

## MUNICIPAL ADMINISTRATION AT ACCRA.

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### Introduction

In 1872, the British successfully negotiated with the Dutch and bought all their possessions, thus becoming the only European power on the Gold Coast.<sup>1</sup> *Ipsa facto*, they completed the unification of Accra under their rule,<sup>2</sup> and immediately set out to tackle the town's major problem, that is, sanitation. They persistently encouraged the traditional authorities to, at least compel their subjects to observe the basic tenets of hygiene and sanitation, but to no avail.<sup>3</sup> It became clear to them that over two centuries of European presence and activities in this major trading town had in no small way undermined and weakened the authority of the traditional rulers.<sup>4</sup>

As Accra developed physically and became more and more urbanized, the problem of an appropriate form of administration for the town became urgent. In the words of Max Weber:

*The crowding of people bears with it tremendous increase in specialized demands. People need streets, public water supply, public sewage system, garbage disposal, police protection, parks, playgrounds, civic centres, schools, libraries, transporting system. A more complicated system of administration is necessary to handle the complex problems of finance, law and social welfare.<sup>5</sup>*

The idea of the British assuming direct administrative responsibility for the town was contrary to their official policy.<sup>6</sup> In the circumstances, the British found it expedient to introduce a municipal system of government at Accra. This system had evolved through time and usage in Britain by the realization that the central government had not the time to concern itself with the efficient and effective provision of facilities and development at the local level.<sup>7</sup> The need therefore to bring government to the people at the local level and to ensure the efficient implementation of policies at that level, were some of the basic concepts underling the municipal system of administration.<sup>8</sup>

As we have mentioned, the municipal system, as introduced by the British, had evolved over a long period of time, and had become part of their political culture. Lifting it, as it were, and planting it in a traditional society with dissimilar circumstances, and conditions created profound problems.

In this article, we shall be looking at the history of the introduction of the municipal system of administration and its impact on the traditional political authority of the Ga Mashie, the indigenous people of Accra.

The first ever experiment with the municipal system in this country was in 1858 at James Town, the British sphere of influence at Accra. In that year, the British enacted a Municipal Corporations Ordinance which made no provisions for the representation of traditional authority, but rather for the election of a seven-member council from the ranks of the educated Africans, with the power to elect a Mayor among themselves.<sup>9</sup> The scheme was well received by the educated African elite, who felt that because of their education, they, rather than the traditional elite were more qualified to operate the new system. Even though the council made a good start, and was commended by Governor Pine, the scheme soon ran into serious problems and had to be abandoned three years later.

The main difficulty, as we shall see below, was with regard to the payment of rates. Led by the traditional rulers, the towns people refused to pay and threatened to beat up any security officer sent to coerce them to do so. In the face of this determined resistance which threatened the peace, the Acting Governor rushed to James Town from Cape Coast. He had the recalcitrant traditional rulers arrested and detained at James Fort until they could lodge a security for their good behaviour.<sup>11</sup> When a similar situation erupted at Cape Coast over the same issue, the British thought it wise to abandon the scheme with the view that the idea of introducing the system into the Gold Coast was premature.<sup>12</sup>

The issue of administering Accra became more urgent, particularly when it was made the capital town in 1877. Again, a Municipal Corporations Ordinance was passed in 1889, but like its predecessor, it had to be withdrawn two years later for the same reasons. The Governor complained that no town was willing to adopt it.<sup>13</sup>

By 1894, it had become clear to the government that since there was no other alternative to the municipal system, there was the need to resort to coercive methods to enforce its adoption. Consequently, in that year, it enacted The Town Councils Ordinance and decided that due to its novelty, it was in the first instance, to be applied to Accra and Christiansborg as one municipal unit and gradually extended to other towns in the colony.<sup>14</sup> As soon as the enactment was published, the usual opposition by the people erupted, but this time the government refused to back down.

