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'IF YOU TROUBLE A HUNGRY SNAKE, YOU WILL FORCE IT TO BITE YOU': RETHINKING POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN ARCHIVAL PESSIMISM, WORKER DISCONTENT, AND PETITION WRITING IN GHANA, 1957–66*

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Abstract

My aim is twofold. Highlighting the value and importance of African archives in the construction of postcolonial African histories, I first reject what I call 'postcolonial African archival pessimism': the argument that postcolonial African archives are too disorganized or ill-kept to be of much, if any, value in configuring postcolonial African histories. Second, primarily through petition and complaint letters, I examine how Ghanaian workers protested racist and abusive workplace environments, government malfeasance, stagnating wages, and unfair dismissals in Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana. These archival gems illuminate how workers made claims to and performances of citizenship and reminded the state of their importance, politically and practically, to building the Ghanaian project. From Ghanaian and British archives, I seek to complement histories that highlight the centrality of African workers — through their letters and feet — in articulating the contradictions and aspirations of postcolonial African states.

Key Words

Ghana, West Africa, labour, archives, postcolonial, citizenship, racism.

On 28 May 1962, Kofi Baako, the Ghanaian minister of defense and a critical theorist in Ghana's socialist project during the Kwame Nkrumah years (1957–66), arrived in a truck with two army officers at the newly constructed army barracks at Appremdu, a small town located west of Takoradi, Ghana.[1] Baako, 'a short, brownish-black man, thin, restless, [and] intense', had traveled far to visit the Neoteric Building Company's (NBC's) workers,

* I want to thank Andrew Apter, William H. Worger, Robin D. G. Kelley, Vivian Chenxue Lu, Stephan Miescher, Richard Rathbone, Matthew Quest, Sarah Balakrishnan, and the two anonymous *JAH* reviewers for their insights and constructive criticisms on earlier versions of this article. This paper would have been much poorer without their assistance. I am also grateful to Gregory Mann for his helpful comments and support during this process. I would also like to thank UCLA's International Institute and UCLA's History Department for their financial assistance. Throughout the article I employ American English spellings, unless referring to book or article titles. Author's email: koseopare@fordham.edu.

1 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Sekondi (PRAAD-Sekondi) WRG 24/2/325, letter from O. Ayepa Amoah to the District Labor Officer, 29 May 1962.

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who had just constructed the barracks.[2] The NBC had brought most of the workers and their families from the Eastern and Greater Accra Regions to the Western Region, where the army base was located. The European contractor responsible for their salaries had vanished and failed to pay them. Through their petition letters, the workers lamented that their 'position' was 'very critical' and decried being 'fancy men' forced to frequent 'cassava farms' with their families 'to beg' for food.[3]

Rather than congratulating the workers on their patriotic sacrifice, Baako exited the bus and dismissed their complaints. Baako informed the workers that none 'should entertain the idea that the Government was going to pay [them]'.[4] The minister of defense offered the workers the chance to work without wages for the Workers' Brigade.[5] He informed those present that anyone who refused this offer and was subsequently 'found' at the army barracks 'site' would be imprisoned.[6] Flanked by the two army officers, Baako chased those who had rejected his offer from the compound 'with his stick'. Incensed, the workers wrote a condemnatory letter to the regional commissioner of the Western Region about Baako's conduct and their plight. The workers noted that 'perhaps' Baako had 'forgotten that if you trouble a hungry snake, you will force it to bite you. Yet we are not snakes and will never act like that (sic).' The workers decried being treated as 'goats' and warned the commissioner of their strength and importance to the Ghanaian national project. The workers reminded the commissioner that the government drew 'its strength' from the workers, that they numbered 'almost one thousand', and that if they 'were to die of hunger, it will be a great disaster to the Ghana Nation'.[7]

Using the language of Nkrumah's dutifulness and patriotism, the workers insisted that it was their 'duty to serve' Ghana 'well' despite receiving no pay. The workers reiterated that they believed 'in the freedom and justice of Ghana'. While conceding that the Trade Union Congress (TUC) and the district labor offices were 'doing their best' to aid them, the workers still appealed to the government to 'come to their aid' and pay them before they died 'of hunger'.[8] The workers' critique and capturing of Baako's actions for posterity underscored how complaints maneuvered through bureaucratic channels, and with them, the increased possibility of a 'low-level' case embarrassing a high-level official. While the workers did not always receive relief, it was through these letters — and strikes — that incidents of unfair treatment became known and forced the postcolonial state, whether superficially or substantially, to address them.

Scholars have long been interested in the rise of class consciousness and the formation of unions in Ghana.[9] Peter C. W. Gutkind's seminal essay argued that precolonial Ghanaian canoemen formed class consciousness before the rise of industrial capitalism and the

2 R. Wright, *Black Power: A Record of Reactions in a Land of Pathos* (Westport, CT, 1954), 92.
3 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/325, letter from O. Ayepa Amoah to Regional Commissioner, 1 June 1962.
4 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/325, letter from O. Ayepa Amoah to NBC Employers Union, 29 May 1962.
5 The government established the brigade in 1957 to absorb surplus labor; see D. Rimmer, 'The new industrial relations in Ghana', *International Labor Review*, 14:2 (1961), 207.
6 *Ibid.*
7 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 24/2/325, Amoah to Regional Commissioner, 1 June, 1962.
8 *Ibid.*
9 J. Crisp, *The Story of an African Working Class* (London, 1984).

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advent of colonialism. Gutkind demonstrated that the canoemen went on strike both to acquire 'a larger slice of the capitalist cake' and better working conditions.[10] Focusing on the Sekondi-Takoradi railway workers, Richard Jeffries's authoritative monograph outlined workers' militant political behavior against colonial and postcolonial governments.[11] Jennifer Hart demonstrated how drivers unionized through older indigenous forms of labor organization in colonial Ghana to 'claim control of motor transportation from the colonial authorities and regulate access to it on their own terms'.[12]

Others have also acknowledged the internationalism of Ghanaian trade unions, their role in the Cold War, and how their negotiation of these geopolitics ultimately impacted Ghanaian workers. William H. Friedland and Douglas G. Anglin concluded that the Ghanaian TUC gingerly but enthusiastically sought to establish ties and fraternize with the communist-led World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) to project its newfound independence from British colonialism and Western imperialism.[13] Naaborko Sackeyfio-Lenoch delved into how the TUC exploited Cold War geopolitics to obtain financial and material assistance for itself and its members during austere periods.[14] While these studies offer important insights into Ghanaian trade unions and the lives of the Ghanaian labor elite, this essay is more interested in how we can reclaim the voices of nonelite Africans in relation to their employers and the state, and what methodological tools open up for postcolonial African history when we do so.

Despite the vast literature on the plight of African workers in the colonial era and the myriad of ways African laborers during this period contested their conditions, few have studied how African workers continued to use their voices and feet to agitate against postcolonial African governments and make postcolonial citizenship claims.[15] Even fewer have done so in the Ghanaian context. When scholars have ventured into studying labor unrest during the Nkrumah years, they have framed the few major strikes in 1960 and 1961 as

10 P. C. W. Gutkind, 'The canoemen of the Gold Coast (Ghana): a survey and an exploration in precolonial African labour history', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 29:115/6 (1989), 350, 355.

11 R. Jeffries, *Class, Power and Ideology in Ghana: The Railwaymen of Sekondi* (Cambridge, 1978).

12 J. Hart, 'Motor transportation, trade unionism, and the culture of work in colonial Ghana', *International Review of Social History*, 59 (2014), 186.

