, especially on motor vehicles, were on the increase was that there were many insurance companies operating in the country, and the field was fairly limited as all of them had agreed on the premiums to be charged. If they were competing with one another in the market, some of them would incur losses, but as they were not competing with one another, they sit down together to compare notes and then decided on premiums in order to make profits. Moreover, there was extra overhead expenditure, especially on management, due to the fact that there were many insurance companies operating in the country.

<sup>89</sup> Ghana, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November- 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1958. Accra: Government Printer, 1959, col. 131.

<sup>90</sup> Ghana, *Parliamentary Debates*, 3<sup>rd</sup> November- 19<sup>th</sup> December, 1958. Accra: Government Printer, 1959, col. 131.



The GMU objected to eleven clauses out of the over hundred clauses in the New Road traffic regulations. These included assignment of identification marks to lorries, painting the name and address of owners on commercial vehicles, position of indicators, examination of commercial vehicles, application procedures for licence, conditions of issue of omnibus licence, seating accommodation for passengers in passenger lorries, maximum period of driving commercial vehicles and exemption from fees.<sup>91</sup> On 17 July 1957, the leaders of the GMU and Ako Adjei met for discussion on the issues they outlined in the new regulations.<sup>92</sup> The minister agreed that the Union's concerns were legitimate and resolved to take up the issues with the leaders of the police and his colleague cabinet members.<sup>93</sup>

While the GMU waited for response from Ako Adjei, the police began enforcing the new regulation and the excesses of the police sparked the strike action. As outlined by W. B. Otoo, the General Secretary of the GMU, while the minister was still considering their views, drivers would be left at the mercy of the police acting under the new regulations.<sup>94</sup> Thus, it was resolved by the national executive and union members on 18 July 1957, that the members should stay off the road rather than allow themselves to be harassed by the police.<sup>95</sup>

The CPP government, on its part, condemned the strike and maintained that the purpose of the new ordinance and insurance scheme was to protect

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<sup>91</sup> "Motor Unions Secretary Explains- Why We Took Our Trucks off the Road..." *Daily Graphic*, July 27, 1957, 1.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

innocent parties involved in motor accidents.<sup>96</sup> It was the duty of the government to safeguard the lives of the people by demanding a higher sense of responsibility among drivers and transport owners in the discharge of their duties to the general public. The new independent government was not going to be coerced into submission, and the CPP government's strategy in dealing with the effects of the strike was to ensure that essential services and commodities, especially foodstuffs, were provided at the main centres of population throughout Ghana.<sup>97</sup> Thus, Chief Regional Officers and Regional Officers were authorized to make use of all Government-owned transport in their regions to convey foodstuffs and other essentials items in the manner most suited to their local situations.<sup>98</sup> A central pool of transport was also organised in Accra to be used to supply Accra itself.

The CPP government stationed empty railway wagons at most stations up the line, to convey supplies to Accra. Thereafter, the government announced that:

Anyone in Accra who has foodstuffs in bulk outside to bring to the market in Accra or who can guarantee that a full consignment will be available for collection by him or her at any place up-country, should apply in person to the office of the Senior Government Agent, Rowe Road, Accra.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>96</sup> "Government Views Strike 'With Grave Concern'," *Daily Graphic*, July 24, 1957, 12. See also, "This Strike is Unwarranted," *The Accra Evening News*, July 23, 1957, 2; W. S. Johnson, "Drivers Strike is Ill advised-Who Suffers in the End?" *The Accra Evening News*, July 24, 1957, 3; "Drivers Strike an Opposition Plot," *The Accra Evening News*, July 25, 1957, 2; Nii Teiko Hammond, "This Unwarranted Drivers Strike," *The Accra Evening News*, July 31, 1957, 3.

<sup>97</sup> PRAAD, Kumasi ARG6/10/82 Motor Union Strike- Government Measures for Maintenance of Supplies. See also "N.L.M Calls for Probe," *Daily Graphic*, July 25, 1957, 1.

<sup>98</sup> "Government's Plan to Deal with the Motor Strike," *Daily Graphic*, July 25, 1957, 1.

<sup>99</sup> "Government's Plan to Deal with the Motor Strike," *Daily Graphic*, July 25, 1957, 1; "Government Transport Measures Working Satisfactorily," *The Accra Evening News*, July 29, 1957, 1; "Government is prepared," *The Accra Evening News*, July 29, 1957, 2; "Government May Set Up Transport Corporation," *The Accra Evening News*, July 31, 1957, 1.

Special arrangements were also made for lorries to be sent out to fishing villages to carry daily fish catches from the beaches to the central railway station in Accra.<sup>100</sup> Then from Accra the fish was carried by rail to a number of central points along the country's rail lines. Local arrangements were then made for the distribution of the fish from these central points to consumers.

Like the 1937 strike, all the members of the GMU participated in the strike. Owner-drivers and paid-drivers of the union shared a common interest in cost items like insurance, licence fees, cost of spare parts and capital cost of the vehicles. While the owner-drivers were directly responsible for the increased cost of operating their vehicles, for the paid-driver, these payments and other capital charges were reflected in the daily sales he was expected to make to his employer.<sup>101</sup> If the owner of a vehicle who employed a driver was unable to meet his financial obligations due to the high running costs, the latter ultimately became unemployed.<sup>102</sup> Thus paid-drivers' participated in the strike in pursuance of job security.<sup>103</sup>

The strike, which lasted for a period of ten days, caused a great deal of discomfort and showed the extent to which the activities of these private entrepreneurs in the motor transport industry could paralyze the nation. From the onset of the strike, its impact could be felt at the railway stations, as "there was an unusually large number of passengers at the Accra Railway station and officials

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<sup>100</sup> "The Motor Strike Goes On: Government Trucks to Start a 'Fish Lift'," *Daily Graphic*, July 26, 1957, 1.

<sup>101</sup> Republic of Ghana, *White Paper on the Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State publishing Corporation, 1968, 4-5.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

had difficulty in dealing with them.”<sup>104</sup> The strike was felt by ordinary people as thousands of people were stranded and had to scramble for municipal buses in an effort to get to their places of work. In several communities outside Accra, individuals were left to trek from one destination to the other, while foodstuffs could not be moved to the city centres to be sold.<sup>105</sup>

The broader implication of the strike was rising prices of foodstuffs as there were no lorries to carry food to the various cities. In Kumasi, for instance, a tuber of yam that was formerly sold at two shillings six pence (2s 6d) was being sold at five shillings six pence (5s 6d) and plantain at four pence (4d) each instead of one penny (1d).<sup>106</sup> In Accra, cassava which normally sold at three tubers for six pence (6d) went up to two for nine pence (9d).<sup>107</sup> Plantain was sold at six for two shillings (2s) instead of the usual price of six for one shilling (1s). One woman summed up the impact on cost of living thus: “my husband will have to pay more for his food if the strike continues indefinitely.”<sup>108</sup>

In trying to find a solution to the strike, the TUC, led by its Acting General Secretary, E. A. Mettle-Nunoo, played a mediating role between the CPP government and the GMU.<sup>109</sup> At the beginning of the strike the TUC expressed interest in finding an amicable solution to the problem. When the two parties,

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<sup>104</sup> “The Drivers’ Strike-Thousands Stranded as Lorries Stop Work...,” *Daily Graphic*, July 23, 1957, 6&7.

<sup>105</sup> “Moses Danquah Says ... Stop This ‘Footsore Nuisance’,” *Daily Graphic*, July 29, 1957; “Calls off the Strike!” *Daily Graphic*, July 27, 1957, 5.

<sup>106</sup> “Up Goes Prices of Foodstuffs,” *Daily Graphic*, July 24, 1957, 3.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>108</sup> “Up Goes Prices of Foodstuffs,” *Daily Graphic*, July 24, 1957, 3; “Government’s Plan to Deal with the Motor Strike,” *Daily Graphic*, July 25, 1957, 1.

<sup>109</sup> “TUC Invites Drivers,” *Daily Graphic*, July 24, 1957, 3; “TUC Invites Drivers,” *The Accra Evening News*, July 24, 1957, 1.



government and the GMU, finally agreed to hold talks and discuss the problem it was agreed that the unions should call off the strike so as to have a fruitful discussion. Thus, on 1 August 1957, the GMU and the Ghana Taxi Drivers Union called off the 10-day strike in anticipation of a fruitful negotiation with the Minister of Transport.<sup>110</sup> The only condition for calling off the strike from the GMU's perspective was that the "the Government gave assurance that they would not be arrested under any sections of the clauses over which negotiations were being carried on."<sup>111</sup>

In the view of the public, the members of the motor transport unions were selfish and were seeking their own interest.<sup>112</sup> Indeed, Hart argues that this began the demonization of drivers within the public sphere.<sup>113</sup>

### **The Industrial Relation Act of 1958: The GCMU and the Search for Stronger National Unions**

Under the direction of Kwame Nkrumah, who acted as Leader of Government Business from 1951 and later became Prime Minister in 1957, the government did not downplay the vital role of the workers movement in its development agenda. In effect, Ako Adjei, Minister of Trade and Labour, told the 11 Annual Conference of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in 1954 that, "Government fully realized that it was essential that there must exist in the

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<sup>110</sup> "Drivers Call off Strike for Talks..." *Daily Graphic*, August 1, 1957, 1; "Ashitey Calls on Drivers to Resume Work," *The Accra Evening News*, August 1, 1957.

<sup>111</sup> "Drivers: We're Ready for New Talk," *Daily Graphic*, July 31, 1957, 16.

<sup>112</sup> Jennifer Hart, "'One Man, No Chop': Licit Wealth, Good Citizens, and the Criminalization of Drivers in Postcolonial Ghana," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, 3, 2013, 373–396.

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

country, a strong, virile and responsible trade union movement. For without such an organisation it was difficult for the government to carry out progressively the economic and social development of the country.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, the government endeavoured to have a working relationship with the TUC.

Consequently, when the leadership of the TUC, from 1954, began considering more seriously the issue of national trade unions, it got the full backing of the government.<sup>115</sup> Indeed, the first expression of the desire to have strong national trade unions was at the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress of the TUC, held in September 1954.<sup>116</sup> As at 1954, there were twelve unions for commercial workers, six unions for Municipal employees, ten for forestry and six for construction workers.<sup>117</sup> By the 12 Annual Congress, in 1955, little progress had been made on the issue of national unions.<sup>118</sup> Thus, a committee was appointed by congress to seriously consider the issue. At the 13 Annual Congress, in October 1956, John K. Tettegah, the General Secretary of the TUC, stressed the need to consider the possibility of centralizing the TUC by merging the various registered trade unions into one formidable organisation.<sup>119</sup> According to him:

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<sup>114</sup> “Government Recognizes Need for Trade Unions.” *Daily Graphic*, September 21, 1954, 12.

<sup>115</sup> This saw the GCTUC formally opening an “Organisation bureau” to help strengthen the existing unions affiliated to it and also help set up new unions on sound and responsible basis. The first new union to be organised by the congress, through the bureau, was the Union of Distributive Retail and Allied Workers which catered for artisans, fitters and other employed by Levantine, Indian, and Africans. See “Organisation bureau opened by T.U.C.,” *Daily Graphic*, October 1, 1954, 2.

<sup>116</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> Kraus, “The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana,” 125.

<sup>118</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 71.

<sup>119</sup> The Gold Coast Trades Union Congress, *A Programme for Congress: Executive Board's Report to the 13<sup>th</sup> Annual Congress held at Sekondi-Takoradi from 27<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> October, 1956*. Accra: GCTUC, 1956, 28.

Despite all our efforts there are [sic] still too great multiplicity of Trade Unions in a small country like Ghana with a population of only 5 million. We must now positively consider the feasibility of merging the various registered Trade Unions with the Trade Union Congress so that Congress could become a negotiating body. Departments can be created and a centralized Executive to direct out affairs throughout the Gold Coast.<sup>120</sup>

The CPP government showed interest in the work of the TUC. At the 13 annual conference of the TUC, held at Sekondi-Takoradi from 27 to 28 October, 1956, Nkrumah was full of praise for the contribution of the labour movement to the struggle for self-determination.<sup>121</sup> Speaking to workers representatives at the conference, Nkrumah pointed out that “we have by our united effort achieved political freedom. Our next united talk must be achievement of economic freedom from want, and freedom from disease, filth and squalor.”<sup>122</sup>

The relationship that developed between the TUC and the government after independence has been interpreted in varied ways by scholars like Robert Edward Dowse, David Ernest Apter, Douglas Rimmer, Frederick Cooper and E. A. Cowan.<sup>123</sup> For example, Frederick Cooper draws attention to the admiration of British officials for the efforts that Nkrumah and the CPP more or less made to have an alliance with the labour movement.<sup>124</sup> This alliance, according to some

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<sup>120</sup> See John K. Tettegah, *A New Chapter for Ghana Labour*. Accra: Trades Union Congress, 1958, 14.

<sup>121</sup> “TUC Boss says ‘I Quit’,” *Daily Graphic*, October 29, 1956, 16.

<sup>122</sup> “TUC Boss says ‘I Quit’,” *Daily Graphic*, October 29, 1956, 16.

<sup>123</sup> Robert Edward Dowse, *Modernization in Ghana and the USSR: a comparative study*. London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1969; David Ernest Apter, *Ghana in Transition*. Princeton University Press, 2015; Douglas Rimmer, “The New Industrial Relations in Ghana,” *ILR Review* 14, 2, 1961, 206–226; Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996, 432; Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 91-112.

<sup>124</sup> Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 432.

scholars compromised the labour movement, as the CPP controlled the TUC.<sup>125</sup> However, for trade unionist like Cowan, the relationship that developed between the TUC and the CPP government was one of reciprocity, therefore, the TUC benefited enormously from its relationship with the CPP.<sup>126</sup> It is clear that Prime Minister, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah viewed the labour movement as part of the CPP. During the inauguration of the Hall of Trade Unions, Dr. Nkrumah advised trade unions, particularly, those in government Departments that:

The new economic policy of our country introduces a number of important changes and consequently the role of our Trade Unions in public sector of our economy the workers must know that they are working for the State and no longer for business concerns. The workers are for the state and the State for workers, and thus they are working for themselves. To achieve the maximum results and prove that public enterprises can be successfully run, the Trades Union must assist in increasing productivity and the national consciousness of the workers.<sup>127</sup>

The leadership of the TUC considered the General Federation of Jewish Labour (Histadrut) as the ideal model for a new emerging nation like Ghana. Thus, when Tettegah returned from Israel in October 1957, he re-emphasized the need for a centralized TUC and took steps to ensure its realization.<sup>128</sup> In spite of opposition from the larger and wealthy unions like the UAC African Employees

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<sup>125</sup> See Rolf Gerritsen, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress under the Convention People's Party: Towards a Re-Interpretation," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 13, 2, 1972, 229–244. See also Richard Jeffries, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress under the Convention People's Party: Towards a more Radical Re-Interpretation," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 14, 2, 1973, 277–286.

<sup>126</sup> Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 91-112. See also Gerritsen, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress under the Convention Peoples Party," 233.

<sup>127</sup> "Address Delivered by Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah at the Opening of The Hall of Trade Unions," as reproduced in Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 197-203.

<sup>128</sup> Tettegah, *A New Chapter for Ghana Labour*, 42-51.



Union, the Railway Workers Union and the Mines Workers Union, the Industrial Relations Act 1958 was passed into law in December 1958.<sup>129</sup> For a scholar like Jon Kraus, the passage of the Industrial Relations Act in December 1958 marked the point when leaders of the TUC allied themselves with state power in order to obtain for the unions, workers and themselves what they found extremely difficult to obtain from employers.<sup>130</sup> In other words, the trade union movement obtained access to economic resources, status and power.<sup>131</sup>

The Industrial Relations Act established a Trades Union Congress and reduced its membership from the over one hundred trade unions to twenty-four trade unions.<sup>132</sup> The passage of the Act marked the beginning of official amalgamation of trade unions on a national basis with the objective of eliminating the small, weak and ineffective unions. Again, the amalgamation of a number of small trade unions into a few major ones managed by full-time trade union officials meant an increase in their bargaining strength at negotiation and consultative meetings.

The Industrial Relations Act of 1958 was further amended by the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act, 1959, to provide, among other things, the dissolution of unions within a period of two months from the date of the passage of the Act if they failed to amalgamate with identified unions.<sup>133</sup> Beyond reducing

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<sup>129</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 51. See also Akilagpa Sawyerr, "Thirty Years Of Industrial Relations Legislation In Ghana: 1941-1971," *Verfassung Und Recht in Übersee/Law and Politics in Africa, Asia and Latin America*, 1978, 331-345.

<sup>130</sup> Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," 132.

<sup>131</sup> See Cowan, *Evolution of Trade Unionism in Ghana*, 91-112.

<sup>132</sup> Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 14.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

the multiplicity of trade unions to 24 unions, the Industrial Relation Act sought to stop the proliferation of trade unions, end rampant strikes and trade union militancy.<sup>134</sup> Thus, it made the principle of collective bargaining and provision of collective agreement legally binding on employers, workers and trade unions.<sup>135</sup>

Furthermore, it introduced the principles of compulsory conciliation and arbitration and laid down the procedures to be followed before embarking on a strike action.<sup>136</sup> Above all, the industrial relations act gave the check-off system a legal backing, which ensured constant flow of funds for the trade unions.<sup>137</sup> By the end of 1961, the membership of the TUC had been reduced again from twenty-four to sixteen.<sup>138</sup>

Table 4. 1 List of Trade Unions forming the 24 National Unions under Trades Unions Congress (Ghana)

Certificate No.	Name of Union	Certificate No.	Unions Amalgamating
151	<b>Commercial and Allied Workers' union</b>	75	Cardbury & Fry, (Colony and Ashanti)
		33	Ghana S.C.O.A. African Employees
		74	P.Z African Employees
		130	U.D.R.A.W
		102	John Holt Employees
		45	U.T.C African Employees
143	<b>Timber &amp; Woodworkers' Union</b>	106	Thompson Moir & Galloway Employees' Union
		65	African Timber and Plywood Ghana Employees' Union
		143	Timber & Woodworkers' Union
32	<b>Engineering and Electrical Trades Union</b>	32	Government Electrical Workers' Union
154	<b>Public Transport and General Workers' Union</b>	67	Department of Civil Aviation Workers' Union

<sup>134</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 56.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>136</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 55.

<sup>137</sup> The check off system was an arrangement by which trade union dues were deducted at source from workers' wages. It was then distributed according to the stipulated proportions, to the TUC, national Union and local branches. See Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 55..

<sup>138</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 14.