In January 1895, the traditional rulers and elders of Accra and Christiansborg, petitioned the Governor not to apply the new Ordinance to Accra. This was ignored.<sup>15</sup> However, in the face of the mounting tension, the Governor agreed to a meeting with a delegation of traditional rulers led by the Paramount ruler of Accra, the Ga Mantse, accompanied by four prominent Accra lawyers, namely: Messrs. Charles Bannerman, William Addo, Philip Randolph and A.H. Fearon. The delegation submitted that the people were not "sufficiently civilized to submit to such an Ordinance".<sup>16</sup> This was rejected by the Governor who observed that the people simply did not want to pay the rate.<sup>17</sup> Having made no headway with the Governor, the people set up a committee, headed by Mr. E. Bannerman to write a petition to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London, in which they described the Ordinance as giving them "Municipal rights which they neither demanded nor required".<sup>18</sup>

On 14 February 1898, four years after its enactment, the Government, marshalling all the force at its disposal applied the Town Councils Ordinance of 1894 to Accra. With considerable difficulty, the Government eventually succeeded in persuading three prominent citizens: Nii Kojo Ababio, James Town Mantse, Mr. Charles Bannerman and Mr. A.B. Quartey-Papafio to accept to be nominated unofficial members on the Council, alongside three European official members.<sup>19</sup> They immediately began work, setting up committees to deal with finance, markets and slaughter house, general purposes, water, bye laws and lighting, sanitation and open spaces.<sup>20</sup>

The first serious test, which confronted the Council, was the collection of the municipal rate for the year. A determined resistance, actively led and encouraged by the Ga Mantse, the paramount ruler of Accra, was organised. Noisy meetings were held and the African and the African unofficial members of the Council were threatened and intimidated. With the situation threatening to get out of hand, the colonial Government invoked The Peace Preservation Ordinance, which enabled it to exercise emergency powers. The leaders were threatened with arrest and the rates were doubled. In the face of this tough measures, the back of the opposition was broken, though not completely eliminated.<sup>21</sup> In the first year, the collection of the rates was not so encouraging, but improved in subsequent years. It however took a bubonic plague, which swept through Accra with a devastating effect in 1907 to drive home to the townspeople the need to pay their rates, at least, to enable the Council to address the sanitation problems of the town. From this time onwards, the Council.<sup>22</sup> made steady progress with rate collection

The Town Councils Ordinance of 1894 survived in Accra and was subsequently applied to the seaport towns of Cape Coast and Sekondi. As we shall see below, in an amended form, it survived until 1943.

It is necessary to look at the important factors that sparked off the initial and subsequent opposition to the municipal system in Accra, from its enactment to the assumption of office of Governor F.G. Guggisberg in 1919. First is the revolutionary

nature of the scheme. The concept of municipal administration as introduced by the British was alien to the traditional practices of the Ga Mashie people. In the traditional system, dealing with administrative issues of the community were appropriately dealt with at the family, household, ward, quarter, divisional, and the paramount level. The idea of a scheme whereby a body was constituted and given powers in which the people, led by their traditional rulers were not involved was contrary to tradition, and therefore never went down well with the people. Nobody felt more threatened by the scheme than the traditional rulers who rightly regarding themselves as 'natural rulers' felt they must be given primary consideration. It is therefore not surprising that they led the opposition to the scheme.

Secondly, there was a historical reason why the people fiercely resented the payment of rates. This had to do with their experience with the introduction of the Poll Tax in the 1850s, resistance to which led to the bombardment of Christiansborg resulting in considerable loss of lives and properties in 1854.<sup>23</sup> Such was the determined resistance to the tax throughout the colony that the colonial government had to abandon the Poll Tax in 1861. In the words of Kimble, "the abandonment of the Poll Tax ... unfortunately created the impression... that direct taxation was an unjust imposition to be resisted at all cost". "The Poll Tax," he continues, "... set the pattern for a century of strenuous, if intermittent political opposition to taxation in any shape."<sup>24</sup>

Thirdly, the official majority on the Council, all of whom were Europeans, was resented particularly by the African educated elite. In their view, these Europeans paid no rates themselves and therefore had no right to control their monies. The Council as constituted "commanded no local loyalty and inspired no local pride."<sup>25</sup>

Fourthly, certain inherent problems became obvious a few years after the formation of the Town Council: revenue was wholly inadequate and the survival of the council was the result of grants-in-aid from the Government. Furthermore, the Council had no full time executive officers.<sup>26</sup>

Fifthly, a problem of dual control was created in that, the Town Council's area of competence coincided with those of traditional councils within the town. In time the relations between the two systems became more and more difficult. The feeling, with justification, by the traditional councils was that the Town Council was not only encroaching on their functions, but also undermining their power and authority.<sup>27</sup>

Sixthly, the foremost position that Accra had come to occupy both politically and economically had led to a large influx of people into the town. These immigrants were not bound by local customs and had needs like housing which the traditional councils and the Town Council as set up by the Ordinance were not competent to adequately address.