13 W. H. Friedland, 'African trade union studies: analysis of two decades', *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 14:55 (1974), 582; D. G. Anglin, 'Ghana, the West, and the Soviet Union', *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 24:2 (1958), 164.

14 N. Sackeyfio-Lenoch, 'The Ghana Trade Union Congress and the politics of international labor alliances, 1957–1971', *International Review of Social History*, 62:2 (2017), 191–213.

15 For an exhaustive review of African labor historiography, see A. I. Asiwaju, 'Migrations as revolt: the example of the Ivory Coast and the Upper Volta before 1945', *The Journal of African History*, 17:4 (1976), 577–94; A. Eckert and S. Bellucci (eds.), *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries* (Rochester, NY, 2019); F. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge, 1996); G. Curless, 'The Sudan is "not yet ready for trade unions": the railway strikes of 1947–1948', *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, 41:5 (2013), 804–22; G. Padmore, *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers* (London, 1931), 78–102; R. Roberts, 'The peculiarities of African labour and working-class history', *Labour/Le Travail*, 8/9 (1981–2), 317–33; J. Simons and R. Simons, *Class and Colour in South Africa 1850–1950* (London, 1983), 556–7, 574–8; W. H. Worger, *South Africa's City of Diamonds: Mine Workers and Monopoly Capitalism in Kimberley, 1867–1895* (London, 1987). The exceptions include A. Momoh, 'Popular struggles in Nigeria 1960–1982', *African Journal of Political Science*, 1:2 (1996), 164–75.

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episodic moments of worker dissatisfaction.[16] However, I argue that worker discontent and mistreatment cannot be encapsulated in a few major strikes or sectors. Sources such as police notes, district and regional labor reports, and workers' grievance letters and petitions from Ghanaian and British archives reveal a much larger wave of strikes and dissatisfaction with labor conditions across Ghana, and this article draws from these incidents and sources.

I define workers here as anyone engaged in any contractual, wage-earning labor or enterprise.[17] This ranges from pupil laboratory technicians to night guards to railroad workers to fitter mechanics to carpenters and miners. It is estimated that by 1960, 2.5 million people over the age of 15 were in the Ghanaian labor force. Of this figure, 62 per cent were in agriculture, fishing, or lumbering, 14 per cent in commerce, 9 per cent in manufacturing, and 6 per cent in service.[18] Women constituted 1,870 out of 33,840 workers in the mining and quarrying sectors. They also comprised 101,520 out of 395,940 artisans, production process workers, and laborers 'not elsewhere listed'. Perhaps as many as 47 per cent of women workers were migrant workers.[19] Regarding women's employment more generally, approximately 80 per cent were self-employed or employers, with most being 'petty traders or hawkers'.[20] Unfortunately, women's forced labor underpinned cocoa production and was critical both to its productivity and profitability.[21] While 'factory workers' in Ghana constituted a 'very small proportion of the total population', they were crucial to Ghana's 'future development'.[22]

The NBC workers' colorful letter and thousands like it in postcolonial African archives permit us to unpack two historical phenomena in the formative years of postcolonial Africa. First, these archival gems illuminate how workers in the early years of Ghana's postcolonial era employed letters to frame, articulate, and understand the relationship between themselves and the new state. Second, these letters show that the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule did not silence dissent or create dutiful persons who were blindly coopted into the national political machine. Workers continued to protest

16 Bob Fitch and Mary Oppenheimer call the general strikes of September 1961 the only major expression of worker dissatisfaction with the Nkrumah government; see B. Fitch and M. Oppenheimer, *Ghana: The End of an Illusion* (London, 1966), 102–5. Dennis Austin argues that the strikes were a 'serious check' and manifestation of worker discontent; see D. Austin, *Politics in Ghana 1946–1960* (Toronto, 1964), 400–7. Jeffrey Ahlman considers the September 1961 strikes as a turning point in the relationship between the government and workers; see J. S. Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism: Nation, State, and Pan-Africanism in Ghana* (Athens, OH, 2017), 137–41.

17 I include people working for the Brigade in this definition. For a greater discussion on the demographics of workers on state farms, see K. Lambert, '"It's all work and happiness on the farms": agricultural development between the blocs in Nkrumah's Ghana', *The Journal of African History*, 60:1 (2019), 40–2.

18 M. Peil, *The Ghanaian Factory Worker: Industrial Man in Africa* (Cambridge, 1972), 1.

19 T. Killick, 'Labour: a general survey', in W. Birmingham, I. Neustadt, and E. N. Omaboe (eds.), *A Study of Contemporary Ghana, Volume I; The Economy of Ghana* (Evanston, 1966), 129, 132.

20 Peil, *Ghanaian Factory Worker*, 6.

21 B. Grier, 'Pawns, porters, and petty traders: women in the transition to cash crop agriculture in colonial Ghana', *Signs*, 17:2 (1992), 304–28. Unpaid labor was a feature of the colonial and postcolonial Ghanaian governments. Furthermore, local chiefs gathered these individuals to 'fund' small-scale development projects; see A. Weimers, '"When the chief takes an interest": development and the reinvention of "communal" labor in Northern Ghana, 1935–60', *The Journal of African History*, 58:2 (2017), 239–57.

22 Peil, *Ghanaian Factory Worker*, 4.

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mistreatment in its various guises. My aim then is twofold. First, I highlight the value and importance of postcolonial African archives in the construction of postcolonial African histories. Thus, I reject what I call 'postcolonial African archival pessimism': the argument that postcolonial African archives are too disorganized or ill-kept to be of much, if any, value in configuring postcolonial African histories. I argue instead that African archives have an important role to play in the construction of those histories. Second, primarily through petition and complaint letters, I explore some ways Ghanaian workers protested racist and abusive workplace environments, government malfeasance, stagnating wages, and unfair dismissals. These archival gems illuminate how workers made claims to and performances of citizenship and reminded the state of their importance, politically and practically, to building the Ghanaian project. From Ghanaian and British archives, I seek to complement African labor historiographies by illuminating the centrality of African workers — through their letters and feet — in articulating the contradictions and aspirations of Nkrumah's political-economic project. Unlike materials from the political and labor elite, which presume to speak on behalf of the workers, these letters contain what the workers themselves deemed important. Thus, they remain an important but underutilized site and source of historical inquiry. While I do not suggest a rejection of other methods and sources to render the invisible visible, these letters open different ways for historians to think about workers and how to write histories that center their perspectives and cosmologies in postcolonial Africa.

THE POSTCOLONIAL AFRICAN ARCHIVE AND SOURCES

While I embrace calls to use non-African archives to locate events pertaining to postcolonial Africa, I question historians' failure to examine local African archives as well.[23] The near deliberate or benign occlusion of postcolonial African archives is worrisome for the future of postcolonial African historiography. At its crux, postcolonial African archival pessimism suggests that the postcolonial African archive is too fragmented, 'jumbled', and 'messy' to be of substantial value to historians.[24] Underlying this argument is a critique of the postcolonial African state, implying that it is either incapable or uninterested in producing, organizing, storing, and preserving documents in a manner which Western-trained historians can easily and readily dissect and service. This is often categorized by the presence of defined labels on folders and a set of documents pertaining to those

23 Other scholars have engaged non-African archives in conjunction with postcolonial African archives to produce transnational African histories. I embraced this approach in N. Osei-Opare, 'Uneasy comrades: postcolonial statecraft, race, and citizenship, Ghana-Soviet relations, 1957–1966', *The Journal of West African History*, 5:2 (2019), 85–112; see also M. A. Bedasse, *Jah Kingdom: Rastafarians, Tanzania, and Pan-Africanism in the Age of Decolonization* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2017); J. Allman, 'Phantoms of the archive: Kwame Nkrumah, a Nazi pilot named Hanna, and the contingencies of postcolonial history writing', *American Historical Review,* 118:1 (2013), 104–29; E. Burton, 'Navigating global socialism: Tanzanian students in and beyond East Germany', *Cold War History*, 19:1 (2019), 63–83.