		21	Airways Workers' Union
		110	Government Motor Drivers' Union
		112	Adra Brothers Workers' Union
153	<b>General Municipal Workers' Union</b>	63	Cape Coast Municipal Employees' Union
		12	Accra Municipal Workers' Union
		25	Sekondi/Takoradi Municipal Employees' Union
		35	Kumasi Municipal Employees' Union
146	<b>Maritime and Dockworkers' Union</b>	131	U.A.C Lighterage African Employees' Union
		129	National Maritime and Dockworkers' Union
150	<b>Manufacturing and Industrial Workers' Union</b>	39	Ghana Brewery Employees' Union
		141	Pioneer Tobacco Employees' Union
128	<b>Government Construction and Public Works Union</b>	22	P.W.D
		128	National Building Timber and Workers Industrial Union
158	<b>Health and General Hospital Workers' Union</b>	103	Ghana Hospital Workers' Union
		111	Medical Field Units Union
86	<b>Printers and Newspaper Workers' Union</b>	86	National Union of Printers, Journalist and Newspaper Workers
4	<b>Railway Employees' Union</b>	4	Ghana Railway Employees' Union
157	<b>Union of Postal and Telecommunication Workers'</b>	18	Post Office Employees' Union
		94	Postal Engineering Workers' Union
155	<b>General Clerical and Public Board Employees' Union</b>	55	Cocoa Marketing Board Employees' Union
		126	Tema Development Corporation Employees' Union
149	<b>Union of Teachers and Educational Institution Workers'</b>	122	University Workers' Union
		140	Federation of Ghana Teachers Association
152	<b>Public Utility Services Union</b>	51	Ghana Army Civilian Employees' Union
		5	Ghana Water Works Employees' Union
		70	Survey Department Employees' Union
		115	Rural Water Development
148	<b>Teamsters and Private Transport Union</b>	64	Ghana Motor Union
		135	Ghana Taxi Drivers' Union
147	<b>Union of General Agricultural Workers'</b>	96	Agricultural Department Employees' Union
		101	W.A.C.R.Z Employees' Union
49	<b>Government Clerical and Technical Employees' Union</b>	49	Ghana Meteorological Staff Union
9	<b>Ghana Mine Workers' Union</b>	9	Ghana Mines Employees' Union
136	<b>Construction and General Workers' Union</b>	136	Amalgamated Civil Engineering and Woodworkers' Union
97	<b>Catering and Meatcutters Union</b>	97	National Union of Domestic Restaurant, Bar and Hotel workers
34	<b>Union of Oil and Petroleum workers'</b>	34	Union of Oil and Petroleum

			Workers
160	<b>Local Government Workers' Union</b>	95	National Union of Local Government Employees
		69	Obuasi Urban Council Trade Union
12	<b>Union of Railway and Harbour Workers</b>		

Source: Government of Ghana, *Annual Report on the Labour Division of the Ministry of Labour, Co-operatives and Social Welfare 1957-58*, Accra: Government Printer, 1960.

The GMU was compelled by the Industrial Relation (Amendment) Act to amalgamate with another trade union, the Ghana Taxi Drivers Union (GTDU).<sup>139</sup>

The amalgamation also necessitated a name change. There was a proposal that the new name should be National Union of Road Transport and Allied Workers.<sup>140</sup>

However, the GTDU suggested the name should be the National Union of General Transport Worker.<sup>141</sup> In the end, Teamsters and Private Transport Workers' Union (TPTWU) became the name that was adopted. The union enjoyed increased membership.<sup>142</sup> By 1959, the TPTWU had an estimated membership of 6,256 with a total paid-up membership of 332.<sup>143</sup>

Table 4. 2 List of National Unions forming the Ghana Trades Union Congress by Membership as at 30<sup>th</sup> September, 1962

<b>Trade Union</b>	<b>Membership</b>
Construction and General Workers' Union	36,720
Union of Catering Trades	5,000
Government Clerical and Technical Employees' Union	24,901
Union of General Agricultural Workers'	37,000
Health and General Hospital Workers' Union	35, 000
Industrial, Commercial and General Workers' Union	40,000
Municipal and Local Government Workers' Union	27,600

<sup>139</sup> In 1956 the Gold Coast Taxi Drivers Union was formed and affiliated to the TUC. After independence the name changed to the Ghana Taxi Drivers Union. See Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 70.

<sup>140</sup> Tettegah, *A New Chapter for Ghana Labour*, 42.

<sup>141</sup> "Taxi-Drivers' Union to Support Regulations" *Daily Graphic*, October, 16 1958.

<sup>142</sup> Government of Ghana, *Annual Report on the Labour Division of the Ministry of Labour, Co-operatives and Social Welfare 1957-58*. Accra: Government Printer, 1960.

<sup>143</sup> Obeng-Fosu, *Industrial Relations in Ghana*, 168.



Mine Workers' Union	27,337
Maritime and Dockworkers' Union	40,000
Public Utility Workers' Union	32,635
Railway Enginemen's Union	750
National Union of Railway and Harbour Workers	14,000
Timber and Wood Workers' Union	16,289
Educational Institutional Workers' Union	14,000
Teamsters and Private Transport Workers' Union	25,000
Transport and Telecommunication Workers' Union	12,157

Source: Government of Ghana, *Annual Report on the Labour Division of the Ministry of Labour, Co-operatives and Social Welfare 1961-62*, Accra: Government Printer, 1962, 77.

### Conclusion

In 1950, the umbrella body of the trade unions in the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast Trades Union Congress, called for a strike in support of the Meteorological Workers' Union. This action of the GCTUC coincided with the CPP's call for positive action in demand for self-government. The result was a fourteen-day general strike in the Gold Coast. The colonial government reacted to the general strike by arresting leaders of both the GCTUC and the CPP. The GCTUC and its affiliate trade unions were shattered in the process as members debated the propriety of declaring strikes in support of political actions in the Gold Coast. Subsequently, the GCTUC sought to reorganise itself.

In the aftermath of the strike, the EPMU, WPMU, CPMU and MTUA amalgamated to form one national union, the Gold Coast Motor Union, made up of lorry owners, drivers and bookmen. The GCMU became the official mouth piece of lorry owners and drivers in the Gold Coast. As such, the Gold Coast colonial government had one organisation to negotiate and deal with on issues concerning motor transportation.

Following the formation of the GCMU in 1950, the GCMU attempted to institute measures to regulate the activities of one of its members groups, the bookmen. The bookmen had become very powerful at the lorry parks that they determined practices thereof. For example, the bookmen charged new entrants to the lorry parks *Amantemsa* and also a 10 per cent commission on the total fares for every fully loaded lorry. As these charges and the activities of bookmen were not defined by the constitution of the GCMU, the bookmen kept all these revenue without accounting to the GCMU. The effort to regulate and make bookmen accountable led to the banning of the activities of bookmen in 1958 by the government of Ghana. Subsequently, the Ghana Motor Union, which had replaced the GCMU after independence also, banned the bookmen. However, in banning bookmen, the GMU only succeeded in removing one group of people and replaced them with another set they called potters.

In midst of the struggle to rid the GMU of bookmen, the GMU organised its first post-independence strike in July 1957. The purpose of the strike was to contest the new motor regulations and a proposed third-party insurance scheme the CPP government was to introduce.

By 1961, the TUC in collaboration with the CPP government succeeded in reducing the number of trade unions in Ghana from over one hundred to only sixteen. This was achieved through the Industrial Relations Act 1958, which forced trade unions in the same industry to amalgamate.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BREAKING THE MONOPOLY OF THE GMU, 1966-1987

#### Introduction

As discussed in chapter four, from 1950 when the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU), a struggle ensued in the union. The struggle was occasioned by attempts by transport owners of the GMU to control the activities of the “bookmen.” By 1958, the GMU, with the support of the government of Ghana banned the activities of bookmen.

Immediately after the overthrow of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) government in 1966, the first splinter group of the GMU, the Ghana Co-operative Transport Association (GCTA) was formed. The new association challenged the operation and control of the GMU at various levels, especially, at the lorry parks. The various government of Ghana, between 1966 and 1987, tried to resolve the struggle between the GMU and the GCTA.<sup>1</sup>

While the chapter would not focus in detail on these governments, it would discuss the policies of governments that had direct impact on commercial road transportation and the GMU, and how the various governments tried to resolve the struggle between the GMU and the GCTA at the lorry parks. This chapter argues that the lorry park power struggle, between the GPRTU and the GCTA, remained unsolved until the PNDC government resolved to bring lorry

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<sup>1</sup> Between 1966 and 1987, the terminal period for this work, Ghana had eight governments: the National Liberation Council (NLC) 1966-1969, the Progress Party (PP) 1969-1972, National Redemption Council (NRC) 1972-1975, the Supreme Military Council I(SMCI) 1975-1978, the Supreme Military Council II(SMCII) 1978-1979, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) 1979, the People’s National Party (PNP) 1979-1981 and the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) 1981-1993.

park activities and the work of “bookmen” under control so as to boost tax collection and government revenue using the structures of the GPRTU.

### **The National Liberation Council Abolishes Compulsory Trade Union Membership for Civil Servants**

On 24 February 1966, the government of the CPP was overthrown in a coup d'état organised by military and police officers. The orchestrators of the coup formed the National Liberation Council (NLC) government. Among the accusations levelled against the CPP was economic mismanagement.<sup>2</sup> The NLC adopted a policy of austerity within the economic sector.<sup>3</sup> The number of government ministries was reduced from thirty-two to seventeen. Similarly, the number of administrative districts was also reduced from one hundred and sixty-seven to forty-seven.<sup>4</sup> In addition, some state-owned enterprises were placed under foreign firms because of the NLC government's dislike for the socialist economic system that the CPP government had started to develop in the country.<sup>5</sup> The new government set up a number of commissions of enquiry to investigate the operations of state organisations like the Timber Marketing Board and the

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<sup>2</sup> See, Akwasi Amankwaa Afrifa, *The Ghana Coup: 24th February 1966*. London: F. Cass, 1966.

<sup>3</sup>A. Adu Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. London: Longman Group Limited, 1975, 228.

<sup>4</sup> Roger Gocking, *The History of Ghana*. Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2005, 148.

<sup>5</sup> The Ambassador and Continental Hotels were placed under the Inter-Continental Hotels Corporation of the United States. Some state projects were also shelved. Among these were projects like the Kwabenya Atomic Reactor Station, the Wenchi Tomato Factory and the building of the Dawhenya Irrigation Dam. The seven-year development plan of the CPP government was cancelled.



State Housing Corporation.<sup>6</sup> Other commissions probed the assets of leading members of the CPP.<sup>7</sup>

The NLC government, thereafter, introduced measures to reduce cost of living and ensure industrial peace.<sup>8</sup> The initial budget of the administration reduced the prices of basic commodities by reducing customs and excise duties; it also reduced the range and rates of taxable income.<sup>9</sup>

To consolidate its position, the NLC disbanded all the auxiliary wings of the CPP.<sup>10</sup> These included the United Ghana Farmers' Council, National Cooperative Council and National Council of Ghana Women.<sup>11</sup> However, the TUC and its affiliates, which, from 1960, had been regarded as part of the CPP, were not banned.<sup>12</sup> The NLC, which needed the support of workers in order to stay in power, aimed at industrial peace and higher worker productivity during its tenure in office. Thus, the government of the NLC did not ban workers' union groups. Although, the TUC showed commitment to work with the NLC, its

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<sup>6</sup> Boahen, *Ghana: Evolution and Change*, 228.

<sup>7</sup> Among these commissions were the Ollenu Commission which probed alleged irregularities in the granting of import licence, the Apaloo Commission, which investigated the activities of the Ghana Housing Corporation, the Azu Crabbe Commission, which investigated the establishment of the National Development Corporation, the Blay Commission, which looked into the activities of the Timber Marketing Co-operations Union and the Jiagge, Manyo Plange and Sowah Commissions, which probed the assets of some specified public officials.

<sup>8</sup> D. E. K. Amenumey, *Ghana: A Concise History from Pre-Colonial Times to the 20th Century*. Accra: Woeli Pub. Services, 2008, 238-239.

<sup>9</sup> Duties on food items like gari, sugar, corn, rice, milk and flour were reduced. Also, prices of motor fuel, alcoholic drinks and inland postage were reduced. For wage earners, all people earning less than four hundred cedis were exempted from paying tax.

<sup>10</sup> Dennis Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*. London: Oxford University Press, 1964, 382-384.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*; Jon Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," in Ukandi Godwin Damachi, Dieter H. Seibel, and Lester N. Trachtman, (eds.), *Industrial Relations in Africa*, London: The Macmillan Press Ltd, 1979, 136.

<sup>12</sup> For extensive discussion of the CPP and TUC relationship see, George E. Lynd, *The Politics of African Trade Unionism*. New York: Frederick Praeger, 1968, 382; Gerritsen, "The Evolution of the Ghana Trades Union Congress Under the Convention Peoples Party.," Austin, *Politics in Ghana, 1946-1960*, 382; *Evening News*, August 3, 1959.

leaders were arrested together with some CPP functionaries.<sup>13</sup> Thereafter, Benjamin A. Bentum, was appointed in February 1966 as the Secretary-General of the TUC by the N.L.C government.<sup>14</sup> In June 1966, when the Extraordinary Congress of the TUC was convened at the University of Ghana, Legon, the position of B. A. Bentum as the Secretary-General of the TUC was confirmed through an election by the Congress.<sup>15</sup>

The NLC embarked on liberalization of trade union laws by removing restrictions put on workers by the previous CPP administration. For example, NLC Decree 134, abolished compulsory trade union membership for civil servants, nullifying section 24 of the Civil Service Act, 1960 C. A.5, which made trade union membership for civil servants compulsory.<sup>16</sup> As such, workers could again form trade unions and register freely, and civil servants were liberated from an earlier law that compelled them to join unions. This had an adverse effect on the membership of most unions in government departments, as union membership

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<sup>13</sup> Ironically organisations like the United Ghana Farmers Council, the National Cooperative Council and the National Council of Ghana Women also expressed public support for the NLC. In fact, the press statement of the United Farmers Council noted how timely the coup was. Furthermore, the statement indicated that the coup saved the Ghanaian economy from total collapse. See *Daily Graphic*, Feb. 28 1966 and March 2 1966.

<sup>14</sup> Bentum was a former chairman of both the Agricultural Workers Union and the Executive Board of the TUC who was seconded to the CPP government because of internal troubles within the TUC and, at the time of the coup d'état, was Minister for Forestry. It was generally believed among Trade Unionists that Bentum was one of the government members J. W. K. Harlley alleged to be behind the coup and hence his hasty appointment as TUC Secretary-General. The appointment of Bentum was supposed to help in the re-organisation of the TUC to suit the new situation. It must be noted that the TUC was effectively organised and, at the time of the coup d'état was strengthening its position within the Party at the expense of the central committee of the Party. As a result, he was more disposed towards dealing with any opposition. See Peter Blay Arthiabah and Harry Tham Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress: The History of the Trades Union Congress of Ghana, 1939-1995*. Accra: Gold-Type Press Publication Ltd., 1995, 99.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

<sup>16</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 101-102.

was no more automatic.<sup>17</sup> The Public Service Workers' Union was the hardest hit by the new law. Its membership was mainly from the civil service. Thus, when the new law decoupled the civil service and trade union membership, the membership of the Public Service Workers' Union dropped from 40,000 to 26,000 in June 1968.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Ghana Co-operative Transport Association**

The transport sector was also affected by policies of the new government. Still struggling with tension within itself because of the banning of the bookmen in the 1958, the GMU did not escape the reach of the government. A commission of enquiry, which the NLC appointed on 25 April, 1966 investigated the financial activities of the Ghana Trades Union Congress and made some observations about the GMU to the NLC government. The commission indicated that:

We have found that the Teamsters and Private Transport Workers' Union is the most disturbing of all the National Unions. We have discovered that the main factor contributing to the instability of this Union is a force, commonly termed the "bookmen" who work under the cloak of the Union, yet uncontrolled by it. The 'bookmen's' association is established all over the country and their field of operation covers every Lorry Station in the Country. We would not mention how much profit we feel the 'bookmen' make, but we consider it will be in the interest of the Union to control the 'bookmen' who in turn will pay all sums collected by them to the Union for wages. We would further recommend if this recommendation is accepted and in order to guard against misappropriation that overseers be appointed, who will be known as 'bookmen's overseers' each with certain number of 'bookmen' under him and covering a particular zone or station.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Arthiabah and Mbiah, *Half a Century of Toil, Trouble and Progress*, 101-102.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into the funds of the Ghana Trades Union Congress*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1966, 79.



Despite the fact that these observations and recommendations were made by the commission, in August 1966, disgruntled “bookmen,” beginning in the Eastern Region, registered a union, the Eastern Regional Transport Co-operative.<sup>20</sup> This new organisation began its operation in, and around Nsawam, Asamankese and Koforidua, but sought to spread its influence throughout the country.<sup>21</sup> This culminated in the formation of a national umbrella body, the Ghana Co-operative Transport Association (GCTA) in 1967.<sup>22</sup>

The GCTA was a limited organisation which was registered, certified and practiced under Ordinance No. 15 of 1937 and Regulation 20 of 1937, and subjected to N.L.C. Decree No. 252 of 1968.<sup>23</sup> The main objective of the GCTA

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<sup>20</sup> A co-operative society is a voluntary association or organisation that is formed by people of common interest with the aim of pooling resources together to promote their economic, social and cultural interest through a jointly-owned enterprise. The organisation of Co-operatives in Ghana was based on colonial Laws that existed from the 1930s. During the 1930s, the handling of a large crop harvested from a large number of separately-owned and widely-scattered plantations across the country brought into being a large force of middlemen, who facilitated the transportation of crop harvest from the centres of production to the purchasers. This employment of large number of middlemen was one of the disadvantages and probably the most uneconomical feature of small holdings. Thus, the colonial government, encouraged the formation of co-operatives, by passing the Co-operative Societies Ordinance No. 4 of 1931. The Ordinance was based on similar enactments in India, Ceylon and Mauritius where the predominant need of the inhabitants was relief from a burden of inherited debt. The Ordinance proved to be not entirely suited for the Gold Coast where the major need was for the subscription of funds the farmers and their application to the improvement of cultivation and marketing of produce. Thus, the Co-operative Societies Ordinance 1937 was drafted in the light of experience gained locally during the six-year period, 1930-1937, and introduced some useful provisions taken from similar legislation in Nigeria and Tanganyika. At the time of the passing of the Co-operative Societies Ordinance 1937, there were over 400 agricultural co-operative societies in the Gold Coast with about 10,000 members and paid-up share totalling £17,000. These societies issued £24,000 in loans to their members and accumulated funds to be used for inter-society loans and long-term agricultural investments. Systems of joint marketing and combined insurance were also started by groups of societies working in collaboration with one another. See Colonial Office, *Annual Report on the Social and Economic Progress of the People of the Gold Coast 1934-35*. London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1936, 26, 67; Supplement to the Gold Coast Gazette No. 89, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1936.

<sup>21</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A. Bentum to The Chairman, National Liberation Council, Ghana Transport Owners and Drivers Association, September 16, 1966.