Soon after assuming office, Guggisberg set out to tackle these problems. He set up a high-powered committee made up of Mr. John Maxwell (Chairman), Mr. Casely Hayford, Mr. T. Hutton-Mills, Mr. E.J.P. Brown and Mr. J. Glover Addo, and charged them to recommend how best the existing Councils could be improved upon as "educational establishment in administrative responsibility."<sup>28</sup>

In its report submitted on 26 May 1922, the committee recommended the drafting of a new Ordinance that will give the councils unofficial African majorities. It added that "in order ... to give the African citizen real responsibility for the management of his own affairs ... the franchise be extended to all rate payers, male and female of the age 21 years possessed or occupying land or building of annual value of not less than 5 pounds."<sup>29</sup> Furthermore it recommended that majority of the council members be elected by the rate payers either as one body for the whole town or by wards as local circumstances dictated. The Governor was to appoint one-third of the total number of elected members, while the local Chamber of Commerce - where it existed - was to appoint one sixth of that number. It recommended that the appointment of the President of the council should discontinue and rather the office of a Mayor be established to be filled by an election from among the African unofficial members. The committee advised that its proposals must be considered "in the light of an experiment in the practical political education of the educated African" who would put in practice "the great mass of theory of English political and municipal institution" observed by him.<sup>30</sup> Finally, they recommended that due to the novelty of their scheme, the new Ordinance when enacted should, in the first instance, only be applied to Accra.<sup>31</sup>

The recommendations were embodied in a new Municipal Corporations Ordinance, which was passed on 30<sup>th</sup> August 1924. It turned out that this progressive Ordinance which Guggisberg had put in all his effort and energy to have enacted, had to be withdrawn in the face of a massive opposition to it by the townspeople of Accra and Christiansborg. Guggisberg was to confess later that this was his only real disappointment as Governor of the Gold Coast.<sup>32</sup>

Whether by accident or by design, it is significant, that neither the townspeople, nor their traditional rulers were notified of the Bill till it had been passed and gazetted.<sup>33</sup> It is also significant that the Ordinance was designed to the benefit of the Western educated African elite, who supported it, against the rival claim of the traditional elite, who for obvious reasons opposed it. Even though these were strong reasons for the rejection of the Ordinance, a closer examination of the circumstances, reveal that the rejection was as a result of a conspiracy of deliberate distortion and misrepresentation of the facts because of a chieftaincy dispute involving an influential section of the town on one side, and the Ga Mantse and his supporters, on the other hand. The Ga Mantse was falsely accused of being party to the enactment and imposition of an obnoxious Ordinance. The idea was to isolate him and make him unpopular in order to facilitate his destoolment. Though the plot backfired, his opponents however were

able to gather enough support against the Ordinance to have it withdrawn.<sup>34</sup>

Subsequently, the 1894 Ordinance was modified and re-enacted as The Town Council Law (Amendment) Ordinance of 7<sup>th</sup> July, 1927.<sup>35</sup> Section 6 provided that:

- a) In every town to which this Ordinance is extended there shall be an established a Town Council having a perpetual succession and common seal, consisting of ten members.
- b) Of these members, five shall be Government officers appointed by the Governor to be members. One shall be a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, appointed by the Governor, to be an unofficial member elected under the provisions of this Ordinance.
- c) The Governor shall appoint one of the official members to be President and Treasurer of the Council.<sup>36</sup>

The new Ordinance, like its predecessor, did not improve the position of the traditional elite in any way. Their situation further deteriorated with the coming into effect of the 1925 Constitution as amended in 1927. It provided that Accra, Cape Coast and Sekondi were each to elect a municipal member to represent the town at the Legislative Council. Furthermore, four elected members were also to be elected to serve two-year terms on the Town Councils. They were all to be Africans from the ranks of the Western educated elite.