24 A. Tsuruta, 'Expanding the archival horizon: American archives for researching postcolonial Rwandan history', *History in Africa*, 44 (2017), 265–83; L. White, 'Hodgepodge historiography: documents, itineraries, and the absence of archives', *History in Africa*, 42 (2015), 317.

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classifications within individual folders — preferably numbered accurately, too.[25] I am not making a blanket suggestion that archives are uniformly accessible or that pertinent documents exist across the African continent. Governments and archivists can and do limit access to sources, waste researchers' time, or even destroy documents.[26] These problems are not unique to African history. Soviet and Russian historians face similar archival hurdles yet rarely dismiss the centrality and importance of Russian archives in constructing Soviet and Russian histories.[27]

Despite this pessimism, a new generation of scholars are committed to (re)claiming the value of postcolonial African archives. Samuel Fury Childs Daly engages with neglected legal sources from Eastern Nigerian courts and tribunals to study the rise and intensification of fraud during the Nigerian Civil War.[28] Katherine Bruce-Lockhart employs postcolonial Ugandan archives to reconceptualize the social dynamics of Ugandan prisons and prison officers.[29] While acknowledging the challenges these archives pose, these works also highlight the value and possibilities of postcolonial African archives in rethinking and constructing postcolonial histories from the voices of nonelite persons. Historians of postcolonial Africa must be prepared to read their littered stories across postcolonial African archives. This article adds to this bourgeoning school by focusing primarily on Ghanaian workers' petitions, complaints, and letters to uncover and rewrite postcolonial African stories from postcolonial African archives.

The act of petition writing and scholars' usage of it in African studies is not new. Africans in colonial South Africa and British West Africa engaged in 'petition-writing campaigns' against the colonial apparatus to contest ill-treatment and adverse conditions.[30] 'In putting pen to paper', Oliver Coates argues that 'petitioners were grafting together two disparate worlds' and 'narrating their most personal problems for a reader they barely

25 Others have relied on nonelite personal collections to circumvent the problems of the colonial and postcolonial archive. See K. Skinner, 'Local historians and strangers with big eyes: the politics of Ewe history in Ghana and its global diaspora', *History in Africa*, 37 (2010), 142; S. Miescher, 'The life histories of Boakye Yiadom (Akasease Kofi Abetifi, Kwawu): exploring the subjectivity and "voices" of a teacher-catechist in colonial Ghana', in L. White, S. F. Miescher, and D. W. Cohen (eds.), *African Words, African Voices*: Critical Practices in Oral History (Indianapolis, IN, 2001), 162–194.

26 While scholars like John Straussberger have seen value in local African archives in writing political histories, they argue that postcolonial African governments — as in the case of Guinea — are actively destroying documents. See J. Straussberger, 'Fractures and fragments: finding postcolonial histories of Guinea in local archives', *History in Africa*, 42 (2015), 299–307.

27 S. Mazov, 'Soviet aid to the Gizenga government in the former Belgian Congo (1960–61) as reflected in Russian archives', *Cold War History*, 7:3 (2007), 426; B. Shechter, *The Stuff of Soldiers: A History of the Red Army in World War II Through Objects* (Ithaca, NY, 2019).

28 S. Daly, 'The survival con: fraud and forgery in the Republic of Biafra, 1967–70', *The Journal of African History*, 58:1 (2017), 129–44.

29 K. Bruce-Lockhart, 'The archival afterlives of prison officers in Idi Amin's Uganda: writing social histories of the postcolonial state', *History in Africa*, 45 (2018), 245–74.

30 Hart, 'Motor transportation', 187; C. J. Korieh, '"May it please your honor": letters of petition as historical evidence in an African colonial context', *History in Africa*, 37 (2010), 84, 87; S. Moroney, 'Mine worker protest on the Witwatersrand, 1901–1912', in E. Webster (ed.), *Essays in Southern African Labour History* (Johannesburg, 1978), 37–9, 41.

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knew'.[31] Through these documents, workers made legible their claims to citizenship, restitution, and humanity and made themselves visible to the government and archive. These letters humanized the workers; they were no longer mere production parts or economic statistics, but individuals with concerns and expectations. Francis Cody has argued that to submit a petition 'is to engage fields of political power' and to yield oneself directly to the power of the state bureaucracy and 'governmentality'. Yet I also argue that petition writing was a means to hold power brokers accountable. The act of writing produced new structures of governance and relationship vectors between the state and its citizens.[32] Chima J. Korieh declared that scholars should use petition writings to gauge African 'reactions and responses to colonialism'.[33] I concur and suggest that historians, particularly in the Ghanaian context, should also employ petitions to identify African experiences in the postcolonial era.

In this article, I broadly use two types of workers' petitions. The first genre was written by workers — individually or collectively — to their trade union representative, their supervisors, or the labor, district, or regional officers and commissioners. Professional scribes mediated the second type. Neither the recipients nor I distinguish between these two formats. In the first format, the workers used their signatures and names to ascertain the petition's validity. In the second, the workers put their names and fingerprints, often in dark blue ink, on the document to verify its contents. Moreover, when a scribe wrote a complainant's note, the document contained a seal with the scribe's logo, name, identification number, and a stamp.

Both letter formats employed similar rhetorical structures. As a political genre, the letters exalted the officer(s) being addressed while humbling the complainant(s). Susan Zaeske describes such shifts in tone between humility and 'insistence' as the 'rhetoric of humility'.[34] In the Ghanaian context, after deploying the 'rhetoric of humility', the letters then delved into the complainant's hardships. At times, the letter-writers listed the officials and offices they previously contacted for assistance and its subsequent failure. Next, the writers requested that the recipient remedy the situation, often by appealing to the officer's power or 'moral reasoning'.[35] I read the letters alongside internal governmental departmental reports and memoranda, trade union documents, party magazines, newspapers, presidential cabinet meeting agendas, statistical data, and secondary literature to make sense of this historical moment.

THE GHANAIAN POLITICAL-ECONOMIC PROJECT

Upon independence, Ghana's economy was primarily agricultural export-orientated. Cocoa, diamonds, gold, and magnesium were its principal export commodities.[36] In

31 O. Coates, '"The war, like the wicked wand of a wizard, strikes me and carry away all that I have loved": soldiers' family lives and petition writing in Ijebu, southwestern Nigeria, 1943–1945', *History in Africa*, 45 (2018), 73.

32 F. Cody, *The Light of Knowledge: Literacy Activism and the Politics of Writing in South India* (Ithaca, NY, 2013), 172.

33 Korieh, '"May it please your honor"', 84, 87.

34 S. Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship: Petitioning, Antislavery, and Women's Political Identity* (London, 2003), 2.

35 Korieh, '"May it please your honor"', 98.

36 R. L. Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis and the Birth of Development Economics* (Princeton, 2006), 112–13.