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

<sup>23</sup> Supplement to the Gold Coast Gazette No. 89, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1936; PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Petition Protesting against the Illegal Collections and Pulling of Ropes at all Lorry Parks by the Motor Union of Ghana Private Road Transport Union of T.U.C. (Ghana).



was to promote the economic interest of its members, as transport sector operators in passenger and haulage transport services, by providing a means of savings for its members and providing loans for members among other services.<sup>24</sup> Its funds were derived from entrance fees of new members, shareholding of members, savings and deposits from members, special contributions, borrowing from government and financial institutions and miscellaneous income arising out of the conduct of business.<sup>25</sup>

The GCTA took certain initiatives to bolster the economic interests of its members. In October 1967, it quickly signed an agreement of work with another co-operative, the Ghana Co-operative Marketing Association (GCMA).<sup>26</sup> The agreement appointed the GCTA to cart the entire cocoa produce and other crops purchased by the GCMA from farmers across the country.<sup>27</sup> Another agreement signed with the State Cocoa Marketing Board also gave the GCTA the right to cart cocoa produce from across the country.<sup>28</sup> On 23 October 1967, Enyonam Adzosii, secretary of the GCTA, pointed out that “only transport owners with membership cards duly stamped with the official seal of the GCTA would be allowed to cart cocoa from the buying centres to the ports.”<sup>29</sup> The GCTA also took an initiative of establishing an insurance company to take care of the insurance

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<sup>24</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Petition Protesting against the Illegal Collections and Pulling of Ropes at all Lorry Parks by the Motor Union of Ghana Private Road Transport Union of T.U.C. (Ghana).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> “Transport Body to Hold Talks,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 19, 1968, 5.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*; “Co-op Union Appointed to Cart Cocoa,” *The Ghanaian Times*, October 24, 1967, 8.

<sup>28</sup> “Co-op Union Appointed to Cart Cocoa,” *The Ghanaian Times*, October 24, 1967, 8.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

needs of its members.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, it negotiated with the NLC government and obtained government approval for the release of an amount of NC100, 000 in 1968 for the establishment of an insurance company.<sup>31</sup> The association also made arrangements to offer credit facilities to members and payment spread over a period of time to relieve members of hardships.<sup>32</sup>

Membership of the GCTA was opened to all commercial transport workers through application for registration in accordance with the laws for the development of transportation. By 1968, the GCTA had a membership of 1,875 and 2,635 vehicles.<sup>33</sup> To increase its membership several attempts were made by the GCTA to coerce individual members of the GMU to join the GCTA.<sup>34</sup> As it grew in strength and numbers, the GCTA objected to some of the payments exacted from its members by the GMU at the lorry parks. In particular, the GCTA did not see any reason why its members, who were not members of the GMU, should be made to pay welfare dues to the GMU. This argument was true for those drivers who did not belong to any grouping at all.

### **The GMU strike of 1967**

Amidst its internal challenges, that is, with the emergence of a splinter group, the GMU wasted no time in putting its grievances to the NLC government. While during the period of the CPP government the union accepted to be patriotic to the course of the new nation, by accepting increased taxation and the third-

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<sup>30</sup> “Transport Group to get Insurance Company,” *The Ghanaian Times*, July 23, 1968, 8.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> “Don’t Join Association- Driver’s Urged,” *Daily Graphic*, June 3, 1967, 9.

party insurance scheme, its members still felt their economic wellbeing was under threat. The insurance scheme that had necessitated a general strike in 1957, had been implemented fully, and as the fear was, it had over the years seen drastic increment in premiums.<sup>35</sup>

On 2 May 1967, the GMU of the TUC submitted the first of two memoranda to the Chairman of the NLC, in which they listed a number of problems facing their members and suggested remedial measures for the NLC government's consideration.<sup>36</sup> The major grievance of the GMU was the recurring problem of arbitrary arrest and unfair treatment of its members by the police, and the heavy fines imposed on its members at the law courts. The union also complained about unavailability of vehicle parts on the market, high vehicle licence fees, high cost of commercial vehicles, the ban on passenger trucks, lack of maintenance of roads, high fees for renewing driving licence, exorbitant increase in commercial vehicle insurance and third-party premiums.<sup>37</sup>

The third party insurance premium to which most members of the GMU subscribed had seen over hundred per cent increase in premiums between 1959 and 1967.<sup>38</sup> For example, a 16-seat passenger bus paid £7.3.0 as third party

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<sup>35</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 34-42.

<sup>36</sup> See Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 34-42.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum Submitted to the Chairman-National Liberation Council by the Ghana Motor Union on difficulties facing Drivers, Transport Owners Engaged in Commercial Transport Business in Ghana, as Reproduced in Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 34-41.

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

insurance premium between 1959 and 1960.<sup>39</sup> By 1967, the same 16- seat passenger bus paid £102.03.0 as premium.<sup>40</sup> The Guardian Assurance Co. Ltd. justified the insurance premium increment of 1965 by notifying its clients that “in common with the majority of Insurance Companies in Ghana,” it was “necessary to increase premiums in respect of certain classes of Motor Insurance. This has become necessary largely as a result of a steep increase in claims costs.”<sup>41</sup> In addition to these increments, the insurance companies, particularly, the Royal Exchange Assurance Co. surcharged owners of vehicles plying the Accra-Kumasi road 45 per cent on the total premium due the poor state of the road.<sup>42</sup> The GMU argued in its memorandum that:

Despite all these exorbitant and unwarranted increases in premiums and other heavy taxes, transport owners and drivers of the country have maintained the standardized lorry fares of 1d. per mile introduced immediately after World War II by the Colonial Government with a view to helping the Government develop the land of our birth. The Union [GMU] feels, that something must be done about this burning issue, because the burden of taxation on transport owner/drivers brought about by the old regime is so great that the least freedom allowed these firms

<sup>39</sup> Memorandum Submitted to the Chairman-National Liberation Council by the Ghana Motor Union on difficulties facing Drivers, Transport Owners Engaged in Commercial Transport Business in Ghana, as Reproduced in Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 34-41.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* The other insurance companies engaged in these practices included, State Insurance Corporation, Guardian Assurance Co. Ltd., New India Assurance Company, British Indian General Insurance Co., Northern Assurance Co. Ltd., Royal Insurance Co. Ltd., New Ghana Insurance Services and White Cross Insurance Company.



[Insurance Companies] to increase premiums, will inevitably result in economic difficulty not only to transport owners but the general Ghanaian public.<sup>43</sup>

In the same memoranda, the GMU proffered some solutions to the problems outlined. For instance, the GMU proposed the establishment of separate courts to deal expeditiously with motor traffic offences, and the appointment of national transportation committee.

As the GMU waited for a response to its petition, the union reconstituted itself into the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) on 24 June 1967.<sup>44</sup>

With disgruntled bookmen forming the GCTA, it was necessary to forestall the creation of another splinter union from the GMU. The existence of the transport owner's association, who had earlier challenged the practices of bookmen in the GMU, threatened the stability of the union. Thus, through a meeting under the chairmanship of Lieutenant-General J. A. Ankrah, Chairman of the National Liberation Movement and NLC member responsible for Labour, further breakaway was forestalled and a new union, the GPRTU was reconstituted.<sup>45</sup> The GPRTU was formed with James Tawiah Kotey, as national chairman, Yaw Ntoah, vice chairman and J. K. Amoo as general Secretary.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup>Memorandum Submitted to the Chairman-National Liberation Council by the Ghana Motor Union on difficulties facing Drivers, Transport Owners Engaged in Commercial Transport Business in Ghana, as Reproduced in Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 40.

<sup>44</sup>"New Motor Union is formed," *the Ghanaian Times*, June 26, 1967, 1.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup>"Road Transport Men Sworn In," *The Ghanaian Times*, July 12, 1967, 9.

Four months after taking over, the leadership of the GPRTU sent the second memorandum to the NLC government on 19 October 1967.<sup>47</sup> The GPRTU reiterated the issues in the first memorandum, but this time it placed emphasis on high insurance premiums and the refusal of insurance companies to insure ‘over-age’ vehicles.<sup>48</sup> The GPRTU argued that “to ensure the equitable distribution of losses the present law should be amended to make it obligatory for all insurance companies transacting general business to undertake motor business as well.”<sup>49</sup> Again, the GPRTU suggested the “law should be so amended as to make it impossible for these companies[insurance] to refuse insurance of the vehicles[over-age and second-hand] on our roads.”<sup>50</sup>

When the NLC did not respond to these grievances, a spontaneous strike started on 11 December 1967.<sup>51</sup> On 10 December 1967 the Greater Accra Branch of the GPRTU organised a road safety rally, and Ernest Ako, the Assistant Commissioner of Police, who addressed the rally on road safety issues, was unable to satisfactorily answer questions that members of the GPRTU posed to him on the high insurance premiums charged by the insurance companies.<sup>52</sup> At the same road safety rally, the National Chairman of the GPRTU, James Tawiah Kotey, could also not give the rank and file satisfactory answers about the same

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<sup>47</sup> Memorandum Submitted to the Chairman-National Liberation Council by the Ghana Private Road Transport Union on Motor Insurance Business as Affecting Driver/Transport Owners in Ghana, as Reproduced in Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 41-42.

<sup>48</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 42.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*

issue.<sup>53</sup> The General Secretary of GPRTU, J. K. Amoo, who had traveled to Takoradi, on his return to Takoradi, the following day, could also not provide any useful information to members in his constituency, except that he told the members there that he had arranged a meeting with the State Insurance Corporation to discuss the insurance complains.<sup>54</sup> Thus, the rank and file decided to stop working until they were assured that a reduction in insurance premiums would be made by the State Insurance Corporation, with whom the majority of them were due to renew their policies.

The NLC reacted to the strike by advising the members of GPRTU to go back to work while the offices to the TUC and the Commissioner of Labour and Social Welfare considered their grievances.<sup>55</sup> While the NLC government agreed that trade unions had the right to fight for legitimate causes, it cautioned against any attempt to disrupt normal traffic in the country by maltreating private and taxi drivers and others pursuing their normal business.<sup>56</sup> As the strike was spontaneous it was called off immediately on 14 December 1967 when the NLC government agreed to engage in a negotiation.<sup>57</sup> Though short lived, the general public felt the impact of the strike as people walked from their homes to places of work. It was, therefore, not surprising that the government expressed concern about the strike and swiftly appointed a special committee, headed by E. J. Prah, Managing

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<sup>53</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State Publishing Corporation, 1968, 42.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> "Taxi Cabs now off the Roads: Government Urges Strikers to go to Work," *Daily Graphic*, Dec. 13, 1967, 16.

<sup>56</sup> "Taxi Cabs now off the Roads: Government Urges Strikers to go to Work," *Daily Graphic*, Dec. 13, 1967, 16; "Disruption of Normal Traffic System: Strike-Government Warns Drivers," *The Ghanaian Times*, December 13, 1967, 1.

<sup>57</sup> "Drivers Agree to Resume Work-Strike Called Off," *Daily Graphic*, Dec. 14, 1967, 16; "Drivers Call off Strike," *The Ghanaian Times*, December 14, 1967, 1.

Director of State Transport Corporation, to investigate it.<sup>58</sup> The Prah Committee was set up to investigate the causes of the strike and also examine the grievances of the GPRTU of the TUC as contained in the union's petition to the chairman of the NLC dated 2 May 1967, with particular reference to insurance charges.<sup>59</sup>

The committee concluded that the strike, which can be traced to issues that were associated with a road safety rally of the Greater Accra Branch of the Union held on the 10 December 1967, was unofficial, spontaneous and had no political undertones.<sup>60</sup> On the basis of the committee's report, the NLC government issued a white paper on their recommendations. In line with the proffered solutions from the GPRTU, special courts for motor offences were established in Accra and Kumasi, aimed at ensuring motor traffic offences were dealt with swiftly and separately from criminal and civil cases.<sup>61</sup>

Furthermore, to ensure the availability of spare parts at reasonable prices the importation of spare parts was moved from "Specific Licence" and placed on

<sup>58</sup> "Strike-Committee Set Up," *Daily Graphic*, Dec. 15, 1967, 1.

<sup>59</sup> Other members of the Committee included; J. F. Nortey, Head of the Organisation Department, TUC (member); J. K. Amoo, General Secretary, Ghana Motor Union of TUC (member); A. B. Mc. Auslane, Chairman, Ghana Insurance Consultative Committee (member); A.A Nuamah, Accident Manager, State Insurance Corporation (member); Ernest Ako, Assistant Commissioner of Police (member). "Strike-Committee Set Up," *Daily Graphic*, Dec. 15, 1967, 1; "New Body to Study Drivers' Case," *The Ghanaian Times*, December 15, 1967, 1.

<sup>60</sup> This was one of the conclusions of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the Strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi drivers. The committee held further that the Union officials were largely to be blamed for the strike because they failed to provide full information given to them by the State Insurance Corporation to their members. Interestingly, the use "Tro-Tro" in reference to the Ghana Motor Union officially appears as the title of the report of the committee. Over the years the passenger motor vehicles that plied the roads within cities came to be known popularly as "Tro-Tro." The name has its origin in the fare that was charged passengers during the colonial days. That is, three pence per trip for each passenger. The pence refers to the penny coins that was in use during the colonial days.

<sup>61</sup> "Trotro Drivers Need No Strike," *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 13, 1968.



“Open General Licence” from the beginning of 1968.<sup>62</sup> This sought to curb the monopoly of expatriate dealers in the motor spare parts trade. The GPRTU had argued further that, a more serious and painful exercise which had crippled the transport trade was the cut-throat attitude adopted by some Levantine transport dealers.<sup>63</sup> According to the GPRTU, these spare parts dealers arranged with the various motor firms to deny Ghanaian lorry owners or commercial drivers the opportunity to purchase a vehicle even though they might have the required amount ready for the purchase of a vehicle.<sup>64</sup> As such, Ghanaian lorry owners or commercial drivers were forced to go through Levantine businessmen who charged interest as much as £500 to £600 in addition to the actual cost of the vehicle, before the vehicle was released to the Ghanaian buyer on hire-purchase system.<sup>65</sup> Examples of such Levantine businessmen that were cited were Messrs. Fattal, Majoub, and Kalmoni Salim and Sons, who were agents for Datsun and Cedric vehicles.<sup>66</sup> While the total selling price of a Datsun car for taxi was £1,087 10s including purchase tax, insurance and licensing, a potential lorry owner had to pay through a Levantine middleman a total sum of £1,600 including deposit of £600, by monthly instalments of £80.<sup>67</sup> Failing to pay the regular installments led to the seizure of the vehicle and forfeiture of the deposit of £600.<sup>68</sup> This practice, the GPRTU argued, threatened to gradually eliminate Ghanaians completely from

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<sup>62</sup> This meant that any registered importer could import motor spare parts, only subject to the limit imposed by availability of foreign exchange. This was intended to create adequate supplies which would assist in lowering prices. “Trotro Drivers Need No Strike,” *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 13, 1968.

<sup>63</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State publishing Corporation, 1968, 36.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

the commercial transport field. The Levantine traders also owned and operated taxi services in major cities such as Accra, Takoradi and Kumasi.

The committee tasked to investigate the grievances of the drivers made several recommendations to which the government agreed. These included having a basic standard premium for a “standard risk.”<sup>69</sup> This risk applied to vehicles which were not more than three years old, whose named driver or drivers were above 25 years with at least two years driving experience without any accident.<sup>70</sup> As a result of this recommendation a person insuring a bus paid only 12 per cent more than he would have paid in 1965, in respect of a standard risk, while the person insuring a vehicle other than a bus paid 31 per cent more than would be the case in 1965.<sup>71</sup> The increase of 12 per cent in the premium for insuring a bus, as against the rise of 31 per cent in the premium for insuring other vehicles was to encourage the running of buses instead of lorry which had wooden bodies and, therefore, considered to be undesirable.<sup>72</sup> The Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of *Tro-Tro* and Taxi Drivers also provided an incentive to make drivers exercise greater care to avoid accidents as much as possible. Thus, the Committee recommended that any lorry owner who took an insurance policy

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<sup>69</sup> A standard risk is an insurance risk than an insurance company considers common or normal. The premiums for standard risk are without restrictions. See Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State publishing Corporation, 1968.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>71</sup> “Trotro Drivers Need No Strike,” *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 13, 1968.

<sup>72</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of “Tro-Tro” and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State publishing Corporation, 1968.

but submitted no claim to be met by the insurance company during the period of the insurance should be given 25 per cent discount when renewing the policy.<sup>73</sup>

The NLC also endorsed the recommendation of the committee which encouraged transport owners to purchase new vehicles.<sup>74</sup> This was achieved through the relatively small increase in the premiums paid for vehicles which were relatively new. The premiums for vehicles over three years but not over five years old were increase by 25 per cent.<sup>75</sup> Vehicles over five years but not over seven years attracted 50 per cent increase in insurance premiums, and those over seven years paid 75 per cent.<sup>76</sup>

Again, to discourage the running of old vehicles which were likely to cause accidents, the standard risk was not applied to vehicles over five years old.<sup>77</sup> The premium for vehicles over five years old but not over seven years was increased by 30 per cent.<sup>78</sup> In the case of vehicles which were over seven years old, the committee recommended these vehicles should attract an increased premium of 75 per cent.<sup>79</sup> The NLC government indicated that the determination of the increase in the premium for such vehicles should be left to the discretion of individual insurers, adding that the increase should not exceed 75 per cent.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Republic of Ghana, *Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*. Accra: The State publishing Corporation, 1968, 4.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*

In addition to the gains made in relation to the insurance premiums, concessions were also granted in the form of tax reliefs for the benefits of the GPRTU. The dilemma of the NLC government was the extent to which government revenue and economic programmes would be affected if it acceded to all the recommendations on taxes. That notwithstanding, the government granted some tax reliefs which have been outlined on the table below;

Table 5. 1 Tax concessions granted by government.

<b>Reduction</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>To</b>
Vehicle examination fee	N¢1.00	50Np
Driving Licence renewal	N¢4.00	N¢2.00
Vehicle first registration fee	N¢50.00	Abolished for Taxis
Change of vehicle ownership fee	N¢50.00	Abolished for commercial vehicles
Bridge tolls		Abolished
Standard assessment payable by Tro-tro drivers	N¢48.00	N¢24.00
Purchase tax on small cars (Taxis)	20 -25%	10 -20%
Rate of purchase tax on commercial vehicles	12 1/2%	10%

Source: Republic of Ghana, *White Paper on the Report of the Special Committee of Enquiry into the strike of "Tro-Tro" and Taxi Drivers*, Accra, The State Publishing Corporation, 1968.

The strike was short lived; however, the effects of the strike were noticeable throughout the country. Public opinion toward commercial transport operators was balanced. However, public opinion began to shift in the years after the strike.