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Nkrumah's Independence Day speech on 6 March 1957, he put the onus on Ghanaian workers to work hard to ensure that the first independent Black sub-Saharan African state would become a 'respected . . . nation in the world'. Nkrumah reminded the population that they were 'no longer a colonial but free and independent people' and that sacrifices had to be made to ensure that they remained 'free forever'. Dampening their expectations, Nkrumah acknowledged that Ghana would 'have difficult beginnings' but sought their 'support' to ensure that 'when the African is given a chance, he can show the world that he is somebody!'[37]

As the euphoria of Independence Day subsided, the task of revamping Ghana's economy started in earnest. The government had to 'play the role of main entrepreneur in laying the basis of the national economic and social advancement'.[38] Like the colonial regime before it, the Ghanaian government was the state's biggest employer of wage labor.[39] Thus, any increase in the workers' wages cut directly into the government's budget. Like other emerging postcolonial countries, Nkrumah concluded that Ghana had to transform its 'purely trading and raw-material producing economy into productive units capable of bearing a superstructure of modern agriculture and industry'.[40] What did this entail?

First, from 1957–8 Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, Ghana's minister of finance, and Sir W. Arthur Lewis, the renowned University of Manchester economist and then Ghana's chief economic advisor, wrestled Ghana's £200 million in foreign reserves, which British Crown Agents had mismanaged, from Britain's security exchanges.[41] Second, the Ghanaian government heavily taxed farmers, particularly cocoa-farmers, to modernize and industrialize the economy. Third, the government dispatched numerous requests to foreign countries in search of experts to oversee rapid industrialization.[42] Europeans who had held managerial positions in the private sector during the colonial era largely remained. Consequently, the Ghanaian government focused on building national universities, technical institutions, and sending its students abroad to acquire the technical expertise to gradually assume key positions in the country's political, educational, and economic landscape.

Nkrumah was acutely aware that foreign capital was necessary to lubricate Ghana's goals and vigorously courted it.[43] Ghana's 1958–9 budget provided tax incentives to attract foreign investment. In explaining the budget, Gbedemah stressed the importance of 'private capital', 'reducing the company tax' to support 'pioneer industries', and industrialization.[44] In April 1960, the Ghanaian government removed exchange controls 'of money coming from outside the sterling area by companies with authorized capital of

37 K. Nkrumah, 'Independence speech', in K. Konadu and C. C. Campbell (eds.), *The Ghana Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Durham, NC, 2016), 301.
38 K. Nkrumah, *Africa Must Unite* (New York, 1963), 119.
39 C. L. R. James, *Nkrumah and the Ghanaian Revolution* (London, 1977), 170.
40 Nkrumah, *Africa*, 97.
41 Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*, 154–9.
42 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra (PRAAD-Accra) ADM 13/2/40, minutes of the Standard Development Committee, 26 and 29 July 1957.
43 Nkrumah, *Africa*, 101; S. Miescher, '"Nkrumah's baby": the Akosombo Dam and the dream of development in Ghana', *Water History*, 6:4 (2014), 341–66.
44 Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*, 159.

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£15,000 or less', and guaranteed companies 'permission to remit profits and repatriate capital from Ghana'.[45] However, Nkrumah maintained that his government was 'alert to ensure' that foreign capital and capitalism did 'not endanger' Ghana's independence.[46]

Local and global events around 1960 pushed Nkrumah to change political and economic course. First, in the latter half of 1960 circumstances in the newly independent Democratic Republic of Congo led to the assassination of its first leader and Nkrumah's close ally Patrice Lumumba the following January.[47] Second, attempts on Nkrumah's life resulted in the creation of the Preventive Detention Act, which called for the incarceration of criminals or individuals deemed dangerous to the state.[48] Third, Ghana became a republic in July 1960; Queen Elizabeth II was no longer Ghana's official head of state. Fourth, with the drop of cocoa prices, Ghana's foreign reserves fell despite Ghanaian farmers' higher production levels.[49] Fifth, Nkrumah believed that Lewis' agriculture-centered economic policies were too slow to transform the Ghanaian economy and shifted towards a more rapid industrialization program.[50]

These events pushed Nkrumah to usher in the Programme for Work and Happiness in July 1962, to construct a plethora of state-enterprises, and establish a new seven-year development plan in 1964.[51] The Programme for Work and Happiness called for the eradication of unemployment, homelessness, hunger, and illiteracy within seven years.[52] By 1963, the government had built over forty state enterprises.[53] Celebrating the fifteenth anniversary of the Convention People's Party (CPP), Nkrumah informed the nation that the seven-year development plan would establish a 'socialist pattern of society' and instructed workers to 'work hard and eschew anything that borders on laziness, dishonesty and subversion'.[54] Ghanaian workers were central to realizing Nkrumah's plans.

Government and party officials charged Ghanaian workers with making Nkrumah's dreams a reality by increasing their productivity while shunning laziness and personal wealth. In 1962 Accra City Council Chairman E. C. Quaye warned workers that the council would not 'tolerate any sign of laziness and indiscipline'.[55] The following year, on 27 August 1963, the CPP's magazine *The Party Chronicle* castigated workers who showed an 'unhealthy desire to get rich quick' instead of 'working hard to build Ghana'.[56] It was up to the workers to show that 'the black man could manage his own affairs'. According to Nkrumah, Ghana 'held no glowing hopes of wealth without labor'.

45 TheNational Archives of the United Kingdom (TNA) LAB 13/1409, inward telegram to Commonwealth Relations Office, 19 Apr. 1960.
46 Nkrumah, *Africa*, 101.
47 L. de Witte, *The Assassination of Patrice Lumumba* (London, 2001).
48 A. Biney, 'The legacy of Kwame Nkrumah in retrospect', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2:3 (2008), 139.
49 D. Rimmer, 'The crisis in the Ghana economy', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 4:1 (1966), 1–32.
50 Tignor, *W. Arthur Lewis*.
51 D. Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah: Vision and Tragedy* (Accra, 2007), 256.
52 'The party and employment', *The Party Chronicle* (Accra), 7 Aug. 1963; 'Party vigilance', *The Party Chronicle*, 27 Aug. 1963.
53 Rooney, *Kwame Nkrumah*, 258.
54 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Cape Coast (PRAAD-Cape Coast) RG 1/13/1, vol. 4, 'Osagyefo's message to the nation on the occasion of the 15th anniversary of the party'.
55 *West Africa*, 12 May 1962.
56 'Let's serve Ghana now', *The Party Chronicle*, 27 Aug. 1963.

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Workers, Nkrumah ventured, had to 'work doubly hard now that' they 'were laboring for ourselves and our children, and not for the enrichment of the former colonial power'.[57] More than mere subjects of communist political rhetoric, the workers were key to developing the state's industrial capacity and racial independence. 'Both the state and capital', historian Abubakar Momoh concluded, depended on workers 'for survival and expansion'.[58]

Ghanaian elites promised the workers that their development schemes would eliminate social ills, poverty, and unemployment and make Ghana into Africa's model showpiece. Workers were expected to work overtime and accept suffering to make those dreams a reality. This discourse was conducted under the backdrop of a deteriorating national economy in the first half of the 1960s. Despite working harder, workers' 'real wages dropped by 20 per cent in the private sector and by 40 per cent in the public sector' from 1960 to 1965.[59] This reality was not lost on the workers.

TRADE UNIONS AND THE WORKERS

In 1941 the British legalized trade unions in colonial Ghana in response to widespread discontent.[60] British union leaders traveled throughout the colony to develop unions that functioned in concert with British interests. Despite these attempts, the TUC became a vehicle for both anticolonial and nationalist activity and an avenue for economic protection for laborers in various sectors.[61] Mineworkers in colonial Ghana 'emerged as one of the most militant and politically aggressive groups'.[62]

The TUC's radical wing caused both Nkrumah and the British difficulties in the 1950s in the forms of strikes, claims to better working conditions, and anti-British and anticolonial agitation.[63] To counter this development, Nkrumah and the CPP sought to bring 'the colony's labor movement into its fold' and to harness their anticolonial activity by appointing Nkrumah's allies to the TUC and declaring the CPP a worker's party. While Jeffrey S. Ahlman argues that labor as an entity lost its independence under Nkrumah's regime, contemporaries had an alternative perspective.[64]

According to F. S. Miles, an official in the British High Commissioner's Office in Accra, despite foreign perceptions that the TUC had become the government's arm, it continued to secure gains for its members. Miles ventured in 1959:

> I cannot help feeling that the Ghanaian trade union movement is often unfairly maligned by uninformed criticism from overseas. . . . [I]n its day to day work of labor relations and negotiation it

57 Nkrumah, *Africa*, 107.
58 Momoh, 'Popular struggles', 164.
59 Sackeyfio-Lenoch, 'Ghana Trade Union Congress', 208.
60 Jeffries, *Railwaymen of Sekondi*, 26.
61 R. B. Davison, 'Labor relations in Ghana', *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 310:1 (1957), 138.
62 Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism*, 120.
63 G. M. Carter, 'The Gold Coast: a future dominion?', *International Journal*, 9:2 (1954), 141–3.
64 Ahlman, *Living with Nkrumahism*, 121. Rolf Gerritsen, however, dismisses the notion that the CPP ever 'controlled' the TUC; see R. 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), 229–44.

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> operates effectively and efficiently in much the same way as British trade unions do. And Ghana's T.U.C., unlike its British opposite number, has not had to face the problem of unofficial strikes![65]

Although senior trade union officials in Ghana were 'well' compensated, they worked doggedly. They traveled across the country 'putting across . . . new ideas to the workers' and thereby built a robust bureaucratic machine that increased membership by organizing annual conferences, educational rallies, self-help seminars, and basic literacy education for its members.[66] John Tettegah — considered by the British as a dynamic, 'driven', and influential TUC leader — argued that the 'rank and file' workers still influenced 'their leaders' despite the impositions of the Industrial Relations Act (which will be described in more detail in the next section).[67] Miles noted that union regional secretaries were 'continuously bombarded by streams of workers bringing their grievances', creating 'an atmosphere in a Regional Office . . . often near . . . bedlam'.[68]

In coordination with the union, workers mutinied to push their employers to rehire dismissed colleagues and garner other concessions in the postcolonial era. In February 1958, nearly a year after independence, 160 Takoradi Veneer and Lumber Company (TVLC) workers went on strike with their union's backing after a co-worker, William Sodo, was dismissed for inefficiency. Sodo's identity and what constituted his 'inefficiency' are absent within the archive. In response to the strike, the TVLC dismissed the revolting workers and instructed them not to return to the company's premises until 4 March. In addition, the TVLC offered workers who had recognized the folly in attacking big capital the opportunity to reapply for their positions, but only after 4 March. Facing an uncertain future, some abandoned the strike and resumed work on 28 February.

However, by 7 March the remaining strikers had forced the TVLC's management to reverse course. The TVLC withdrew its universal termination letter and agreed to send any employee three written warnings before termination — each letter simultaneously had to be delivered to the union, the government labor officer, and the worker in question. The company also overturned Sodo's dismissal and transferred him to another division without any salary alterations.[69] The TVLC incident illustrated the workers' ability, with the union's aid, to bring about positive change. It also revealed that organized labor was unafraid to tackle big capital despite severe threats and consequences.

Other circumstances around Ghana, however, supported the workers' hidden concerns that the union was not entirely on their side but had been coopted by the government and private capital. In September 1958 the government's HM Customs and Excise Employees Union instructed their members to strike for three hours a day against the government department, starting on 27 September. The strike was to last until a government

65 TNA LAB 13/1347, letter from F. S. Miles, 23 Dec. 1959.

66 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960; PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/3843, letter from E. A. Cowan, General Secretary/Treasurer to the Union of Catering Trades of Trades Union Congress-Ghana, 25 May 1964.

67 TNA LAB 13/1347, letter from F. S. Miles to R. B. Dorman, 16 Dec. 1959; TNA LAB 13/1347, letter from E. M. Melles to Wallis, 13 Oct. 1958.

68 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.

69 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor and Minister of Labor and Co-operatives, 7 Mar. 1958.

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commission was appointed to address both forced overtime hours without pay during the seven-day work week and what constituted a regular day and week.[70] Ninety workers ceased working at the harbor until the grievances were resolved. Facing a full labor strike by 16 October, the government met with the union's representatives.

The parties came to a five-point resolution. First, all work stoppages would immediately cease. Second, the union was required to 'submit a list of grievances to the Establishment Secretary personally'. Third, the government's organizational and methods team would review the 'existing structure and procedures in the Department' to bring about 'improvements'. Fourth, the 'Establishment Secretary' would appoint three people to 'receive and consider memoranda and oral evidence' concerning the union's grievances and fashion recommendations to address them. Fifth, the workers were denied compensation for wages lost during the strike. Moreover, the workers would be responsible for all production 'backlog' hours accumulated due to the strike, within the month, outside of their 'normal working hours and without overtime payment'.[71]

Despite the strikers' envisioned goals, the agreement relegated them to a substantial period of unpaid labor. The resolution highlighted both the uneven power relations at play between the union, the workers, and the government and the government's proclivity to treat workers as production parts during its industrialization drive. While the Customs and Excise government workers had won the creation of an administrative platform allegedly attentive to their grievances, the agreement had also crystallized their vulnerability. It was apparent to the workers that an improvement to their working environment was, at various moments, antithetical to the government's economic production agenda. A September 1959 message from TUC Secretary General Joe-Fio Meyer broadly articulated that viewpoint. Meyer reminded the workers that they were making 'sacrifices' for the nation's industrialization efforts.[72] It appeared that this 'sacrifice' included free overtime labor.

The trade union oscillated between fighting for labor rights and collaborating with private capital and the government to undermine their members. Yet the African workforce did not rest on its laurels with the rise of the first African government. Instead, they understood this moment as crucial to protecting and reshaping labor rights and acquiring positive gains from the state, the union, and the private sector.

PASSING THE LABOR AND THE CRIMINAL CODE AMENDMENTS

From 1957–60, the utopian life Ghana's independence leaders envisioned remained out of reach for many workers as constant, visible monuments to and whispers of corruption within the CPP swirled. While wages in public and private sectors remained stagnant from 1957–60 despite the increasing cost of living, Kojo Botsio, an influential cabinet member and minister, had recently built 'a very ostentatious new house' and people

70 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 29 Sept. 1958; PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, H. Takoradi to CIDPDL, 28 Sept. 1958.

71 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, letter from R. K. A. Gardiner, 1 Oct. 1958.

72 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.

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witnessed trade union vehicles parked at nightlife entertainment 'spots'.[73] Moreover, European companies such as Elder Dempster Agencies Limited and the United African Company (UAC) fired workers over dwindling profits and rising operating costs.[74] Public calls to embrace socialism and struggle became hollow to workers when Nkrumah increased his cabinet ministers' wages from £1,200 to £1,800 a year in June 1960.[75] Some workers 'began to mutter "one law for the rich"' and another for the rest.[76]

During Tettegah's absence to the USSR on 3 August 1960, about 100,000 workers in Accra 'threw the municipality into pandemonium when they staged a demonstration at midday . . . demanding more pay and better working conditions'. The workers carried placards reading: 'We want better pay', 'We too know how to drink whiskey and educate our children', 'One man no chop in the Republic of Ghana', and '£1,000 a month too big for one man.' The signs underscored a growing disillusionment with corruption, the vast discrepancy in income between high-level government officials and the workers, a yearning to enjoy the 'finer' things in life, and a desire to educate their children. While holding these placards aloft, the protesters 'sang war songs and made terrific noise, booed and rained abuses on TUC officials who were under police protection'.[77] In scolding TUC officials, the workers made it apparent that they considered the TUC to be intrinsically linked to and part of the problem. However, these strikes contravened directly against the government's attempts to suppress public displays of discontent through the 1958 Industrial Relations Act (IRA). The 1960 strikes pushed the government to enact new anti-labor laws to attempt to suppress public displays of worker dissatisfaction.