### **Lorry Park disputes between the GPRTU and the GCTA**

The strike as discussed in the previous was undertaken by only members of the GPRTU, as GCTA members stayed away. For the GCTA the major challenge for its members was the control of the lorry parks by the GPRTU. In



assessing the influence of private commercial transport operators in Ghana, P. R. Fouracre, in “Public Transport in Ghanaian Cities- a Case of Union Power,” asserts that “their [GPRTU] power is exerted through control of the terminals from which services are operated.”<sup>81</sup> This assertion was largely true because the GPRTU collected membership dues and other welfare charges from its members at the lorry parks. It enforced the payment of fees by prohibiting members who defaulted from entering or exiting the lorry parks. Until 1966, the GMU, which later became the GPRTU, was the only organisation for transport owners and drivers in the country and enjoyed a monopoly in the control of lorry parks. The registration and recognition by government of the GCTA in 1966 introduced two organisations, namely, the GPRTU and the GCTA in the road transport sector, and ushered in a struggle for control of lorry parks, and the Koforidua central lorry park became the centre of this initial struggle.<sup>82</sup>

The first source of conflict between the two transport groups was the properties of the erstwhile GMU, now GPRTU.<sup>83</sup> A kiosk in the middle of the central lorry park at Koforidua became the source of serious confrontation

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<sup>81</sup> P. R. Fouracre et al., “Public Transport in Ghanaian Cities—a Case of Union Power,” *Transport Reviews* 14, no. 1, 1994, 45–61.

<sup>82</sup> Koforidua was one of the largest of the several inland commercial and administrative centres for the Eastern Province of the Gold Coast. It was founded in 1875 by migrants from Asante who fled the civil war between Asante and Dwaben. With the onset of the cocoa-revolution from the early 1900s, a lot of other migrants moved into the area in search of arable land for cocoa cultivation. Thus, the town quickly grew to become one of the oldest cocoa-producing centres in Ghana. When the Accra Kumasi railway line was completed in 1923, Koforidua became an important rail junction and road head. For a better understanding of the migration and political development of Koforidua see, r. Addo-Fening, “Asante Refugees in Akyem Abuakwa 1875-1912,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* 14, no. 1 (1973): 39–64; John Campbell, “Urbanization, Culture And The Politics Of Urban Development In Ghana, 1875-1980,” *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 23, no. 4 (1994): 409–50.

<sup>83</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A.Y. Dankwah, Industrial Relations Officer to The Assistant Commissioner of Police, Trespass over Union’s Property by Members of Co-operative Transport Society -Koforidua, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1967.

between the two groups as it was seized by members of the GCTA.<sup>84</sup> The kiosk was initially bought by the erstwhile GMU from one Yaw Braimah of Koforidua at a cost of thirty-four new cedis (NC34.00) for the bookmen of the GMU to use as their office.<sup>85</sup> When the bookmen formed the GCTA they occupied the 'office' and refused to give it up to the GPRTU. The two groups were unable find an amicable solution to their struggle over the ownership of the kiosk.

A dispute also ensued between the two groups over the collection of lorry park dues by the GPRTU, and the molestation of the GCTA drivers by lorry park bookmen working for the GPRTU.<sup>86</sup> Drivers who failed to pay lorry parks dues were obstructed from either leaving or entering the lorry park by means of pulling of ropes stretched across the entrance of the lorry parks.

B. A. Bentum, Secretary General of the TUC, attempted to resolve the issues between the two groups through several meetings. However, he was unable to resolve the issues between the two groups amicably. Thus, on 17 November 1966, Bentum wrote to the NLC government outlining the genesis of the conflict between the GPRTU and the GCTA.<sup>87</sup> He outlined two proposals for addressing the issue. The first was a firm action to be taken by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to make it illegal for any other entity, apart from the registered

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<sup>84</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A.Y. Dankwah, Industrial Relations Officer to The Assistant Commissioner of Police, Trespass over Union's Property by Members of Co-operative Transport Society -Koforidua, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1967.

<sup>85</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A.Y. Dankwah, Industrial Relations Officer to The Assistant Commissioner of Police, Trespass over Union's Property by Members of Co-operative Transport Society -Koforidua, 21<sup>st</sup> December, 1967.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A. Bentum, Secretary-General (TUC) to the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare, Ghana Motor Union of TUC, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1966.

GPRTU of the TUC, to operate in any lorry parks in the country.<sup>88</sup> The second was that, since the main crux of the matter was the collection of various tolls at the lorry stations by overseers, the collection of these tolls should be completely taken up by the various City, Municipal, Urban and Local Councils. Such councils were to be made responsible for maintaining order and discipline at lorry parks by engaging the services of overseers for a fee paid by these councils from the proceeds collected from drivers who use these lorry parks.<sup>89</sup> When this was done, Bentum argued, the various local councils “will only pay to the GPRTU the normal trade union dues of two shillings (2/) per member per month.”<sup>90</sup> Indeed, Bentum promised that in case the second proposal was acceptable to the NLC government, he would call a meeting of the executives of the GPRTU and explain this new arrangement so that they can co-operate in handing over their operations in the lorry parks to the various City, Urban, Municipal and Local Councils. The NLC government did not act on Bentum’s proposal, as such, the conflict at the lorry stations persisted.

On 23 February 1968, a new round of efforts were made by William Darko, the Eastern Regional Labour Officer and G. C. Baiden, the Principal Co-operative Officer, to rally officials of the two organisations together to settle the differences between them at the Regional Labour Office at Koforidua.<sup>91</sup> Under the

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<sup>88</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 B.A. Bentum, Secretary-General (TUC) to the Principal Secretary, Ministry of Labour & Social Welfare, Ghana Motor Union of TUC, 17<sup>th</sup> November, 1966.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>91</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Settlement of Dispute between the Eastern Region Transport Co-Operative Union Ltd Registered No. 3186 and the Ghana Private Road Transport Union of T.U.C. (Ghana), 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1968.

terms of agreement reached, the collection of additional dues by the GPRTU at the lorry parks in the Eastern Region was to be the responsibility of the members of the GPRTU.<sup>92</sup>

Both parties at the meeting agreed to respect each other's existence, allow the normal flow of commerce by way of automobiles using the lorry park at Koforidua, and put an end to the harassment of non-union members for dues payment to use the lorry park.<sup>93</sup> Also, the collection of dues from non-unionized members was to end immediately.<sup>94</sup> It was also agreed that the GCTA members should pay their dues to the GCTA and the GPRTU members of the TUC also should pay dues to their Union.<sup>95</sup> The kiosk, which became the centrepiece of the conflict, was to be returned to the GPRTU of the TUC, since members of the GCTA ceased to belong to the GPRTU.<sup>96</sup>

### **A Clamp-Down and Dissolution of the TUC by the Progress Party Government**

While attempts were being made to solve the problems between the GPRTU and the GCTA there was change of government. In October 1969, the Progress Party (PP) led by Dr. K. A. Busia won the general elections and formed the next civilian government of Ghana. The PP government towed the line of the

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<sup>92</sup> "Drivers' Dispute Now Settled," *The Ghanaian Times*, February 27, 1968, 9.

<sup>93</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 Settlement of Dispute between the Eastern Region Transport Co-operative Union Ltd Registered No. 3186 and the Ghana Private Road Transport Union of T.U.C. (Ghana), 23<sup>rd</sup> February, 1968.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*; PRAAD, Koforidua ERG2/1/71 A.S. Ayeh, Secretary Eastern Region Co-op. Transport Union Ltd to The Principal Co-Op. Officer, Settlement of Dispute between the Eastern Region Transport Co-operative Union Ltd Registered No. 3186 and the Ghana Private Road Transport Union of T.U.C. (Ghana), 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1968.



previous CPP and NLC governments by demanding industrial peace in the country. At the third biennial conference of the TUC, Prime Minister Busia stressed that it was “artificial and unrealistic for workers to assume the same attitude to management as that of workers in industrial countries.”<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, he stated “there should be developed in this country a strong and free trade union movement that will work in concord, love and peace: a movement that will unite the workers to serve our nations need.”<sup>98</sup> In dealing with labour, the PP government began by reinstating the 2,000 striking dockworkers who were dismissed from employment by the NLC in May 1968.<sup>99</sup>

However, cordial relations between the PP government and the TUC changed quickly and, by the middle of 1971, Ghana was rocked by major strike actions. In reaction to one of the strikes, the dockworkers’ strike, Dr. Bruce-Konuah, the Labour Minister, dismissed about 400 dockworkers. This was after the dockworkers had failed to return to work following a government ultimatum to return to work.<sup>100</sup> Subsequently, 150 striking Public Works Department (PWD) workers were also laid off, while the railway enginemen were cautioned by Bruce-Konuah that a similar action would be taken against them if they agitated.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Kofi A. Busia, *The Way to Industrial Peace: Opening Address to the Plenary Session of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Biennial Conference of the Ghana Trades Union Congress at Winneba*. Accra: State Publishing Corporation, 1970, 4.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>99</sup> Richard Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 116; Kraus, “The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana,” 141.

<sup>100</sup> Jeffries, *Class, Power, and Ideology in Ghana*, 127.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

In September 1971, the PP government introduced a new tax, National Development Levy, on all wage workers.<sup>102</sup> This did not go down well with most workers. Thus, the leadership of the TUC called for the abolition of the National Development Levy, arguing that it would be irresponsible on the part of the TUC to see workers' wages reduced while living conditions increased.<sup>103</sup> A series of uncoordinated labour protests begun in the country.<sup>104</sup> Trade unionists were "accused [by government] of engaging in politics and economic subversion through illegal strikes" and the government was willing to take firm measures to deal with this "misuse of the labour organisation."<sup>105</sup>

The GPRTU, on its part, appealed to the government to exempt commercial drivers and vehicle owners from paying the National Development Levy.<sup>106</sup> In a letter to the Minister of Transport and Communications, E. A. Koranteng, the general secretary of the GPRTU, expressed the shock and dismay of GPRTU members at the introduction of the National Development Levy, which had become obligatory for transport owners and commercial vehicles to pay, in

<sup>102</sup> "Why the Development Levy – Busia Explains," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 8, 1971, 1; Government of Ghana, *Budget Statement*. Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972.

<sup>103</sup> "Clamp-down on TUC," *West Africa*, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1971, 1094; "Union is Against Strikes," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 6, 1971, 1; "TUC Not for Strikes – Bentum: It Seeks Workers' Welfare," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 1, 1971, 16.

<sup>104</sup> "500 Striking Bus Workers Sacked," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 16, 1971, 1; "Bus Strike: 272 Workers Won't Be Re-Instated," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 23, 1971.

<sup>105</sup> "Clamp-down on TUC," *West Africa*, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1971, 1094; In the struggle that ensued, the police searched the headquarters of the Ghana Trades Union Congress and Bentums home following allegation by the government that Bentum had been inciting economic subversion by organizing illegal strikes. See; "We'll Act Against Subversion," *The Ghanaian Time*, September 4, 1971, 1; "Don't Strike on Levy Issue – Warns J.H. Mensah," *The Ghanaian Times*, August 27, 1971, 1.

<sup>106</sup> "Transport Union Wants Exemption from D-Levy," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 4, 1971, 9.

spite of the many other taxes imposed on them.<sup>107</sup> Transport owners and drivers, the GPRTU contended, were heavily taxed on their profession more than any other group of professionals.<sup>108</sup> Thus, its members would find it difficult to pay the levy, which was about 100 per cent of the income tax payable by transport owners.<sup>109</sup> Indeed, the development levy was not the only concern of the GPRTU. The PP government's budget statement for the year 1971 also restructured taxation in the road transport sector.<sup>110</sup> For example, quarterly licence fees were abolished and replaced with higher prices of petrol and fuel oil.<sup>111</sup> The budget increased the price of "premium" petrol by eight new pesewas per gallon, "ordinary" petrol by six new pesewas per gallon and "gas oil" by five new pesewas a gallon.<sup>112</sup>

Fearing that the uncoordinated protest of workers would result in the TUC launching a general strike, the PP Government passed a new labour law, the Industrial Relations (Amendment) Act 1971 (No.383), under a certificate of urgency after a 17-hour debate in the National Assembly.<sup>113</sup> Addressing the case in the National Assembly, the Labour Minister, Dr. William Bruce Konuah, argued that communist-trained union leaders were exploiting industrial disputes to

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<sup>107</sup> "Transport Union Wants Exemption from D-Levy," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 4, 1971, 9.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*; "Control Price of Petrol – Union Urges Government," *The Ghanaian Time*, September 2, 1971, 7.

<sup>110</sup> "YOUR BUDGET Largest Ever Presented..." *The Ghanaian Times*, July 28, 1971; "Petrol Prices Increased," *The Ghanaian Times*, July 28, 1971, 1.

<sup>111</sup> "Prices – Transport Union is Dismayed," *The Ghanaian Times*, August 2, 1971, 1.

<sup>112</sup> "Mensah Warns Drivers," *The Ghanaian Times*, August 2, 1971, 1. See also, "Don't Raise Fares – Nyanor Appeals to Drivers," *The Ghanaian Times*, July 30, 1971, 1; "The Price of Petrol," *The Ghanaian Times*, July 30, 1971, 1.

<sup>113</sup> Amenumey, *Ghana: A Concise History from Pre-Colonial Times to the 20th Century*, 246; "TUC Bill Passed," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 10, 1971, 1; "Government and the TUC," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 10, 1971, 1&6.

cause confusion, and organise illegal strikes and the “recent events on the industrial scene reveal certain incipient threats to our democracy.”<sup>114</sup> The attention of the National Assembly was also drawn by Konuah to the fact that after the 1966 coup, the CPP and its integral wings were banned.<sup>115</sup> However, the TUC which had been part of the CPP machinery had “continued to exist by oversight.”<sup>116</sup> When N.Y.B Adade, Minister of Internal Affairs addressed a Progress Party rally in September 1971, he reiterated the PP government’s position that the “TUC was an integral wing of the proscribed Convention People’s Party and that was why the Nkrumah regime organised it in such a way that every worker was a member and paid his dues at source.”<sup>117</sup> Thus, under the Industrial Relations Act 1971, membership was no longer compulsory from 1971 and the PP government was no longer responsible for collecting dues for associations and societies in the Ghana.<sup>118</sup>

In its effort to curtail strikes and the powers of the TUC, which was deemed pro-CPP, the PP government passed the Industrial Relations Amendment Act of 1971. The Industrial Relations Amendment Act of 1971 abolished the check-off system and the legal status of the TUC as created in 1958.<sup>119</sup> Also, the

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<sup>114</sup> “Ghana Anti-TUC legislation,” *West Africa*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1971, 1121.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, See also “Resist TUC’s Pressure – Konuah Advises Workers,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 8, 1971, 5; “Mensah – We’re not Against TUC,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 11, 1971, 1; J.K. Nketsia, “Moves to Re-organise Trade Unions,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 21, 1971; J.K. Nketsia, “TUC Workers Will be Paid – Konuah,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 18, 1971; “Konuah: Unions Not Abolished,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 13, 1971, 1.

<sup>117</sup> “Membership of the Trades Union Congress not Compulsory says Adade,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 7, 1971, 1.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.*; “Adade: We’ll Stop Bentum,” *The Ghanaian Times*, September 8, 1971, 1.

<sup>119</sup> The check off system was an arrangement by which trade union dues were deducted at source from workers’ wages. It was then distributed according to the stipulated proportions, to the TUC, national Union and local branches. See “Don’t deduct Union Dues,” *The Ghanaian Times*,



assets of the TUC and its affiliate unions were frozen by the PP government.<sup>120</sup> Thus, the TUC could not access its bank accounts or dispose of any of its assets without the written permission of the Labour Minister.<sup>121</sup> The Act also required national unions to reregister and empowered the Registrar of Trade Unions not to re-register unions unless he was satisfied with their rules.<sup>122</sup>

### **Take-Over of Lorry Parks by Councils**

Commercial road transportation was not left out of the labour problems that the PP government had to deal with in 1971. Apart from the appeal from the GPRTU for exemption of its members from the payment of the National Development Levy, the contest at the lorry parks between members of the GPRTU and the GCTA resurfaced. As the GCTA grew in strength in terms of numbers, it objected to most of the practices at the lorry parks. The GCTA directed a new set of petitions to the PP government on the problems faced by its members at the lorry parks. Amidst the general labour agitations in the country in

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September 29, 1971, 1; "Union Dues in 'Suspense Account'," *The Ghanaian Times*, September, 25, 1971, 1; Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, 160-162. See also, Ukandi Godwin Damachi, *The Role of Trade Unions in the Development Process: With a Case Study of Ghana*. Praeger Publishers, 1974. In reaction to the Act abolishing the TUC thousands of workers staged a strike in Takoradi, partially paralyzing the port. The stoppage supported by dock workers and members of other unions. Some railway services were reported to be running, despite a stoppage by signalmen. Over 1,000 strikers gathered to march to the offices of Western Region Chief Executive, Alfred Chinbuah. In Accra, employees of the Greater Accra branch of the Public Works Department staged a sit-down strike to back demands for the refund of money deducted from their wages and salaries for the National Development Levy.

<sup>120</sup> "Government Freezes TUC Assets," *The Ghanaian Times*, September 8, 1971, 1. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) called on the Progress Party Government to respect, in accordance with democratic principles, the wishes of the worker of Ghana "as expressed in their own democratically constituted bodies." The Brussels-based ICFTU, the largest non-communist trade union group, expressed dismay in a cable to Dr. Busia, at reported interference by public authorities with trade union affairs, such as the searching of trade unions premises and the homes of union leaders. It also protested at the reported seizure of union documents and the freezing of Ghana TUC funds.

<sup>121</sup> "Ghana Anti-TUC Legislation," *West Africa*, 24<sup>th</sup> September 1971, 1121.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*

1971, the Labour Minister, Adade, held three meetings with representatives of the GPRTU, the TUC, the GCTA, the Motor Traffic Unit of the Ghana Police Services, the Ministry of Labour and Co-operatives and the Ministry of Internal Affairs.<sup>123</sup> This represents one of the major attempts by government to solve the problem of disturbances and confrontations between members of the GPRTU and the GCTA at the lorry parks.

At the first meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, Adade stressed the fact that the Government was interested not only in providing buses but other kinds of vehicles to ease the transport difficulties in the country. To this end, the PP government planned to encourage private participation in the transportation with the hope that private transport owners would organise their operations efficiently to help the plan of the PP government. In summary, the primary concern of the PP government was to provide efficient transport for the people and “that was why the current [1971] Budget statement of the Government dealt extensively with the subject.”<sup>124</sup>

Furthermore, as the PP government wanted to improve transportation for the ordinary traveler, it encouraged the formation of associations so that they would compete with each other to enhance the efficiency of the transportation industry.<sup>125</sup> Since the representatives of the various groups at the meeting had varied interests in the transportation, it was prudent on the part of PP government

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<sup>123</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

to ensure that no association enjoyed monopoly over the others in the control of lorry parks. Adzosii, the Secretary of the GCTA, presented the grievances of the GCTA and particularly emphasized the ownership of the lorry parks. According to Adzosii, “his association knew that lorry parks were owned by local authorities [urban, municipal, local councils] and that anyone who paid their dues should feel free to use them.”<sup>126</sup> He emphasized that since their members belonged to the GCTA, they were not obliged to belong to any other association and that this was the decision taken when the dispute between GCTA and the GPRTU was first settled by the Jatoe Kaleo, Minister of Transport and Communication.<sup>127</sup> Again, while the GCTA was not against the existence of any other association, it nevertheless objected to the monopolistic control of the GPRTU over the lorry parks. Adzosii clearly outlined some of the practices of the GPRTU that the GCTA opposed. Of particular concern was the “shift system”, through which, he argued, the GPRTU exploited drivers at the lorry parks.<sup>128</sup> The shift system was a system by which bookmen loaded vehicles with goods and passengers strictly based on first come, first served basis at the lorry parks.<sup>129</sup> To join the shift system, drivers, whether GPRTU members or not, had to pay ₵120.00 to the GPRTU.<sup>130</sup> The GCTA regarded the payment for the shift system as a form of

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<sup>126</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>129</sup> Mr. Kwabena Frimpong, interviewed by author, Accra, June 12, 2019.

<sup>130</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.

extortion by the GPRTU. Adzosii asserted that once a driver paid the lorry park fee to the councils, the driver ought to be able to use the lorry parks freely without hindrance from any drivers' union.

Also, the GCTA disagreed with the practice where their members paid welfare monies to the GPRTU when they did not belong to the latter union.<sup>131</sup> Adzosii mentioned that the GCTA did not object to the service fee of 2/- charged at the lorry parks, as that was for the management of the lorry parks.<sup>132</sup> However, since a portion went to the coffers of the GPRTU, it was only equitable that the GCTA should also be allowed to put overseers in the lorry parks, not only for the purpose of collecting funds, but more particularly, for the purpose of watching over the interests of GCTA members at the stations. On this latter point, it was put across by Adzosii that some of the members of the GCTA complained that in the application of the principle of "first come, first served," the overseers discriminated in favour of GPRTU members and against GCTA members.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> The welfare money was collected from drivers at the exit gate of the lorry park and paid to the union's funds. It was payable every day and on each trip. Thus, if a driver entered and leaves a particular lorry park 3 times a day, he paid the welfare dues at the stipulated rate 3 times for the day. See PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.* For their services the overseers charged every driver a service fee of 10% on the gross takings of the driver (i.e. 10np per NC1.00, or 20np in NC2.00). Thus, where a Bus loads 14 passengers Accra/Kumasi at NC3.00per passenger, the overseer's service fee would be NC4.20 (i.e 10np). He the overseer was able to load four such buses per day, he got NC16.80 per day. The overseers paid a portion of their collection into the Union's coffers periodically. The amount differed place to place. In some places, it was NC30.00per week, at other places it was NC4.00 per day.

<sup>133</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.



After extensive deliberation by the various representatives at the meeting, there was consensus among majority of the participants that the lorry parks were owned by councils.<sup>134</sup> Participants agreed that some kind of supervision over the lorry parks was necessary for the protection of travellers from molestation by unscrupulous persons at the lorry parks.<sup>135</sup> Participants also noted that there used to be only one organisation at the lorry parks, however, more than one organisation for drivers had come into being at the station due to the freedom of association in the country. Participants also envisaged the emergence of other organisations in the future. Consequently, Jatoo Kaleo, the Minister of Transport and Communication argued at the meeting that, there was no need to belong to an association before one was allowed to pick up passengers at any lorry park.<sup>136</sup> The only thing that a driver was required to do in order to qualify to send his vehicle to a lorry station was to pay the required toll at the gate of the lorry park.<sup>137</sup>

Notwithstanding the above, the representatives of the GPRTU objected to the suggestion of giving control of the lorry parks to a neutral body on the grounds that the GPRTU, by their operation, employed over 4000 bookmen throughout the country, therefore, they argued any attempt to take away GPRTU's control of lorry parks would lead to the unemployment of the bookmen, most of whom were retired and aged professional drivers, but whose employment

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<sup>134</sup> The Minister of labour and Co-operatives, the Hon. W.G. Bruce-Konuah and the Hon. Aboagye da Costa, Ministerial Secretary Labour and Co-operatives, who were also in attendance supported this view.

<sup>135</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of a Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry park Overseers on 19<sup>th</sup> August, 1971 at 11.00A.M.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

guaranteed order at the lorry parks.<sup>138</sup> Indeed, during the second meeting on 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, Bentum, the General Secretary of the TUC, aligned himself with the position of the GPRTU and stated that the principle of the TUC was to protect the interest of workers.<sup>139</sup> While he was not against any new arrangement at the lorry parks, he maintained that if provisions were not made for the engagement of the bookmen, it would throw a lot of people out of employment.<sup>140</sup> Indeed, this position was contrary to Bentum's earlier proposal to the NLC government, in 1966, on how to solve the problems at the lorry parks in the country.<sup>141</sup>

The third meeting occurred on 14 September 1971 and centred on issues concerning the employment of the current GPRTU bookmen.<sup>142</sup> Adade pointed out that his plan was not to remove the GPRTU or its bookmen from the lorry parks. However, the councils could employ and pay bookmen wages when the councils take over the lorry parks. Furthermore, Adade noted that "it is known that the bookmen collect 20np [Twenty new pesewas] for loading a truck and that even assuming that Councils [City, Municipal, Urban and Local councils] cannot pay them from their own coffers, money that accrues from this service charge could be used in paying them [bookmen]."<sup>143</sup> The TUC leader, Bentum, however, disagreed and likened the "service money" paid by drivers to the market tolls

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<sup>138</sup> "Fate of 4000 'Bookmen', *Daily Graphic*, September 29, 1971, 1.

<sup>139</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of the Second Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-Operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry Park Overseers on the 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, At 11.00A.M.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*

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

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*

collected by the Councils. He argued that, although the councils collected these market tolls, they were unable to pay their employees.<sup>144</sup>

Adade, reiterated that since the councils owned the lorry parks and collected monies from drivers using the parks, the councils had been negligent in the discharge of their duties of ensuring that passengers, drivers, and all who used the parks went about their business in an orderly manner.<sup>145</sup> While the GPRTU had performed exactly this function and had done it creditably it was better to ask those who owned the lorry parks to take over the administration of the lorry parks.

Adade tasked leadership of the GPRTU to concentrate on their trade. Questions of who would be employed, who would pay such people and others were all matters of detail to be worked out after a neutral body had taken over to see to it that all those interested in road transport were protected.<sup>146</sup> The consensus of opinion was that councils should take over the administration of lorry parks as the best solution.<sup>147</sup> As a result, the Chairman of the meeting, Adade, argued that the councils' position was strengthened by the fact that they could ensure impartiality, and the question of whether the work of the present bookmen would be taken over by the new body was a matter of detail that could be looked into.<sup>148</sup> The councils were to determine the qualifications that the bookmen needed in order to be employed. Adade also added that since the bookmen belonged to the GPRTU, it

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<sup>144</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of the Second Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-Operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry Park Overseers on the 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, At 11.00A.M.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

would be unjust to ask the bookmen to continue to manage the lorry parks as justice demanded that members of the GCTA should also have some of their members at the parks.<sup>149</sup>

Effective 15 October 1971, councils were to control and manage the lorry parks in the country.<sup>150</sup> However, any council that was able to implement them earlier than that date could do so.<sup>151</sup> The payment of shift money was to be abolished with immediate effect.<sup>152</sup> Once a driver paid his lorry park fee, he was entitled, subject to any council bye-laws on the matter, to the free and unimpeded use of the lorry park.<sup>153</sup> Welfare dues for any organisation were to be collected from members of the particular organisation only.<sup>154</sup> A service fee of 4 cedis was to be paid to the councils' overseers, until such time as the councils saw fit to decide otherwise.<sup>155</sup> In choosing overseers for the lorry parks the councils were given the right to select from any quarter, however, they were not obliged to engage any or all of the GPRTU bookmen at the time. The councils were tasked to work out uniform rules for implementation. Meanwhile the GCTA started negotiation with the councils to approve places where they could cite their own terminals.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Minutes of the Second Meeting Held at the Ministry of Internal Affairs between the Hon. N.Y.B. Adade and Representatives of the Ghana Private Road Transport Union and the Ghana Co-Operative Transport Union to Discuss the Control of Lorry Park Overseers on the 26<sup>th</sup> August, 1971, At 11.00A.M.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> "Lorry parks," *Daily Graphic*, September 18, 1971, 1.



It is worth mentioning that, following the decision of the third meeting chaired by Adade on 14 September 1971, the position of bookmen found a legal status in the bye-laws of the councils. Bookmen were made agents of the councils, to be paid through a special levy of C4 that drivers were to pay at the lorry parks. On 18 October 1971, the Interim Management Committee of the Kumasi City Council became the first council to recognize bookmen in its bye-laws.<sup>157</sup> This became the model bye-laws for lorry parks for other councils.<sup>158</sup> The bye-laws brought the bookmen under the control of the councils by stipulating that;

Any person or group of persons who wish to operate at any of the Council's approved Lorry Parks as bookmen shall obtain a licence to do so from the Council. The cost of the licence shall be N¢20.00 for every six months or N¢40.00 a year payable half yearly or yearly in advance and shall be renewable every year subject to good conduct and good performances of the particular bookman or bookmen. Notwithstanding this provision the Council reserves the right to revoke the licence of any bookman or bookmen forthwith for acts prejudicial to the good discipline and operation of any of its Lorry Parks.<sup>159</sup>

Anyinam and Suhum followed the example of Kumasi and quickly implemented similar bye-laws.<sup>160</sup> Barely had the bye-laws been implemented throughout the country when the PP government was overthrown in a military coup d'état led by Lt. Col. Ignatius K. Acheampong in January 1972. Consequently, the government of the National Redemption Council (NRC) came into existence.

<sup>157</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 The Kumasi City Council (Lorry Park) Bye-Law, 1971.

<sup>158</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Model Lorry Park Bye Laws, 16<sup>th</sup> November, 1971; "Councils and the 'Bookmen'," *Daily Graphic*, September 18, 1971.

<sup>159</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 The Kumasi City Council (Lorry Park) Bye-Law, 1971.

<sup>160</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Lorry Park Overseers, 19<sup>th</sup> November, 1971; PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Takeover of Lorry Park Bookmen, 1<sup>st</sup> December, 1971.

### Restoration of TUC by the National Redemption Council (NRC)

Col. Acheampong set up the National Redemption Council (NRC) and justified his coup d'état by alluding to the general discontent in the country because of a rising cost of living. Furthermore, the devaluation of the cedi by the PP government created socio-economic hardship for the masses.<sup>161</sup> Like the previous governments, the NRC courted the support of workers and the public in general. The NRC government quickly promised to restore the TUC.<sup>162</sup> The dismissed employees of the TUC were quick to hail these actions by the military government. The NRC also promised to reconsider the devaluation of the national currency and National Development Levy that were created by the previous administration.<sup>163</sup> Apart from these promises, trade union leaders also asked for a restoration of the purchasing power of workers.<sup>164</sup> Leaders of trade unions viewed the restoration to the TUC as “a victory for the inalienable democratic rights of workers in the country.”<sup>165</sup> On 14 February 1972, the leaders of the 17 national unions, in a press statement, stated that:

we are particularly grateful to the Council for its intentions to review the National Development Levy and the devaluation of the cedi which have rendered the real

<sup>161</sup> Devaluation is the deliberate reduction in the official value of a country's currency in relation to another currency, group of currencies or currency standard. It serves as a form of import control, as it makes all imports more expensive and exports cheap. By this time the Ghanaian currency had been devalued twice. In the middle of 1967, the NLC embarked on the first devaluation of the cedi. By late 1969, the PP government embarked on the second devaluation when it reduced the value of the cedi by 44 per cent against the dollar. See; “Ghana's Economic Progress,” *West Africa*, July 8, 1967, 887; “Ghana's Devaluation,” *West Africa*, July 15, 1967, 912; “Ghana After the Devaluation,” *West Africa*, July 22, 1967, 956; “Ghana After Devaluation: The Cedi and the Cocoa Farmer,” *West Africa*, July 29, 1967, 976; “Ghana After Devaluation: 2 The Government and the Traders,” *West Africa*, August 5, 1967, 1019.

<sup>162</sup> “Big Support for Coup,” *Daily Graphic*, January 15, 1972, 1&3.

<sup>163</sup> Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, 168-169.

<sup>164</sup> “Big Support for Coup,” *Daily Graphic*, January 15, 1972, 1&3.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*

income of the working man valueless ... it is our anticipation that the Council will, as a matter of urgency, undertake such economic review which will restore once and for all the real purchasing power of the people of this country to a meaningful level.<sup>166</sup>

To fulfil its promise to the TUC, the NRC passed the Industrial Relations Amendment Decree 1972 (NRCD) in February 1972.<sup>167</sup> This repealed the Industrial Relations Amendment Act 1971 (Act 383) and restored the TUC that was created 1965. The decree protected trade unionists by stating that “Notwithstanding the provisions of section one of this decree, no person shall be liable to any action whatsoever in respect of any act done by him in good faith in pursuance of the said Industrial Relations Amendment Act before the commencement to this decree.”<sup>168</sup>

Meanwhile, in accordance with Act 383, thirteen of the seventeen national unions held a conference for their delegates before the close of February 1972 to elect new officers, pending re-registration to form the new TUC.<sup>169</sup> The GPRTU, the Railway and Ports Workers’ Union, the Public Service Workers’ and the Local Government Workers’ Union, also began the process of organizing their delegates’ conferences.<sup>170</sup> The NRC encouraged the formation of the new TUC

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<sup>166</sup> “Big Support for Coup,” *Daily Graphic*, January 15, 1972, 1&3; “Bentum Support – New Government,” *Daily Graphic*, January 15, 1972, 4; “Workers Demonstrate,” *Daily Graphic*, January 19, 1972, 1.

<sup>167</sup> “TUC Act Repealed,” *Daily Graphic* 12 February 1972, 16.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*; “Decree on T.U.C Act,” *Daily Graphic*, March 6, 1972, 1; “TUC Dues,” *Daily Graphic*, February 25, 1972, 1; Graphic Lawyer, “The Future of Trades Union Congress in Ghana,” *Daily Graphic*, March 17, 1972, 3; “Unions Ready to Hold Big Congress,” *Daily Graphic*, March 15, 1972, 1.

<sup>169</sup> Act 383 required the Unions to hold elections and amend their constitutions before being allowed to register under the Trades Union Ordinance, 1941. “Unions Free to Choose Leader,” *Daily Graphic*, 9 March, 1972.

<sup>170</sup> “Unions Free to Choose Leader,” *Daily Graphic*, 9 March, 1972.

and assured workers of its disinterest in the leadership of the TUC.<sup>171</sup> The NRC also handed over the assets of the TUC which had been confiscated by the previous administration.<sup>172</sup>

In line with the efforts of the government to get the cooperation of workers, the NRC insisted that existing industrial dispute machinery needed to be utilized, and management of corporations and private companies needed to prevent problems that allowed strikes to occur.<sup>173</sup> To this end, private employers and state corporations were tasked to quickly conclude collective bargaining agreements and, that once reached, collective bargaining agreements were to be implemented swiftly.<sup>174</sup> By making the dispute solving methods work faster than before, the NRC removed some of the causes of industrial disputes and cautioned workers that:

The Ghanaian worker needs a new vision and a new spirit. He needs the vision of a Great new nation, well industrialized with booming agriculture, and standing four square on its own resources: He needs the spirit of self-reliance which will make him see his greatest pride in his ability to do what he wants for himself. You have a Government which believes positively in self-reliance, a Government which is prepared to move away from the patterns of the past which have only brought us failure from the distress. We want to prove that we do not need to wait for foreign investment to be able to get ahead; that after all, it is people who create wealth and with a dedicated working people, a creative people, we shall overcome our present

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<sup>171</sup> "Unions Free to Choose Leader," *Daily Graphic*, 9 March, 1972.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>173</sup> Kraus, "The Political Economy of Industrial Relations in Ghana," 147.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.



difficulties. As a Government, we shall not be deflected from this path of self-reliance.<sup>175</sup>

Even before this caution to Ghanaian workers, the GPRTU, in February 1972, beginning with the Eastern Region branch, gradually discontinued the payment of the bookmen special levy which had been introduced by the PP government.<sup>176</sup> That levy enjoined the GPRTU to pay C4 to local, municipal or urban councils as the case might be, for each bookman employed by the council at the lorry park.<sup>177</sup> The GPRTU argued there was no justification for paying the levy as all those who used the lorry parks paid tolls specified by the council. For instance, in Koforidua alone, the GPRTU paid C40 every month to the council apart from the daily levy which every driver paid for each day he used the lorry park.<sup>178</sup>

Following the discontinuation of the payment of the special levy, the GPRTU, still dissatisfied with the directives for the councils to take over the lorry parks sent a petition to the NRC, on 10 March 1972, about their displeasure with the arrangement.<sup>179</sup> However, the NRC did not take any action to reverse the decision of the PP government in respect of lorry park management.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> Quoted in Jennifer Hart, “‘Nifa Nifa’: Technopolitics, Mobile Workers, and the Ambivalence of Decline in Acheampong’s Ghana,” *African Economic History* 44, no. 1, 2016, 181–201.

<sup>176</sup> “Union Gets Tough on Special Levy,” *Daily Graphic*, February 16, 1972, 6.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>179</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Ghana Private Road Transport Union (Ghana), Petition Against Dismissal of Lorry Park Overseers from Lorry Parks, 10<sup>th</sup> March, 1972.

<sup>180</sup> PRAAD, Koforidua ERG 2/1/71 Petition against Dismissal of Lorry Park Overseers from Lorry park, 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1972.

The NRC government had more pressing economic challenges to deal with. The country had balance of payment issues as a result of over dependence on imported items.<sup>181</sup> Col. Acheampong pointed out that;

We have been spending more on imports than the foreign exchange we earn with the result that in the past, we have continually been borrowing to import things into the country. Surely, there must be a limit to the generosity of any creditor if he realizes that the debtor is not making any effort to improve his financial position. This is what we have set ourselves to correct; our aim is to produce the food and the raw material we import and also to increase our export trade so that the foreign exchange we earn can be used to expand our industries and even to establish new ones.<sup>182</sup>

This is the context in which the government launched its flagship programme, “Operation Feed Yourself,” (OFY), which was aimed at making the country self-reliant in agriculture.<sup>183</sup> In doing this, the government was mindful of the importance of the role of drivers in achieving the success of the OFY programme.<sup>184</sup> It was commercial drivers who brought all the produce from the farming communities to the urban centres for sale.

However, Ghana was reeling under transportation difficulties. There was a general call for standardization of vehicles to prevent the importation of all sorts of vehicles into the country. The lorry type of vehicle was the first to suffer from the new measures, as government moved to check the cost of importing spare parts to keep these old vehicles on the road. The NRC government instructed that

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<sup>181</sup> Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, 173.

<sup>182</sup> Hart, “Nifa Nifa.” 185.

<sup>183</sup> Gocking, *The History of Ghana*, 167.