On 23 August 1960, the government passed two bills — the Labor Amendment and the Criminal Code Amendment. The former law gave the minister of labor and co-operatives the authority to impose new or revised minimum rates of remuneration as 'necessary in the public interest'. The latter bill mandated newspapers to submit their publications for governmental scrutiny to prevent disclosures of countrywide revolts, which could prejudice public opinion or undermine public safety. On 25 August, the IRA was amended to permit a 'union shop' — which required workers to join a union and pay union dues and granted the CPP and Nkrumah greater control and scrutiny over the 'activities of individual union leaders'.[78] The minister of labor added an amendment making it compulsory for every worker in Ghana to possess trade union membership and a provision barring employers from hiring non-union members for more than a month. These provisions passed despite Union Party member Joe Appiah's concerns that the 'union shop' and Boateng's additions contravened against the constitution's 'fundamental principle of the liberty of the subjects and human rights'.[79]

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73 TNA LAB 13/1409, report from L. Bevan to C. D. M. Drukker, 27 Aug. 1960; TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.

74 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/1275, letter from H. G. Leeke, an official at the United Africa Company of Ghana Ltd., to the President of the National Maritime and Dockworkers Union, 21 Apr. 1958.

75 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.

76 TNA LAB 13/1409, report from L. Bevan to C. D. M. Drukker, 27 Aug. 1960.

77 'Accra workers demonstrate for better pay: they hoot and boo at president's statute', *Ashanti Pioneer* (Kumasi), 4 Aug. 1960.

78 'All workers must join a trade union', *The Daily Graphic* (Accra), 26 Aug. 1960; TNA LAB 13/1409, report from L. Bevan to C. D. M. Drukker, 27 Aug. 1960.

79 *The Daily Graphic*, 'All workers must join a trade union'.

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The measures put the minister of labor in command of the TUC.[80] It dissolved all unions unaffiliated with the TUC and merged approximately 100 unions into 16 national unions.[81] Furthermore, non-union officials were barred from negotiating wage rates or labor conditions with any employer.[82] The IRA legalized the 'compulsory check-off' of union dues from workers' salaries, effectively made strikes illegal, and 'remove[d] some of the restraints on the unions' freedom of action which were embodied in the Act'.[83] The TUC's education and publicity department noted that the new act created an 'elastic system of negotiation and conciliation' which rendered 'strikes almost unnecessary'. The measures, however, were unpopular among some CPP backbenchers and workers despite efforts to popularize it.[84] Critics argued that the new measures deprived the unions of their teeth. At a CPP meeting, a few of the 'Bill's exponents' were given 'rough treatment' while explaining the act's benefits.[85] Discontent continued into the following year.

During the September 1961 strikes that engulfed the nation, the TUC and government labeled the strikes as politically motivated and foreign-controlled.[86] In framing the workers' dissatisfaction as an instance of 'foreign subversion', both parties attempted to deflect from the 17-day strike. Indeed, the workers marched against Nkrumah's July austerity budget, the installation of a property tax, the increasing cost of consumer goods, a compulsory savings scheme, and for better and more affordable housing. However, the government and the TUC considered the workers not as sophisticated, independent agents pushing for their rights — but as foreign puppets.[87] While the workers received slight pay increases after the strikes, the government also altered Section Six of the LRA, stipulating that no employer could employ 'any unemployed person unless such person' possessed 'a registration certificate'.[88] Moreover, any employer interested in hiring someone had to 'apply to the appropriate Public Employment Centre for the nomination of [a] suitable person for employment'.[89] In 1962, a further eight regional labor departments were created, each with its own regional labor officer, to provide the government with greater administrative and political control.[90]

These measures were part of the government's larger attempts to control Ghanaian labor, secure its power, and make it more attractive to foreign capital and interests. Ako

80 TNA LAB 13/1347, E. M. Melles to Marsh and Wallis, 25 Feb. 1959.
81 TNA LAB 13/1347, E. M. Melles to Marsh and Wallis, 23 July 1959; TNA LAB 13/1409, 'May Day speech of John K. Tettegah, secretary-general of the Trades Union Congress of Ghana, delivered in Accra on Friday, 13th May, 1960', 13 May 1960.
82 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.
83 The Ghanaian archives also have stories of workers refusing to pay their union dues; TNA LAB 13/1347, Marsh and Wallis to E. M. Melles, 23 July 1959.
84 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.
85 TNA LAB 13/1347, E. M. Melles to Marsh and Wallis, 25 Feb. 1959.
86 'T.U.C. talks of the workers' enemies', *The Daily Graphic*, 20 Sept. 1961.
87 Jeffries, *Railwaymen of Sekondi*, 71, 76.
88 Despite this law, the Ghanaian archives are replete with stories of government complaints that employers were knowingly hiring individuals without a registration certificate for more than a month.
89 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Tamale (PRAAD-Tamale) NRG 9/4/23, letter from the Commissioner of Labor to all government departments, all corporations, the Ghana Employers Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Buildings Federation, 11 May 1962.
90 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 9/4/23, Commissioner of Labor to all Regional Labor Officers, 16 May 1962.

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Adjei, the Ghanaian minister of external affairs, assured foreign investors that 'Ghanaian labor would not be troublesome.'[91] Nkrumah reminded the increasingly agitated workers that their interests aligned with the government and the state's with theirs. This would 'achieve', Nkrumah proclaimed, 'maximum results and prove that public enterprises can be successfully run'. The TUC's magazine *Labour* echoed Nkrumah's and Adjei's pronouncements for the workers to sideline their interests for the state's. *Labour* argued that the trade union's role was 'firstly, to mobilize and organize the workers to carry out state plans, and secondly, to be concerned with systematically improving their living and working conditions'.[92] African workers' plight had explicitly and implicitly become secondary to and submerged under private capital, national development, and state power.

UNFAIR DISMISSMALS AND ETHNIC DISCRIMINATION

With the government's vigorous attempts to suppress public displays of worker dissatisfaction, workers turned increasingly to letters to request more funds, protest unfair dismissals, record their frustrations, and highlight workplace discrimination. The month before Nkrumah introduced the Programme for Work and Happiness on 15 June 1962, an official from the Soviet Geological Survey Team (SGST) dismissed Alfred Sandow Alhaji, a pupil laboratory technician, for going to his hometown without permission. The principal personnel officer characterized Alhaji's behavior as indicative of 'a gross lack of interest' in the job.[93] The officer's letter implied that the government tried to control and monitor the movement of certain laborers. Without authorization, workers were prohibited from leaving the work compound — doing so was a sackable offense. In a deteriorating Ghanaian economy, unemployment fears could self-police the movement of laborers and impede complaints against superiors.

In response, Alhaji described large parts of the officer's letter as inaccurate. First, Alhaji questioned how the officer could severely reprimand him for leaving to Tamale in May when his employment began on 1 June. Alhaji urged the officer to 'refer' to his 'personal file for the actual date' of his appointment. Second, Alhaji clarified that he was a pupil laboratory technician and not a pupil geological assistant, explaining his absence on the latter's 'roll-call'. However, Alhaji admitted to leaving for a Ghana Young Pioneers interview in Accra without permission.[94] Letters like Alhaji's revealed that some workers still tackled maltreatment and even flaunted movement restrictions. Tellingly, Alhaji ignored state regulations by circumventing his union and writing directly to his superior. Shunning the 'rhetoric of humility', Alhaji defiantly demanded his reinstatement into the organization.

91 TNA LAB 13/1347, letter from E. M. Melles, 23 Apr. 1959.
92 TNA LAB 13/1409, memorandum from F. S. Miles and T. W. Keeble to J. O. Morton, 4 Nov. 1960.
93 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, Principal Personnel Officer to F. S. Alhaji, 16 June 1962.
94 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, A. S. Alhaji to the Principal Personnel Officer, 20 June 1962. Nkrumah created the Ghana Young Pioneers to 'inculcate a respect for discipline and order into the country's young men and women' and as an organization to absorb surplus labor; see J. S. Ahlman, 'A new type of citizen: youth, gender, and generation in the Ghanaian Builders Brigade', *The Journal of African History*, 53:1 (2012), 87–8, 99.

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Other incidents at the SGST compound further brought into sharp focus the state's attempts to control people's movements, assaults against workers, and ethnic discrimination, as well as workers' attempts to critique their situations through letters. On 24 September 1964, the year Nkrumah introduced the seven-year development plan, Stephen Fianoo, a northerner and an SGST employee, sought a pass from the guard to leave the SGST compound, as he was transferring to Kintampo, another northern town. The guard denied Fianoo's request and grabbed his bicycle and keys. A physical altercation ensued. The police intervened, sending both to court. The court fined Fianoo £G 8 and the guard £G 1. The state had effectively punished the individual seeking his private property and freedom of movement substantially more. While Fianoo paid the fine without complaint and transferred to Kintampo, his problems did not end there.[95]

A few days later, J. B. Baryen, the acting principal personnel officer, wrote to Fianoo informing him that he had 'been suspended' because of his fine. On 10 October, Fianoo wrote a scathing letter to the minister of industries Alhaji Imohu Egala protesting his suspension and highlighting discrimination against northerners. Fianoo, referencing the case of Ossei Kusi, an Ashanti whom the court convicted of physically assaulting a subordinate, furiously questioned why an individual fined £G 8 could 'not work in this Department', but an 'Ex. Convict [*sic*]' could hold a high-ranking post. Fianoo eschewed class and postulated that ethnicity was the root cause of the discrepancy. He argued that public officials — whose duty it was to serve all Ghanaians — severely undermined his claims and rights to full Ghanaian citizenship and consideration because of his ethnicity. Fianoo continued: 'It appears now that Ashantis are the only people given fair deal in this Department and I am therefore appealing to you for your kind consideration.'[96] Fianoo never responded directly to Baryen. In fact, like Alhaji, Fianoo circumvented the union and supervising officer entirely. Instead, he wrote to a senior cabinet official — whose only superior was Nkrumah. Others also highlighted a culture of ethnic discrimination.

Abudulai Moshie, an SGST guard, professed that F. E. Darko, the senior executive officer at the SGST, dismissed him because he was a northerner. Moshie charged that Darko 'slapped' him, called him 'a fool', and stated that his northern origins made him a 'bad person'. Moreover, Moshie wrote that Darko lamented the fact that northerners 'got . . . free work to do' because 'better people' were 'ready with money to apply'.[97] Besides hinting at a fraudulent pay-to-work scheme, Moshie substantiated Fianoo's concerns that northerners suffered discrimination, indicating that the legacies of slavery and uneven colonial development persisted into the postcolonial era. Moreover, these letters show that workers were unafraid to tackle corruption and discrimination. Moshie even carbon-copied Darko in the complaint letter, alerting him to the reality that his actions would not remain hidden. Despite these charges, the state dismissed Fianoo's and Moshie's complaints.[98]

95 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/15, S. Fianoo to the Minister of Industries, 10 Oct. 1964.
96 *Ibid.*
97 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, A. Moshie to the Personnel Officer and to Mr. Darko, 28 June 1962.
98 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, Secretary to the Regional Commissioner to A. Moshie, 11 July 1962.

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WORKPLACE RACISM, VIOLENCE, AND RETALIATION

Ghanaian workers went on strike to protest racial violence and racism. In an intense June 1959 meeting, a white Pioneer Tobacco Company (PTC) managerial staff member, Crowther-Nicol, called Joseph Alexander Odoi a 'monkey'. Infuriated, Odoi broke the glass on Crowther-Nicol's desk and threatened to kill him.[99] Without punishing Crowther-Nicol, the PTC fired Odoi and the Takoradi police arrested him. In response to these actions, Isaac Mensah hit a 'gong-gong' to mobilize the workers to strike. Upon hearing the 'gong-gong', the general manager and G. A. O. Donkor, the Takoradi police superintendent, chased Mensah to the manager's office. Mensah locked the door and escaped through the 'air-condition apparatus hole' as the general manager and Donkor pounded on the front door.[100]

Adhering to Mensah's call, approximately 400 PTC workers marched through the streets of Takoradi 'hooting' and singing 'Asafo war songs' while holding aloft placards stating: 'We are not in South Africa. Down with Flood. Away with Mclean. We want our rights. Mate-Nicols Aide-Camp. Flood go back to South Africa. Remove N.C. Nicol – Big Stooge.'[101] Despite possible reprisals, the workers marched for Odoi's reinstatement and release from prison and for Mensah to be given immunity. While it is unclear whether Flood hailed from South Africa or was South African, the placards framed anti-Black racism as only permissible in apartheid South Africa. Accordingly, in an independent Black state like Ghana, such actions could and would not be tolerated. They had to be rooted out swiftly. Undergirding these chants was a reminder to officials that the workers were not intellectually parochial. They were very cognizant of international affairs — particularly the push to dismantle and eradicate white supremacy across the globe and its implications on their plight.

In December 1957, a Gliksten (West Africa) Limited Company European supervisor — whom the African workers described as a 'bully' — 'slapped' an African tree-feller clerk in Dwenase, Sefwi-Wiawso.[102] In early March 1958, Wilson, the UAC's motor manager, assaulted an African fitter mechanic in Takoradi.[103] Six months later, another violent racial incident arose at Gliksten. R. A. Trickett, a European saw doctor, attacked two African night guards.[104] In response, the workers threatened to strike unless the offending parties were dismissed. None of the European employees were fired, however. In reaction to UAC's failure to dismiss Wilson, 126 workers went on strike for two hours on 10 March

99 PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, W. J. J. Odoteye, Deputy Superintendent of Ghana Police to G. A. O. Donkor, Superintendent of Ghana Police,15 June 1959.

100 *Ibid.*; PRAAD-Tamale NRG 8/30/11, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 15 June 1959.

101 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, report from I. N. Yankah, 16 June 1959; PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, W. J. J. Odoteye, Deputy Superintendent of Ghana Police to G. A. O. Donkor, Superintendent of Ghana Police, 15 June 1959.

102 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 13 Dec. 1957.

103 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 11 Mar. 1958.

104 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, 'Strike of employees of Gliksten (W.A.) Limited', letter to Commissioner of Labor, 16 Oct. 1958.