<sup>184</sup> Hart, “Nifa Nifa.” 185.

the lorry should be phased out and replaced by modern buses.<sup>185</sup> It is important to note that the question of phasing out these vehicles had first been posed in 1958.<sup>186</sup> However, Joseph Kodzo, Parliamentary Secretary to the Ministry of Trade and Industries, in the CPP government, discounted the possibility of any government policy initiative in that direction.<sup>187</sup> He stated that;

The “mammy” lorry is a form of transportation which has achieved great popularity in Ghana. This is due to its usefulness in meeting the needs of both people and goods which are often unsuitable to larger or heavier vehicles. The replacement of these “mammy” lorries would not normally be a question of Government policy but should be influenced by the need for more specialized vehicles for freight haulage, on the one hand, and for passenger traffic, on the other. Specialized vehicles are now largely used for timber, petroleum and other bulk loads and this tendency will continue as roads are made wider and the surface improved. In the same way the number of passenger omnibuses on the main roads is increasing every year. Despite these changes there is likely to be a place for the “mammy” lorry for many years, particularly in connection with the conveyance of passengers and foodstuffs from the more remote country areas. However, the sooner “mammy” lorries gave way to passenger buses, the better for road users.<sup>188</sup>

The use of import restriction to phase out these vehicles put more strain on poor workers whose fate and survival were tied up with that of the lorry especially in Accra and the other regional capitals.

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<sup>185</sup> Hart, ““Nifa Nifa.”” 185.

<sup>186</sup> Ghana. Parliamentary Debates, 1<sup>st</sup> ser., vol. II (1958), cols. 243-244.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

Road transportation as a whole was dogged by spare parts problems and this was compounded by regulations restricting the importation of the types of vehicles to be used in conveying passengers. The transportation system was gradually grinding to a halt due to limited lorries and the lack of spare parts to repair broken down vehicles. The poor state of transportation was epitomized by scenes of long winding queues at the lorry parks throughout Ghana.<sup>189</sup> Workers, school children and market women queued for long hours before getting the opportunity to board one of the few lorries available, to their various places of work or residence.<sup>190</sup> Drivers and lorry owners took advantage of the increasing difficulty in obtaining spare parts to charge higher than the accepted fares. In some cases, passengers who carried no luggage were not permitted to board the vehicles.<sup>191</sup> This was especially so since luggage fees had never been standardized and was charged arbitrarily.<sup>192</sup>

As the general economic situation in the country worsened and a shortage of items especially spare parts and vehicles became apparent in the country, the rank and file of the GPRTU increased transport fares indiscriminately without recourse to the leadership of the union.<sup>193</sup> Passengers and the general public complained bitterly about the very high transport fares.<sup>194</sup> The leadership of the GPRTU, which had failed to rein in their members and bookmen at the lorry parks in order to push for a takeover of the lorry parks, however, blamed middle

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<sup>189</sup> "Wicked Drivers," *Daily Graphic*, July 19, 1978, 7.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>191</sup> "Drivers Must face the Music," *Daily Graphic*, January 30, 1978, 7; "2 Drivers Overseers' 'Hot'," *Daily Graphic*, March 3, 1977, 12.

<sup>192</sup> Graphic View, "Drivers and Fares," *Daily Graphic*, July 12, 1978, 2.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>194</sup> "Drivers Are Bad," *Daily Graphic*, January 23, 1978, 12.



men for creating artificial shortages in the country, through the hoarding of spare parts.<sup>195</sup>

In 1975, amid the growing discontent of the general public on the issue of high lorry fares in the country, the GPRTU appealed to the government for support to take over the control and operations of lorry parks throughout the country in order to ensure the curbing of the problem of escalating fares.<sup>196</sup> According to the leadership of the GPRTU, the union was better placed to restore smooth and effective operations at the lorry parks for the benefit of the general public.<sup>197</sup> W. B. Otoo, General Secretary of the GPRTU, stressed that the union was aware of malpractices such as charging above the stipulated fares, excessive luggage fees, and indiscipline among bookmen at the lorry parks.<sup>198</sup> However, there was little the leadership of the GPRTU could do as the lorry parks were not fully under their control.

### **Government Blames GPRTU for High Cost Of Living in Ghana**

In May 1977, the Head of State, General I. K. Acheampong, blamed the GPRTU squarely “for their woeful contribution towards the prevailing high cost of living in the country.”<sup>199</sup> Acheampong took the GPRTU to task during a meeting with the National Executives of GPRTU at the Osu Castle, Accra. Intelligence reports, according to Acheampong, indicated that transport owners were complicit in the smuggling of lorry tyres, foodstuffs and petroleum products

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<sup>195</sup> “Drivers Are Bad,” *Daily Graphic*, January 23, 1978, 12.

<sup>196</sup> “Let’s Take Over Lorry parks – TUC,” *Daily Graphic*, October 4, 1975, 9.

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

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> “FIRED! Transport Union Taken to Task for Present High Cost of Living,” *Daily Graphic*, May 27, 1977, 1.

out of a country, which led to the scarcity of those items.<sup>200</sup> Furthermore, Acheampong expressed concern about the collaboration of transport owners with bookmen to over-charge for the conveyance of foodstuffs from the rural areas to the urban centres and called for an end to such nefarious activities.<sup>201</sup> The Head of State gave the GPRTU “only one chance” to re-organise their operations immediately in order to qualify for the bulk allocation of import licence to order vehicles for their members.<sup>202</sup> Acheampong also requested that the GPRTU should submit a list of all spare parts required by transport owners together with an application.<sup>203</sup> This, the Head of State hoped would help members to obtain spare parts without any difficulty and also drastically reduce the high prices of passenger vehicles and spare parts.

Following the concerns of Gen. Acheampong, the GPRTU began to exert some form of control at the lorry parks over the bookmen. For example, Daniel Yeboah, the Chairman of the Eastern Region GPRTU, in May 1977, announced plans for the GPRTU to remove “certain undesirable bookmen from the lorry parks and taxi stations in the country.”<sup>204</sup> As part of the efforts to bring changes at lorry parks, bookmen were supplied with uniforms, badges, and serial numbers to differentiate them from crooks who prowled the station to dupe travellers.<sup>205</sup> The GPRTU asked all registered lorry park bookmen to put on the uniform prescribed

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<sup>200</sup> “FIRED! Transport Union Taken to Task for Present High Cost of Living,” *Daily Graphic*, May 27, 1977, 1.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>204</sup> “Bookmen to be ‘Hot’,” *Daily Graphic*, May 28, 1977, 16.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

for them by the GPRTU.<sup>206</sup> W. B. Otoo, cautioned that those who did not comply with the order would be arrested and prosecuted by the police.<sup>207</sup> Dressed in their proper uniforms, the bookmen should be able to co-operate with the law-enforcement agencies to rid the lorry parks of unauthorized bookmen who had been aiding and abetting the smuggling of foodstuffs and charging passengers exorbitantly and harassing them. The union also attempted to check smuggling by its members. Clement Chas-Ocloo, National Chairman of the GPRTU, admonished registered bookmen not to load any vehicle from neighbouring countries unless they were cleared by the union.<sup>208</sup> Again, Chas-Ocloo appealed to bookmen not to load vehicles with foodstuffs meant for export and warned that anybody found not complying with the order would have himself to blame for the consequences of his action.<sup>209</sup>

Following the initiative by the leadership of the GPRTU to regain control of the lorry parks, the government, in a bid to curb profiteering, directed all motor parts dealers in the country to register with the Prices and Incomes Board.<sup>210</sup> Subsequently, the GPRTU, in June 1977, established its own central depot where transport owners and drivers purchased tyres for their vehicles.<sup>211</sup> The establishment of the central depot was designed to eliminate middlemen from the tyre business, and the government lauded the effort of the GPRTU by allocating 10 per cent of all spare parts imported into the country to spare parts shops of the

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<sup>206</sup> "Bookmen to be 'Hot'," *Daily Graphic*, May 28, 1977, 16.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>210</sup> "Dealers of Motor Parts Called Upon to Register," *Daily Graphic*, December 13, 1975, 1.

<sup>211</sup> "Drivers to Get Tyres," *Daily Graphic*, June 30, 1977, 3.

GPRTU.<sup>212</sup> Nii Anyetei Kwakwanya II, the Commissioner for Labour, Social Welfare and Co-operatives, indicated that the government was hopeful that “cheaper fares would be achieved if spare parts were made available to shops belonging to the union [GPRTU] at reasonable prices.”<sup>213</sup>

By May 1978, the GPRTU national office had taken delivery of 500,000 imported slightly-used tyres from Donhok Limited for onward distribution to its members.<sup>214</sup> This augmented supply from Firestone Ghana Limited, the country’s sole producer of tyres. The management of Firestone Limited also imported 5,000 lorry tyres from Spain as a short-term solution to tyre shortage in the country.<sup>215</sup> The Firestone Limited was already handicapped by the government’s economic policies, especially, insufficient foreign exchange allocation for its own operations. As such, by the middle of 1978, it had halved its original production capacity from 30,000 to 16,000 tyres a month due to its inability to import the necessary raw materials for production of car tyres.<sup>216</sup>

Notwithstanding the efforts of the government and the GPRTU in limiting the activities of middlemen in the tyre trade, by the middle of 1978, garages throughout the country were filled with broken down, unserviceable vehicles due to the shortage of spare parts. The *Daily Graphic*, on 8 June 1978, reported that 150 commercial vehicles in the Akim Oda district had been parked for over two

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<sup>212</sup> “Spare Parts: Transport Union to Get 10% Share of Imports,” *Daily Graphic*, December 23, 1977, 16.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>214</sup> “500,000 Imported Tyres In,” *Daily Graphic*, May 11, 1978.

<sup>215</sup> “5,000 Tyres Imported, Part of the Consignment Already In!,” *Daily Graphic*, June 8, 1978, 1.

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*; “Lorry Tyres ... Full Scale Production to Begin Next Month,” *Daily Graphic*, July 5, 1978, 1; “Tyre Factory to Close Down,” *Daily Graphic*, September 28, 1978, 11.



weeks due to lack of road-worthy lorry tyres.<sup>217</sup> Spare parts shops were empty and those still operating did brisk business by selling above government-stipulated prices. As the situation worsened, the government directed the Ghana Commercial Bank to give the 32 main motor vehicle and haulage truck importers in the country facilities to open letters of credit for C15million to import more spare parts into the country.<sup>218</sup>

The weak foreign exchange position of the country affected Ghana's ability to import vehicles and their spare parts in the late 1970s. Thus, the few vehicles and spare parts imported into the country found their way to the black market and were sold at exorbitant prices. For instance, a Nissan Homer bus with an actual price of C22,000.00 was sold between C40,000.00 and C45,000.00 on the black market.<sup>219</sup> A 560 by 15 size tyre rim with an actual price of about C45.00 was sold for C150.00 and C200.00.<sup>220</sup> These high prices affected the operations of the transport industry.

Wary of the fact that in the event of a breakdown, their vehicles would be off the road for a long time due to lack of spare parts, owners and drivers of the few vehicles on the road charged extremely high fares. Large numbers of

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<sup>217</sup> "5,000 Tyres Imported, Part of the Consignment Already In!," *Daily Graphic*, June 8, 1978, 1.

<sup>218</sup> "Government Acts Fast on ... Spare Parts ... G.C.B to Aid 32 Motor Firms," *Daily Graphic*, August 4, 1978, 1. The companies included Ghana National Trading Corporation (Motors); CFAO Motors; UAC (Africa) Motors; SCOA Motors; UTC Motors; Kowus Motors; Japan Motors; Mark Cofie Engineering; Auto Parts Limited; Fatal Brothers Limited; John Holt Bartholomew/Staveley; Leyland Motors; Robert Malek Limited; Edward Nasser and Co.; Jos Hansen and Soehne; R. T. Briscoe; Randolph Motors; Apricon motors; Willowbrook Ghana Limited; Neoplan Ghana Limited; Poku Transport and Sawmillers; Shalabi Transport Services; Omnibus Service Authority; State Transport Corporation; M. Tabicca and Sons; John Moukarzel and Sons; Trans Africa Road Haulage; Anis and Badih Halaby Ghana Limited; Tarzan Enterprise Limited; Agyekum Mack Trucks; Barwuah and Sons Limited and Bosumtwi Motors and Trading Enterprise.

<sup>219</sup> Anthony Oppong, "Transport Problems," *Daily Graphic*, October 16, 1978, 5.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

prospective travellers converged at the lorry terminals and waited for several hours before getting any means of transport to their destinations. Workers reached work places late and exhausted having waited for hours before getting a vehicle to take them to work. In some cases, prospective travellers were left stranded. The “lucky” ones were made to pay exorbitantly for holding very small or light baggage as the fares were dictated by the bookmen.<sup>221</sup>

In spite of the constant appeal from the government to drivers, drivers still charged high fares because of the conditions under which they operated. These conditions included poor road, which reduced the economic life span of vehicles, scarcity of commercial vehicles and spare parts. On top of that, the government’s inability to rehabilitate and modernize the railways as an alternative to road transportation implied that transportation continued to be a problem for workers and travellers in Ghana in the latter part of the 1970s.

### **Regulation of Transport Fares by Government**

In the light of the difficulties discussed above, the government gradually moved in to regulate transport fares in the country. On 18 October 1978, the government announced approved road transport fares for all commercial vehicles throughout the country.<sup>222</sup> The fare for the first mile for taxis was set at 60 pesewas and additional 20 pesewas for every subsequent mile thereafter. For the *tro-tro* service, the fare for the first mile was set at 30 pesewas and any additional mile accrued, 5 pesewas.<sup>223</sup> As part of this new effort by the government to

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<sup>221</sup> Anthony Oppong, “Transport Problems,” *Daily Graphic*, October 16, 1978, 5.

<sup>222</sup> “Approved Transport Fares Out,” *Ghanaian Times*, October 19, 1978, 1.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*

regulate fares, the plight of children was also addressed. All children under three years paid no transport fares, while those between three and twelve years were to pay half fares.<sup>224</sup>

On 23 October 1978, the GPRTU expressed concern about the new regulated fares published in the *Daily Graphic*. The union argued that the fares were based on the old prices of petroleum products and spare parts, and did not reflect prevailing conditions.<sup>225</sup> The leadership of the GPRTU contended that the government's recent budget increased the prices of petroleum products by almost 100 per cent, and there was no engine oil for sale at the filling stations.<sup>226</sup> The union further noted that the government failed to take into account the frightening prices of vehicles spare parts caused by high profit seeking intermediaries and the high interest rates on vehicles the union purchased.<sup>227</sup> The GPRTU described the new lorry fares published in the newspapers by the government as "very unreasonable" and appealed to the government to re-consider the new fares in order to meet maintenance and running costs of vehicles.<sup>228</sup> Even though the GPRTU was the only officially recognized private transport organisation in the TUC, controlling over 80 per cent of road transportation in Ghana, it was not consulted before the new fares were published by the government.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>224</sup> "Government Releases Transport Rates," *Daily Graphic*, October 19, 1978, 3.

<sup>225</sup> "Review New Fares – Union," *Daily Graphic*, October 23, 1978, 16.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*; "Call for Withdrawal of New Lorry Fares," *Daily Graphic*, October 21, 1978; "Checking Arbitrary Increases ... Come Out With New Fares," *Daily Graphic*, September 18, 1978, 1; "Transport Owners' Appeal to Government... Suspend New Fare Idea," *Daily Graphic*, August 25, 1978, 16; Graphic view, "Transport Owners, Fares and Spare Parts," *Daily Graphic*, August 25, 1978, 2.

<sup>229</sup> "Review New Fares – Union," *Daily Graphic*, October 23, 1978, 16.

Drivers were still indifferent and continued to charge more than the government approved fares. From November 1978, the police mounted roadblocks aimed at spotting and arresting drivers of commercial vehicles who charged excessive fares in the country.<sup>230</sup> R. K. Kugbenu, Assistant Commissioner of Police in charge of the Regional Headquarters in Accra, indicated that the order followed the government's concern about the plight of members of the public who were being exploited by unscrupulous drivers.<sup>231</sup> Mr Kugblenu advised the public to pay only the stipulated fares announced by the government on 18 October 1978.<sup>232</sup> Commercial vehicles were stopped at random by the police and passengers queried about fares charged by drivers. Where drivers had over-charged passengers, they were made to refund the difference. Luggage fees were also affected by the police action. For instance, in Accra, an Accra-Kumasi bound driver, A.G. Tetteh, in charge of vehicle number AZ 7476, who charged C8 for a load of groundnuts, was asked by the police to refund the excess of C4 to the passenger.<sup>233</sup> Despite these measures by the police, many drivers were still not perturbed. J. B. Mensah, in charge of vehicle number GF 6714, who refunded an excess of ten pesewas to the passengers, because the police asked him to refund the excess fare of ten pesewas, asked the passengers to pay back the ten pesewas he had earlier refunded when he had passed the police barrier and reached Osu.<sup>234</sup> Several arrests were also made by the police through these crack downs on non-compliant drivers. About forty tro-tro and taxi drivers

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<sup>230</sup> "Police Mount Stiff Check on Drivers," *Daily Graphic*, Nov. 20, 1978, 1.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*



and two bookmen were arrested in Sekondi-Takoradi for the offence of overcharging on 18 November 1978.<sup>235</sup>

As a result, two days later, on 20 November 1978, *tro-tro* and taxi drivers refused to operate in Sekondi-Takoradi.<sup>236</sup> The drivers held an all day long meeting behind closed doors at the Neighbourhood Centre in Takoradi to discuss the situation.<sup>237</sup> Drivers withdrew their services out of fear of being manhandled by soldiers, whom they learnt, would be assisting the police in the enforcement exercise.<sup>238</sup> Thousands of workers, including market women, were compelled to walk from the centre of Sekondi-Takoradi to their place of work in other parts of the city.<sup>239</sup> As the GPRTU and its members contested government regulation of fares and enforcement, Ghana experience another military coup d'état on 4 June 1979, and the government of the Supreme Military Council was overthrown.

#### **“Bookmen” as Salary Workers of the GPRTU**

The new military junta that took over the reigns of government in Ghana on 4 June 1979 called itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). It was chaired by Flt. Lt. Jerry John Rawlings. The AFRC promised to deal with issues of corruption and profiteering in the country which, it alleged had impoverished people. The AFRC promptly tried and executed senior military and police officers who were found guilty of corruption and had caused financial loss

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<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>236</sup> “Drivers Protest ... Against Police Checks on Fares,” *Daily Graphic*, November 21, 1978, 16.

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*

to the state at various levels.<sup>240</sup> The AFRC also adopted other methods to discipline persons found guilty of different offences. The methods included whipping in public, confiscation of assets, dismissals from public service and long prison sentences for people found guilty of corruption and causing financial loss to the state.