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1958.[105] Similarly, in the Trickett affair, between 1,000 and 1,700 railroad workers in October 1958 stopped work in protest.[106]

Despite the workers' multilayered efforts to bring about a zero-tolerance policy and culture against racial violence, responses to those incidents were often lenient and evasive. Donkor admonished the PTC union officials for the workers' strike because they failed to express their grievances through the appropriate channels. Donkor warned the union executives that further work-stoppage incidents would result in police action.[107] For Trickett's troubles, he only received 'a very severe public reprimand'.[108] The secretary to the regional commissioner wrote to Gliksten that they were only 'surprised' and 'displeased' that Trickett 'so attempted to take the Laws of Ghana into his own hands and trusts that you (Gliksten management) will see to it that there is no recurrence of such warranted and disgraceful behavior'.[109] The district labor officer echoed the regional commissioner's report. He urged all company employees, 'whether white or black', to report all disciplinary cases to the company's general manager, as though that body would adequately deal with the matter.[110] Similarly, the European 'bully' who slapped the Ghanaian tree-feller clerk was simply instructed to apologize to the African and was permitted to return to work because he was a 'good worker' and 'an expert on the special crane'.[111]

Rather than list whether the workers' wages would be retrieved or the compensation, if any, to be paid to the Africans assaulted, the government's report only listed the number of working days and hours lost as a result of the strikes.[112] These statements, omissions, and gestures were not lost on the workers, union, and management. It gave the accurate impression that European management could assault and insult African workers with impunity if profits were in danger. If it was some solace to the workers, the UAC transferred Wilson within three days.[113] At its most generous reading, the company's response underscored a tacit tolerance of racism, while the government's reaction revealed a paralysis in dealing with the matter. The government's instruction to the workers to resort to the company's channels to handle racial assaults — not those of the police or the state — highlighted its dereliction of duty and overreliance on European firms' goodwill and absorption of

105 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 11 Mar. 1958.
106 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, letter from the D/S to the Minister, 9 Oct. 1958.
107 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 17 June 1959.
108 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, letter to the Commissioner of Labor, 16 Oct. 1958.
109 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Secretary to the Regional Commissioner to manager, Messrs. Gliksten's (W.A.) Ltd., Dwenase, 24 Oct. 1958.
110 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Secretary to the Regional Commissioner to manager, Messrs. Gliksten's (W.A.) Ltd., Dwenase, 29 Oct. 1958.
111 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to the Commissioner of Labor, 13 Dec. 1957.
112 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, 'Strike of employees of Gliksten (W.A.) Limited', letter to the Commissioner of Labor, 16 Oct. 1958; PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM/23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 11 Mar. 1958.
113 PRAAD-Cape Coast ADM 23/1/2745, Regional Labor Officer, Western Region to Commissioner of Labor, 11 Mar. 1958.

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labor for its success. Yet, the workers, the most vulnerable group in this equation, appeared to be the only entity seriously engaged in seeking to eliminate racial violence. These efforts had adverse consequences, however.

Black Africans endured retaliation for exposing racism. On 16 September 1963, Tingah Moshie, a night watchman at a private company called Agir-Ghana Company Limited in Takoradi, claimed that his dismissal for sleeping on the job was categorically 'false, malicious and untrue'. Moshie insisted, however, that he was suffering retribution because he provided evidence in another case pending before the district commissioner and the Takoradi police department that Roman, his European boss, had called another watchman, Allasan Moshie, a 'Blackman Monkey'.[114] Similarly, on 18 September Kweku Yankah, a carpenter, filed a complaint with the district commissioner against a European named Witney for dismissing him because he told him to stop insulting the Ghanaian government through racial innuendo. Yankah alleged that Witney colluded with white women to 'tell [him] certain nasty words just to infuriate me to anger'. 'I feel', Yankah concluded, 'I have been dismissed out of sheer prejudice and malice.'[115] Workers in Ghana confronted big business and defied state laws to support their colleagues, improve their plight, and attack discrimination. Workers did not absorb these moments of prejudice quietly. Instead, they drew the government's attention to racism, retaliation for reporting discrimination, and the dual failures of private companies and the Black postcolonial state to support them. While Ghanaian leaders and labor unions publicly informed the workers that they would not countenance laziness and indiscipline, they seemed tolerant of racial injustices and violence.

CONCLUSION

After the National Liberation Council overthrew Nkrumah's government in a Western-inspired coup d'état on 24 February 1966, workers in different sectors, at different times, went on strike for better working conditions in late 1966. From his exiled abode in Guinea-Conakry, Nkrumah declared that the strikes were indicative of the workers' discontent with Ghana's political-economic situation.[116] If one applied Nkrumah's logic to his regime, then from the very first months of his government, workers were extremely displeased! However, I suggest that workers were neither pro- or anti-Nkrumah's government or those of its successors but sought improved circumstances. If their needs were unmet, workers were unafraid to protest with their feet or write complaint letters. The workers employed the state's rhetoric of progress and independence in these letters to seek better conditions, underscoring their sophistication.

The shifting political and economic landscape from British to Ghanaian rule did not cower the workers into a false sense of security. From the very first months of Nkrumah's government, strikes and complaints against capital and working conditions were widespread. While Ghanaian workers garnered limited concessions such as higher

114 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 8/1/259, T. Moshie to Managing Director, 16 Sept. 1963.
115 PRAAD-Sekondi WRG 8/1/259, K. Yankah to District Commissioner, 18 Sept. 1963.
116 K. Nkrumah, *Dark Days in Ghana* (New York, 1968), 114–5.

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salaries, improved working hours, and better bureaucratic channels to voice their displeasure against their employers, the Nkrumah government simultaneously engaged in a process of trying to subvert their rights, push them to work harder for the state, and curtail their freedom to demonstrate against the state both in the name of national development and for greater access to foreign and domestic capital. As Catherine Boone argued, 'one of the chief hazards of postcolonial rule' was that regimes depended upon the political support of those they exploited the most'.[117] The Ghanaian workers fell into this category.

The archives show a Ghanaian government caught between two opposed interests: revolutionizing the workers' working conditions or pushing for national development at their expense. It was a dichotomy of interests they could never truly reconcile. In their effort to (re)gain control of Ghana's economy, the government sought to control labor unions, workers' movements, and salaries and determine who had the right to work under what conditions. Despite this, the government also recognized that the easiest way to delegitimize itself in its subjects' and the world's eyes was to ignore the workers or fail to improve their plight. In that sense, the government was bound to competing interests — workers' rights, foreign and domestic capital, and its national development goals. It could not possibly accommodate all without ensuring friction.

While scholars rightly criticize government archives for omitting non-elite actors, this paper has also shown that a broader and deeper engagement with postcolonial African archives can amplify the voices of workers and the forgotten in academic discourse and historical memory. Moses E. Ochonu has noted that a historian's view of 'fragmented sources and archival locations' can determine whether they see fragmentation as an opportunity or hindrance.[118] This essay has shown that the structure and internal logics of postcolonial African archives are an opportunity to reconstruct postcolonial African histories from the ground up. The question of how much success workers' petitions and claims to citizenship had is difficult to answer. Yet what we do know is that 'rather than operating at the margins of the bourgeois public sphere', petitioning workers 'inserted their opinions into central sites of public debate'.[119] Indeed, the workers warned the Nkrumah regime that its actions would 'force' them 'to bite' it, thereby poisoning and crippling the new state. The postcolonial African archive unmasks how African workers articulated and fought for visibility, better working conditions, rights, and citizenship in the postcolonial state — no matter their ultimate successes or failures.

117 C. Boone, 'Rural interests and the making of modern African states', *African Economic History*, 23 (1995), 1.
118 M. E. Ochonu, 'Elusive history: fractured archives, politicized orality, and sensing the postcolonial past', *History in Africa*, 42 (2015), 288.
119 Zaeske, *Signatures of Citizenship*, 5.

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