By 22 June 1979, transport fares had reduced drastically.<sup>241</sup> The leadership of the GPRTU held that the reduction in fares was drivers' contribution to the AFRC's effort at making living conditions better in Ghana.<sup>242</sup> The AFRC also contemplated banning the activities of bookmen totally.<sup>243</sup> Lt E. B. Boadu, Officer Commanding the Eastern Region Detachment Force of the First Battalion of Infantry at Koforidua explained that under the AFRC "there would be no room for able-bodied Ghanaians to loiter without contributing to the building of the state."<sup>244</sup> Furthermore, Lt Boadu attributed the "high prices on luggage paid by travellers and arbitrary increase of lorry fares to the unpatriotic attitudes of bookmen who dictate to drivers."<sup>245</sup> Recognizing the useful role of bookmen at the lorry parks, the AFRC gave recognition to lorry park bookmen to operate under the GPRTU as salaried workers.<sup>246</sup> This was the first instance of the

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<sup>240</sup> Those executed included Generals I. K. Acheampong, E.K. Utuka, Akuffo, Afrifa, and Robert Kotei. Others were Air Marshal Boakye, Rear Admiral Joy Amedume, and Colonel R.J.A. Felli.

<sup>241</sup> "Taxi Fares Reduced in Sunyani," *Daily Graphic*, June 20, 1979, 16; "Taxi Driver in Custody for High Fares," *Daily Graphic*, June 22, 1979, 10; "Fares to be Reduced ... By Asankrangwa GPRTU," *Daily Graphic*, June 22, 1979, 11; "Transport Fares have also been Reduced," *Daily Graphic*, June 22, 1979, 16.

<sup>242</sup> "Tro-tro Drivers Slash Fares ... In Accra, Kumasi," *Daily Graphic*, June 18, 1979, 16; "Drivers to Reduce Fare ... From Kumasi to Accra," *Daily Graphic*, June 20, 1979, 11.

<sup>243</sup> "16 Bookmen Redeployed," *Daily Graphic*, June 23, 1979, 16; "Bookmen Banned in Eastern Region," *Daily Graphic*, June 27, 1979, 3.

<sup>244</sup> "16 Bookmen Redeployed," *Daily Graphic*, June 23, 1979, 16.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> "Lorry Park Overseers to earn Salaries," *Daily Graphic*, July 26, 1979, 3.

GPRTU taking back full control of the lorry parks in the country.<sup>247</sup> Thus, the AFRC succeeded in bringing the operation of bookmen fully under the control of the GPRTU.

The AFRC handed over power to a civilian government, the People's National Party (PNP) led by Dr. Hilla Limann on 24 September 1979. With the change of government, drivers and bookmen began charging beyond the stipulated government approved fares. Passengers appealed to the GPRTU to discipline its members.<sup>248</sup> The GPRTU on the other hand appealed to the PNP government for a review of government fares.<sup>249</sup> The union noted that the rate of increase in fares did not reflect the rate of increase in the price of fuel, an increase which was over 100per cent.<sup>250</sup> The union also argued that the "burden" of income tax was not taken into account in calculating government fares.<sup>251</sup> As such, the fares did not account for the increasing cost of running commercial vehicle.<sup>252</sup> In asking for a review of the government fares, the GPRTU pointed to the introduction of fuel ration coupons and the bad state of the country's sub-standard roads as factors which hindered the service provided by transport owners.<sup>253</sup> Thus, the union argued it was "inappropriate at this inflationary era to ask transport owners to charge uniform rate of fares" over all manner of roads.<sup>254</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> "Lorry Park Overseers to earn Salaries," *Daily Graphic*, July 26, 1979, 3.

<sup>248</sup> "Drivers manhandle passenger," *Daily Graphic*, January 1, 1980, 8.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>250</sup> "Review Transport Fares ... says GPRTU," *Daily Graphic*, January 1, 1980, 1.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> *Ibid.*

Notwithstanding the appeal to the Liman government, by the beginning of February 1980, the Accra Central Police arrested 23 commercial lorry drivers within the Greater Accra Region for charging fares to other regional capitals above the government stipulated rates.<sup>255</sup> Some of these drivers charged C40 from Accra to Aflao instead of C8.90, others charged C10 from Accra to Koforidua instead of C4.10 and C10 from Accra to Cape Coast instead of C3.<sup>256</sup> Two passenger bus drivers plying the Kumasi-Accra route were also arrested by the Kumasi police for allegedly charging C20 instead of the stipulated fare of C15.<sup>257</sup> The PNP government did not complete its term in office. On 31 December 1981, J.J. Rawlings led a coup d'état that toppled the PNP administration and established the government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

#### **The PNDC and the GPRTU: A New Era of Collaboration with Government**

According to the PNDC, “their action was dictated largely by what they saw as the government’s incompetence, lack of drive and the failure of the PNP administration.”<sup>258</sup> To provide guidelines for the politics of Ghana, the PNDC established public organs like the Workers’ Defence Councils (WDCs), the Peoples’ Defence Committees (PDCs) and the Committee for the Defence of the Revolution (CDRs). The collective duty of these public organs was to

defend the rights of the ordinary people; expose and deal with corruption and other counter-revolutionary activities  
... maintain collective national discipline and supervision

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<sup>255</sup> “25 Drivers Grabbed ... for charging High Fares,” *Daily Graphic*, February 1, 1980, 3.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>258</sup> F. K Buah, *A History of Ghana*. Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1998, 211.



of national resources ... afford everyone the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process in the country.<sup>259</sup>

The CDRs were the most important organs of labour, as they were set up in work places and institutions to “protect the interests of the employees and to serve as watchdogs against malpractices among the management staff of the organisations.”<sup>260</sup> Thus, the CDRs became competitors of the trade unions and an avenue for workers to express discontent with management. The CDRs also carried out on the spot measures to remedy workplace situations it found unacceptable.<sup>261</sup> In doing this, the CDRs undermined the importance of the basic unit of trade unions, the local unions.

By February, 1982, the influence of the CDRs had led to the formation of the Association of Local Unions (ALU). The ALU, made up of mostly the rank and file of the national unions, mounted a number of protests and challenged the authority of the leadership of the TUC and the national unions.<sup>262</sup> This was done with the aim of taking over the leadership of the TUC. On 29 April 1982, ALU announced the dissolution of the Executive Board of the Ghana TUC and the National Executive Councils of the National Unions. ALU also dismissed the

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<sup>259</sup> Buah, *A History of Ghana*, 211.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>261</sup> Trade unionists recognize three forms of struggles during this period. First, workers concentrated its efforts on exposing corruption, inefficiency, mismanagement and the hoarding and diversion of basic consumer goods by management and individuals at workplaces. The second took the form of actual or attempted takeover of existing manufacturing enterprises jointly owned by the state and foreign companies. The third took the form of workers exposing private industries both foreign and Ghanaian owned for indulging in unfair labour practices.

<sup>262</sup> There was some level of resistance to the activities of ALU. A section of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) publicly disassociated itself from ALU actions and withheld their dues to the TUC. Also, unions organised within the Central Regional Council of Labour denounced ALU. Again, members of the Ghana Mine Workers Union (GMWU) and the Railway Worker Unions (RWU) based in Sekondi-Takoradi and Tarkwa refused to dispose of the elected officers as directed by ALU.

national union leaders and set up Interim Management Committees (IMC) in their place.<sup>263</sup> Thereafter, E. K. Aboagye became the chairman of the IMC of the TUC and he declared the TUC's support for the PNDC.<sup>264</sup> The IMC of the TUC pledged to co-operate with the PNDC to advance the revolution in the interest of Ghanaian workers.<sup>265</sup> The purpose of ALU, according to Aboagye, was to clean the labour scene and give the TUC a new lease of life.<sup>266</sup> Aboagye called on workers to stop indulging in activities that retarded national progress, for the revolution would succeed only if workers and other sections of the society made hard work, dedication and honesty part of their lives.<sup>267</sup>

In June 1982, Kofi Aikins became the chairman of the Interim National Management Committee of the GPRTU.<sup>268</sup> Anuradha and Ayee contend that the political alliance of Kofi Aikins and the PNDC government inured to the benefit of the GPRTU and its members.<sup>269</sup> Indeed, it was from this period the GPRTU became a significant actor in Ghanaian politics.<sup>270</sup> Again, from 1982 the GPRTU played an important part in the political mobilization and party activities of the PNDC, to the extent that the government designated the GPRTU as "patriotic"

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<sup>263</sup> Most leaders of the ALU do agree that they were influenced by the ideas of the PNDC government but disagree that the PNDC had a direct interest in the process. However, in the ensuing confrontation between the ALU and the leadership of the TUC, the government intervened and froze the accounts of the TUC, the National Unions and their leaders. In April, when ALU led hundreds of workers to invade the Hall of the Trades Union the government did little to prevent it. In fact, some of the dismissed leaders were detained by the PNDC government. Also, when workers of Sekondi-Takoradi organised a protest demonstration to resist the ALU takeover, the government used the army to stop the demonstrators from reaching the Hall of the Trades Union.

<sup>264</sup> "TUC supports PNDC—Aboagye," *Daily Graphic*, August 19, 1982, 1.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>268</sup> "GPRTU Being Re-Organised," *Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1982, 1.

<sup>269</sup> Anuradha Josi and Ayee Joseph, "Taxing for the State? Politics, Revenue and the Informal Sector in Ghana," *IDS Bulletin*, 33, 3, 2002.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*

and called it an “organ of the revolution.”<sup>271</sup> Upon assuming the leadership role of the GPRTU, Kofi Aikins moved to effectively bring activities at the lorry park under the firm control of the GPRTU. Aikins cautioned all bookmen “with questionable characters who think they could not be removed from the lorry parks to start packing bag and baggage before the axe of justice falls on them.”<sup>272</sup> Kofi Aikins stressed that the union would kick out any member who might stand between the union and the successful implementation of its policies.<sup>273</sup>

As the GPRTU tried to effectively control the lorry parks, the question of who controlled the lorry parks in the country was raised again by the GCTA.<sup>274</sup> In August 1982, the GCTA reacted to the control exercised by the GPRTU at the lorry parks.<sup>275</sup> The GCTA threatened court action against the GPRTU for collecting ₵150 entrance fees from transport owners who called at the lorry parks for the first time.<sup>276</sup> S. K. A Djanie, president to the GCTA, “accused the GPRTU of hiding behind the industrial relations Act 1965 to collect illegal dues from transport operators who loaded at the lorry parks in the country.”<sup>277</sup>

On 31 May 1985, the PNDC government proclaimed its support for the GPRTU of the TUC as the only legitimate private road transport union in the

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<sup>271</sup> Jørgen Burchardt, “Order out of Chaos, Self-management and public control of the paratransit sector: case Ghana,” *International Association for the History of Transport, Traffic and Mobility*, 2015, 1-23.

<sup>272</sup> “GPRTU Being Re-Organised,” *Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1982, 1.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>274</sup> “Lorry Parks: Take Over Explained,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, May 11, 1984, 1; “Take-Over of lorry parks,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, May 3, 1984, 8; “Council takes over lorry parks,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, June 15, 1984, 3; “GPRTU Control of lorry parks in Ashanti to be probed,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, May 10, 1985, 5; “Who Controls Lorry Parks?,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, May 17, 1985, 3.

<sup>275</sup> “GPRTU warned,” *Daily Graphic*, August 11, 1982, 1.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>277</sup> *Ibid.*

country.<sup>278</sup> The government's support was in response to the GPRTU's support of the programmes of the PNDC government. For example, the GPRTU responded well to the government's call for help in fixing the road networks of the country by actively engaging road maintenance projects.<sup>279</sup> Again, according to Ebo Tawiah, a member of the PNDC, government support was because

transport owners other than members of the GPRTU in the recent past manipulated the question of income tax on transport owners to initiate crisis in the economy...it was not until the leadership of the GPRTU came in to give transport operators the correct picture that an explosive situation was averted.<sup>280</sup>

Under the direction of the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and other monetary agencies, the PNDC embarked on a programme to revive and strengthen the economy of the Ghana. Thus, from 1983, the PNDC government began implementing the Economic Recovery Programme (ERP). This took the form of massive currency devaluation, trade liberalization, privatization of state-owned enterprises, drastic cuts in government expenditure reduction in the number of employees in public services. The PNDC government increased the availability of

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<sup>278</sup> "Govt explains support for GPRTU," *People's Daily Graphic*, June 1, 1985, 8.

<sup>279</sup> "Nkawkaw GPRTU helps rehabilitate road," *People's Daily Graphic*, January 2, 1985, 8; "Agogo GPRTU Repairs 20km Trunk Road," *People's Daily Graphic*, January 19, 1985, 8; "GPRTU, Cocobod repair road," *People's Daily Graphic*, January 31, 1985, 8; "Berekum GPRTU repairs road," *People's Daily Graphic*, March 22, 1985, 8; "Call on GPRTU to help Gov't in road repairs," *People's Daily Graphic*, May 13, 1985, 5; "Asuom GPRTU repairs roads," *People's Daily Graphic*, November 26, 1985, 2; "Kaogo GPRTU repairing road," *People's Daily Graphic*, November 27, 1985, 8; "GPRTU porters and military training," *People's Daily Graphic*, December 2, 1985, 8.

<sup>280</sup> "Govt explains support for GPRTU," *People's Daily Graphic*, June 1, 1985, 8.



spare parts and embarked on massive rehabilitation of the road infrastructure in Ghana, which inured to the benefits of GPRTU members.<sup>281</sup>

As part of the ERP, the PNDC worked to raise revenue and broaden the tax base in Ghana.<sup>282</sup> Several efforts were made by the newly created Internal Revenue Service (IRS) to raise the tax consciousness of both Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians by encouraging them to honour their tax obligation to the state.<sup>283</sup> A number of exercises were embarked on by the IRS to collect taxes for the state. Among these exercises were “Operation Mop Up”, “Operation Pay Roll Audit”, “Operation Spread Net” and “Operation Pay As You Earn.”<sup>284</sup>

The GPRTU and its rival union, the GCTA, were given the option to suggest an alternative to the standard vehicle tax assessment.<sup>285</sup> On 4 August 1986, Kofi Aikins, addressed the Brong-Ahafo Regional Council of the GPRTU and tasked “all regional branches to submit their views and proposals [on

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<sup>281</sup> “Transport Owners Withdraw Vehicles ...In Ashanti Region,” *Daily Graphic*, July 14, 1981, 16; “Kumasi Drivers Resume Work,” *Daily Graphic*, July 15, 1981, 1; “Face-lift for Roads,” *Daily Graphic*, December 1, 1981, 1.

<sup>282</sup> See “Widening the Tax Net,” *West Africa*, 18 November, 1985, 2414.

<sup>283</sup> Lloyd Evans, “The Tax Dodger,” *People’s Daily Graphic*, May 12, 1987, 3.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>285</sup> The standard assessment was based on an estimate of the earnings of an individual over the tax period, initially yearly, but later quarterly. This form of tax was not affordable for the informal sector, particularly, drivers because they were required to pay in advance in a lump sum and did not consider periods of breakdown of vehicles and lost workdays. The whole process was cumbersome since drivers had to take their tax clearance certificates to the Vehicle Licensing Office before a road-worthiness certificate was issued. Under the Standard Assessment scheme, members of the GPRTU were required to pay taxes on a quarterly basis and display their tax clearance certificates in their vehicles. Unlike other occupations in the informal sector, however, evading taxes was difficult. Informal transporters plied throughout the country and were subject to regular checks by various public authorities. At each checkpoint, if they did not have the tax clearance certificates, they were harassed. Thus, paying taxes was, at least for some routes, less costly than paying bribes at the numerous checkpoints. But the actual payment of tax was also difficult. Those who wanted to pay had to go to their local internal revenue service office. Between finding the right files, negotiating the taxes owed and the invariable waiting, typically a driver would have lost a whole day of work. Furthermore, members found the system of payment unfair—they were required to pay irrespective of the fact that they might not have worked because of illness or vehicle repairs.

alternative form of taxation for drivers] to the union's national headquarters for study."<sup>286</sup> Subsequently, through the initiative of Nana Antwi, Regional Chairman of the GPRTU in Asante, a new tax system for drivers was proposed for trial for commercial transport operators.<sup>287</sup>

Thus, after extensive negotiation between the GPRTU and the PNDC government, the latter agreed that from 1 February 1987, drivers should pay their income tax daily, instead of the usual quarterly and yearly payments, at their respective lorry parks.<sup>288</sup> Taxi and *tro-tro* drivers paid ₵100 and ₵120 respectively, while passenger vehicles plying between cities and towns paid ₵30 on every 1,000 passenger fares they collected on each trip.<sup>289</sup> These new tax measures were first announced by Ato Ahwoi, PNDC Secretary for the Internal Revenue Secretariat (IRS), at a day's seminar on "Co-operative Transport for National Development" organised by the Greater Accra Co-operative Transport Union at the Bediako Hall, Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT) head office, in Accra, on 16 January 1987.<sup>290</sup>

The new tax system aimed at making lighter the burden of paying taxes which were fixed annually on an individual's turnover. The daily tax collection made payment small and affordable to the drivers. This tax innovation also exempted drivers from paying taxes on Saturdays and Sundays as long as the

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<sup>286</sup> "Standard Vehicle Tax Assessment To Go If ...," *The Ghanaian Times*, August 6, 1986, 3.

<sup>287</sup> Mr. Kwame Nkrumah, interviewed by author, Accra, June 12, 2019.

<sup>288</sup> "Accra Drivers Favour New Tax System," *People's Daily Graphic*, February 4, 1987, 1.

<sup>289</sup> "New Tax System for Taxi Drivers," *People's Daily Graphic*, January 17, 1987, 1.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*

vehicles were at home and not at the station.<sup>291</sup> Again, drivers did not have to pay tax when their vehicles were broken down and were off the road. Ahwoi explained that the payment of income tax was to be paid at the same time the drivers paid their ₵50 daily tolls to their various unions, and it was expected that each driver would belong to a recognized union.<sup>292</sup>

Apart from this tax reform in the transport sector, the PNDC government delegated the responsibility for collecting this tax to the unions, especially, the GPRTU.<sup>293</sup> The new tax collection system was advantageous to both the government and the tax payer with the former benefiting most. The PNDC government received its taxes from the GPRTU in bulk and promptly too, and with less cost as the collectors were not on the government's payroll. The leadership of the GPRTU cautioned its members about defaulting in their tax obligation.<sup>294</sup> Tax evaders had no breathing space under this system as the GPRTU itself dealt swiftly and drastically with them before the law enforcement agencies took any action.<sup>295</sup>

Reports from the regions, especially, Asante, indicated higher returns, and that was a resounding victory for the GPRTU, the only organisation that wholeheartedly and voluntarily engaged its entire membership in the daily taxation system. From July 1987, the *People's Daily Graphic* was awashed with

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<sup>291</sup> "New Tax System for Taxi Drivers," *People's Daily Graphic*, January 17, 1987, 1.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>294</sup> "GPRTU Won't Defend Drivers who Default in Tax Payment," *People's Daily Graphic*, February 12, 1987; "Drivers Warned Against Tax Evasion," *People's Daily Graphic*, September 26, 1987, 16; "Tax Dodgers Warned," *People's Daily Graphic*, May 25, 1987, 4.

<sup>295</sup> "GPRTU Bans Tro-tro Driver for Refusing to Pay Tax," *People's Daily Graphic*, May 8, 1987, 16; "Driver Suspended for Failing To Pay Tax," *People's Daily Graphic*, May 30, 1987, 16.

success stories of GPRTU's efforts in tax collection from its members.<sup>296</sup> With the exception of the Upper East Region, reports from Greater Accra, Brong Ahafo, Asante, Eastern Region and Western Regions all indicated massive revenue generation from the GPRTU.<sup>297</sup> The effort of the GPRTU in collecting taxes from its members contributed to the IRS realizing and exceeding its revenue target in 1987.<sup>298</sup>

The PNDC government gave the GPRTU sole control of all lorry parks.<sup>299</sup> GPRTU was also given the go-ahead to form the union guards.<sup>300</sup> These guards were recruited, trained and employed to patrol lorry parks and streets to monitor violations of the Road Traffic Act by members of the union.<sup>301</sup> Furthermore, according to Nana Kwame Antwi, the Regional Chairman of the GPRTU in Asante, "the guards would help check pilfering, overloading, evading of taxes and other social injustices at the lorry parks."<sup>302</sup> The creation of the Union Guards, as they were called, gave the GPRTU enormous powers over the road transportation industry.

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<sup>296</sup> "GPRTU Scores A Mark," *People's Daily Graphic*, August 24, 1987, 5; "GPRTU Collects C76m in 5 Regions," *People's Daily Graphic*, August 5, 1987, 16.

<sup>297</sup> "U. E. GPRTU Collects Low Taxes," *People's Daily Graphic*, October 15, 1987, 16; "Accra GPRTU Bags C35 Million as Income Tax," *People's Daily Graphic*, July 20, 1987; "Greater Accra GPRTU Bags C72.7m in Taxes," *People's Daily Graphic*, November 21, 1987, 16; "Brong Ahafo Drivers Pay C4.8m Tax to IRS," *People's Daily Graphic*; "Ashanti GPRTU Bags C35million in Taxes," *People's Daily Graphic*, July 14, 1987, 5; "Ashanti GPRTU Collects C49m in Taxes for 7 months," *People's Daily Graphic*, September 15, 1987, 16; "GPRTU Pays C7.2m Tax," *People's Daily Graphic*, July 4, 1987; "Western Region GPRTU Bags C7.2m as Tax," *People's Daily Graphic*, August 1, 1987, 16.

<sup>298</sup> "IRS Exceeds Tax Collection Target by Two Billion Cedis," *People's Daily Graphic*, May 16, 1987.

<sup>299</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>300</sup> "GPRTU Guards Pass Out," *People's Daily Graphic*, February 4, 1987, 5.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*



## Conclusion

The attempt by the GMU to control the activities of one of its groups, the bookmen, formed the main theme of the chapter. This attempt to control and regulate the activities of bookmen eventually led to the formation of the first splinter group of the GMU, the GCTA in 1966. The GCTA, formed by aggrieved bookmen, most of whom were also lorry owners, succeeded in convincing other lorry owners and drivers to join it. When the GCTA was formed, the GMU ceased to be the sole body organizing and representing the concerns of transport owners and drivers in the country. However, in terms of size the GMU represented majority of the transport owners and drivers, and controlled the lorry parks through its bookmen. The control of the lorry parks by GMU sparked several disputes at the lorry parks in Ghana between the GMU and the GCTA.

These disputes, between the GMU and the GCTA, formed the major focus of the second part of this chapter. Within the period the chapter covers, the TUC and the various governments of Ghana tried to bring harmony to operations at the lorry parks by settling the disputes between the GMU and the GCTA. The PP government took the greatest step in resolving the disputes when the government tasked the councils to take charge of the lorry parks, employ bookmen and pay these bookmen from a special levy collected from drivers. These directives separated the bookmen from any of the unions and put them directly under the councils.

Against rising cost of operation, lorry fares were arbitrarily increased by drivers and bookmen. In 1977, the SMC government, under General

Acheampong, blamed the GPRTU for the rising cost of living in Ghana. While the GPRTU accepted the blame, it argued it was not in charge of the lorry parks in the country and could not effectively control the activities of bookmen at the lorry parks. From October, 1978, the SMCII took steps to regulate lorry fares in the country by publishing government approved fare. While the GPRTU challenged the position of SMCII government, it became the norm for successive governments to announce government approved lorry fares in the Ghana.

Under the AFRC and the PNDC governments, the GPRTU gained more control of the lorry parks in Ghana. The AFRC made bookmen accountable to the GPRTU by putting bookmen directly under the control of the GPRTU as salaried workers. Subsequently, in 1985, the PNDC government gave its full backing to the GPRTU of the TUC as the only legitimate private road transport union in Ghana. The PNDC government used the power and structure of the GPRTU to mobilize taxes from its members throughout the Ghana.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Conclusion

The thesis set out to investigate trade unions in the Ghanaian context, with a special focus on the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) as a pioneer trade union. The GPRTU is one of the 12 national unions affiliated to the Trade Union Congress. However, unlike the other national unions the GPRTU has no common employer and is made up of both employers and employees.

The thesis contributes to understanding how this group of employers and employees formed a trade union and has maintained its affiliation with the TUC. The original contribution of the thesis to knowledge is that informal sector workers can effectively mobilize and form trade unions contrary to the assertion that trade unionism emerged in circumstances where there was only a common employer. In forming trade unions, motor drivers and owners were seeking ways to work within the transport policies of the government of the Gold Coast and the subsequent governments of Ghana. However, to better navigate these transport policies drivers had to put in place mechanism to help check the activities of their members. Unionization presented the framework for drivers and vehicle owners to maintain discipline among themselves by defining routes and setting standardized fare for all members.

The members of the GPRTU reacted in various ways to government policies that affected the smooth operation of their work. Throughout the period under study, government enacted policies aimed at protecting railway traffic and revenue by road transport and, to make road transportation safe for the public.

The GPRTU openly contested some of these policies through official letters, petitions, and discussions with government or through strikes.

From 1900, the colonial government embarked on the development of transportation infrastructure, that is, railway, water and road transport in the Gold Coast. The colonial government favoured the development of railways over the other means of transportation. As such, considerable investment went into the development of railways. By the end of the 1920s, the railway system of the Gold Coast consisted of a western “pioneer” railway between Sekondi and Kumasi, a distance of 167miles, an eastern railway line between Accra and Kumasi which was 195miles and the central province railway line from Huni valley to Kade a distance of 99miles. This railway system was managed by the colonial government’s railway department to ensure that the colonial government recouped its investment.

As the colonial government was investing in the railway system, the first motor vehicle was introduced into the Gold Coast in 1902. By 1913, the Ford vehicle had been introduced into the Gold Coast and it revolutionized road transportation in terms of its cost, availability of its spare parts, speed and how easily it moved on all surfaces. Gold Coasters got involved in providing commercial road transportation services. Unlike elsewhere in East Africa, for example, where the colonial government took the lead in providing commercial road transportation, albeit for a racially segregated society, in the Gold Coast, indigenous entrepreneurs took the lead. When Gold Coast entrepreneurs took to driving, they viewed it as a skill to be acquired. For this reason, acquiring the skill



of driving was based on the age-old apprenticeship system. By this system, a prospective apprentice was given out to a skilled driver from whom he learned the skill of driving over a period of time.<sup>1</sup>

The fast development of commercial road transportation, beyond the control of the colonial government brought to the fore a number of issues. For example, motor road accidents became rampant and road transportation negatively affected railway traffic and revenue. In 1925, the colonial government, through the use of governors, fixed the speed of lorries to 16 miles per hour. While the use of governors helped check over speeding, its ultimate purpose was to make road transportation an unprofitable venture. Again, to protect the railways, the Gold Coast colonial government used road traffic laws, particularly, licence fees, to tighten its control of commercial transport. Between 1915 and 1928, the colonial government introduced and increased driver's licence fees, as well as commercial motor vehicle licence fees. The colonial government argued that commercial road transport providers needed to contribute to the maintenance of roads. Motor traffic ordinances also became part of an official colonial bureaucratic regime, and to survive, drivers had to be able to navigate within the official ethos.

It is true that the increasing restrictive nature of colonial laws regarding commercial road transport forced drivers to come together to form trade unions

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<sup>1</sup> According to James Addo, this system has changed overtime. With the increased number of vehicles in the country from the 1950s, a mate joined a bus, not necessarily to serve as an apprentice but motivated by what he would earn. The person even determined the vehicle he wanted to work with. For instance, most of the mates of the buses plying their trade within the cities did not prefer the three-seater buses because they do not generate enough revenue from those buses. Mr. James Addo, interview by author, Accra, Ghana, June 12, 2019.

from 1930.<sup>2</sup> However, as demonstrated in chapter three, to function within official ethos, the motor unions needed to curb the ruinous competition among their members. Thus, the motor unions set rules and defined routes for their members. Also the motor unions identified standardization of fares as crucial to reducing the ruinous competition among themselves, a competition that led to infringement of road traffic laws. The Gold Coast colonial government did not officially endorse the issue of standardization of fares by the motor unions, as the colonial government anticipated the emergence of more motor unions in the Gold Coast, and did not relish empowering a particular motor union. That notwithstanding, from 1934, the motor unions began enforcing standardized rates and defining routes for their members.

In 1934, the colonial government took another step in tightening its control of road transportation when it passed the Motor Traffic Ordinance 1934. Through its literacy requirement, the MTO 1934 sought to define who could drive in the Gold Coast. With majority of drivers and their apprentices lacking formal education, this policy was a direct threat to them. The MTO 1934 was contested by motor unions through processes available to them, such as, sending petitions to the colonial government. The protracted opposition to this ordinance, eventually, led to the first coordinated strike of the motor unions in November 1937. As there were numerous motor unions, and the colonial government sought to deal with them individually, the strike achieved very little success. This illustrated to the

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<sup>2</sup> Jennifer Hart, *Ghana on the Go: African Mobility in the Age of Motor Transportation*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016, 84-87; Jennifer Hart, "Motor Transportation, Trade Unionism, and the Culture of Work in Colonial Ghana," *International Review of Social History* 59, no. S22, December 2014, 185–209.

drivers the significance of having a strong national union to represent them. Indeed, the motor union strike was one of the strikes in the 1930s, as Governor Hodson indicated, in 1938, which called for an urgent machinery of government to understand.

Subsequently, the colonial government aimed at having a machinery of government to better manage trade union activities. This culminated in the passing to Trade Unions Ordinance in 1941. By the time this ordinance was passed, the motor unions had been functioning in the Gold Coast for over a decade, and like other trade unions, the colonial government merely tolerated their existence. In line with the provisions of the Trade Union ordinance, and the need for strong unions, the motor unions merged to form larger unions. By 1947, four distinct motor unions could be identified in the Gold Coast. These were the Eastern Province Motor Union, the Western Province Motor Union, the Central Province Motor Union and the Motor Transport Union Asante.

These four motor unions in the Gold Coast amalgamated to form a national union, the Gold Coast Motor Union (GCMU) in 1950. The GCMU became the official mouth piece of commercial motor drivers in the Gold Coast. Thus, from 1950, the colonial government and, subsequently, post-colonial governments, dealt with only one national union on issues of commercial motor transportation. The national umbrella body, the GCMU, standardized fares nationwide and defined practices for its members both on the roads and at the lorry parks, all within the general laws of the Gold Coast.

After independence in 1957, the CPP government proposed a new road traffic regulation, and also attempted to operationalize a third-party insurance scheme that had been on the status books since 1940. The Ghana Motor Union (GMU) which had replaced the GCMU after independence went on strike to protest these new regulations in July 1957. The impact of the strike was far-reaching as it crippled commercial road transportation in the country. However, the outcome was less favourable to the GMU, as the CPP government succeeded in passing the third-party insurance scheme and also introduced a new road traffic law in July 1957.

Throughout the 1950s, the GMU writhed under internal challenges involving one of its member groups – the bookmen. The bookmen had been part of the several motor unions that eventually formed the GCMU in 1950. However, the relationship between the bookmen and drivers in the GCMU was not legally and formally defined by the union constitution, but based on a convention, by which the bookmen were allowed to keep whatever they collected from drivers as fees for their services at the lorry parks. The GCMU, as it developed from 1950, wanted accountability from the bookmen on the monies they collected as fees from drivers. This resulted in a tussle within the union, which eventually led to the banning of the activities of bookmen by the union and the government in 1958. Meanwhile, at the national level, the TUC, with the support of CPP government passed the Industrial Relations Act in December 1958. The industrial Relations Act and its subsequent amendments reduced the national unions



affiliated to the TUC to 16 and made it impossible for new trade unions to be registered.

When the CPP government was ousted from office in February 1966, disgruntled bookmen succeeded in forming the first splinter group of the GMU, the Ghana Cooperative Transport Association (GCTA) in August 1966. This broke the monopoly of the GMU in relation to being the mouth piece of all commercial motor transport providers in the country and also its control of the lorry parks. As such, the GMU ceased to be the sole body organizing and representing the concerns of transport owners and drivers in the country. However, in terms of size, the GMU continued to be the largest union and still controlled the lorry parks, the source of its power and control. The emergence of GCTA, brought to the fore the question of who controlled the lorry parks.

Notwithstanding the formation of the GCTA in August 1966, the stability of the GMU was still threatened internally. The threat was posed by the existence of the transport owners association, who had from 1950 challenged the practices of bookmen. On 24 June 1967, Lieutenant-General J. A. Ankrah, Chairman of the National Liberation Movement, chaired a meeting of the GMU. At this meeting a new union, the Ghana Private Road Transport Union (GPRTU) was formed to replace the GMU. Reconstituting the GMU as the GPRTU was to give the union a fresh start and to forestall further breakaway.

In December 1967, the GPRTU embarked on a strike action. This strike was in response to arbitrary police arrests, high court fines for motor traffic offence, and high third-party insurance premiums. In 1957, when the GMU

protested the introduction of the third-party insurance scheme, the fear of the members GMU was uncontrolled increases in insurance premiums. Indeed, during the ten-year period between 1957 and 1967, insurance companies in Ghana did not compete among themselves but just agreed and increased premiums. Insurance premiums became very expensive, and the State Insurance Corporation (SIC) also operated this way and charged high premiums. SIC also refused to insure certain commercial vehicles, particularly, lorries with wooden bodies unless owners paid compulsory deposit of NC200.<sup>3</sup> While the 1967 strike was spontaneous and short-lived, the National Liberation Council (NLC) government granted concessions to the GPRTU on the question of insurance premiums.

Meanwhile, the conflict between the GPRTU and the GCTA over the control of the lorry parks escalated. The Progress Party government of Dr. K. A. Busia took a decision on it. The PP government instructed the councils to be responsible for managing the lorry parks.<sup>4</sup> Against protest from the GPRTU, the councils, in October 1971, started to manage the lorry parks with the support of the bookmen they recruited and paid from special levies collected from drivers at the lorry parks.

As the Ghanaian economy declined, Smuggling, hoarding and profiteering became pervasive. Prices of general goods and services and transportation fares were not stable in the country. The situation engendered the publication of a lot of vile opinions about drivers in the *Daily Graphic*, the country's official

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<sup>3</sup> "Union Decries Deposit Scheme," *Daily Graphic*, October 21, 1967, 4.

<sup>4</sup> That is, City, Municipal, Urban and Local Councils.

newspaper.<sup>5</sup> In discussing the numerous perspectives of the general public on drivers of the Gold Coast from the 1960s to the 1980s, Jennifer Hart posits that in an effort to “(re)assert control and order over the country and its capital, successive postcolonial governments effectively criminalized drivers.”<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, she argued that “the criminality of drivers is the result of a relatively recent shift in public perception, the result of a process of criminalization, which altered the status of drivers and introduced new forms of risk into their work.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, “the independence and entrepreneurial success of drivers, which had once been the foundation of their respect and status as cosmopolitan, modern men, became their greatest liability during the ‘era of decline’ that lasted from independence through the early 1980s.”<sup>8</sup>

In May 1977, General I. K. Acheampong blamed the GPRTU for the high cost of living in the country. The GPRTU, according to Acheampong, were complicit in the smuggling of lorry tyres, foodstuffs and petroleum products out of the country which contributed to the scarcity of those items. The GPRTU was tasked by the head of state to reorganise their operations in order qualify for bulk allocation of import licence to order vehicles and spare parts for its members. The GPRTU began to exert some form of control at the lorry parks. Bookmen were supplied with uniforms, badges, and serial numbers to make them easy to identify.

The government of SMC II began regulating road transport fares for all

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<sup>5</sup> “Drivers Are Bad,” *Daily Graphic*, January 23, 1978, 12; “Drivers Must face the Music,” *Daily Graphic*, January 30, 1978, 7; “Wicked Drivers,” *Daily Graphic*, July 19, 1978, 7;

<sup>6</sup> Hart, *Ghana on the Go*, 123; Jennifer Hart, “‘One Man, No Chop’: Licit Wealth, Good Citizens, and the Criminalization of Drivers in Postcolonial Ghana,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 46, no. 3 (2013): 373–396.

<sup>7</sup> Hart, “One Man, No Chop”, 376.

<sup>8</sup> Hart, *Ghana on the Go*, 124.

commercial vehicles throughout the country from October, 1978. The GPRTU expressed concern about the new regulated fares, describing the new lorry fares as “very unreasonable,” as it was based on old prices of petroleum products and spare parts. In spite of this protest from the GPRTU, the police began enforcing the new fares approved by the government.

Chapter five of the thesis demonstrates that there was little the GPRTU and its members could do about high fares. The members of the GPRTU bemoaned the rising cost of running vehicles as a result of increasing cost of third-party insurance premiums and unavailability of spare parts. This increased cost of running vehicles was passed on to passengers in the form of high fares. The GPRTU leadership blamed the excessive fares on unscrupulous bookmen at the lorry parks, who were not under their control. The demands of the GPRTU for control of the lorry parks and bookmen were soon met when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) took over from the Supreme Military Council (SMC) II in 1979. The AFRC initially considered banning booking all together, as the AFRC considered drivers capable of handling the task of booking themselves. However, the AFRC eventually backed the demands of the GPRTU by making bookmen accountable to the union. Thus, bookmen were made salary earners under the GPRTU. Subsequently, the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) recognized the GPRTU of the TUC as the only legitimate private road transport union in Ghana in 1985. As the PNDC worked to increase government revenue, the GPRTU was empowered by the PNDC government to collect taxes from union members on behalf of government. In spite of the initial success of the



tax initiative, accountability and corruption became an issue, as some officials of the union embezzled the monies collected.<sup>9</sup>



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<sup>9</sup> Mr. Kwame Nkrumah, interviewed by author, Accra, June 12, 2019.

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