The introduction of the innovative electoral process in returning unofficial members to the Legislative Council and the Town Council created initial problems for the people. In the words of the Gold Coast Leader:

*When the Supplementary Order-In-Council was published, even the leaders of the people had scarcely considered the organization by which Municipal members would be returned to the Legislative Council, and it was not until it was actually announced that elections would take place ... that the people set about to organize and prepare for the probable contest. Up to the last moment there were some otherwise enlightened persons who thought that it was merely a matter of the 'Oman' walking up to the Returning Officer and naming their pet candidate and the will of the 'Oman' will be carried out.<sup>37</sup>*

The onus therefore fell on the educated elite who organized two political parties to canvass for votes; these were the Ratepayers Association and the Manbii Party. Their activities in Accra between 1927 and 1944, divided Accra society very deeply.<sup>38</sup>

By 1943, it became clear to the British that their policy of indirect rule had failed and therefore the need to introduce a more comprehensive local government system. As part of the reforms, it was deemed necessary to enact a new municipal Ordinance for Accra. Consequently, The Accra Town Council Ordinance No. 26 of 1943 was passed, and applied to Accra with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> September of that year. The Council was made of seven unofficial members elected from the seven wards into which Accra was divided; two representatives of the Ga Mantes, and five official members nominated by the Governor.<sup>39</sup>

In 1951, The Coussey Committee<sup>40</sup> in its recommendations for constitutional reforms observed that:

*The complexity and stress of modern life, the desire for change, and the progressive outlook which are now pervading over the remotest villages call for more efficient organs of local administration. We therefore recommend entirely new councils more democratic in composition, which should prove more efficient and effective in the discharge of greater responsibilities for the social welfare and well being of their local communes.<sup>41</sup>*

Consequently, a new Municipal Council Ordinance was enacted in 1953 and applied to Accra giving it a council with a membership of thirty-one councilors. The number of wards in Accra was increased to twenty-seven, each of which was to return one member to the council, while four were to be nominated by the traditional authority.<sup>42</sup> In 1957, the council became wholly representative and therefore fully democratic when the nominees of the traditional council were removed by the provisions of The Municipal Councils (Amendment) Ordinance No. 2 of 1957. In 1961, the Municipal Councils Ordinance of 1953 was replaced by The Local Government Act No. 54 of 1961. Section 2 of the act empowered the Minister of Local Government to declare Accra a city and to transfer all the activities of the municipal council to the newly created Accra City Council, the membership of which continued to be wholly representative.

The nature of representation on the council changed with the coming into power of the military government of the National Liberation Council (NLC) in 1966. Under the provisions of The Local Government (Interim Administration) Decree (NLCD. 26), a management committee made up of appointed members, replaced the elected members. Under the Local Government (Accra District Council) Establishment Instrument of 1974, a 32-member council was set up. Two-thirds of which was appointed by the Government, while one-third was appointed by the traditional authorities. This attempt to encourage traditional authority to play a meaningful role on the council was continued by the government of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC). In exercise of the powers conferred on the Council by Section 89

of The Local Government Law 1988, (PNDC.L 207), enacted the Local Government (Accra Metropolitan Assembly) (Establishment) Instrument on 17<sup>th</sup> March 1989. A Metropolitan Assembly consisting of not more than one hundred persons was established. Sixty-eight persons were to be directly elected to represent the electoral areas into which Accra has been demarcated.

The attempt however at this time, to encourage the traditional authorities to be involved in the administration of the town through the municipal system was, as it were, 'too little too late.' Under the present local government system, all effective legislative and executive powers are with the Metropolitan Assembly and the Metropolitan Authority, headed by the Metropolitan Chief Executive.<sup>42</sup>

### Summary and Conclusion

The introduction of a municipal system of administration at Accra was primarily the result of the unsuitability of the traditional system to cater for a town undergoing a rapid modern process of urbanisation. To be sure, the colonial administration at first gave all the necessary encouragement to the traditional institutions to assume some measure of responsibility of the sanitation of the town. They were however soon to find out that the traditional authorities had become so weak and did not exercise any effective influence on their own subjects, let alone the immigrants who had been flocking into the town. The adoption of the municipal system, very much at variance with the traditional system of town administration, was therefore an essential necessity if Accra was to perform its functions as the administrative, commercial, financial and the political capital of the Gold Coast.

However, the adoption of this novel system, without regard to the traditional system, contributed significantly to its marginalization and weakness. The situation was further aggravated when the people of Accra, both Ga Mashie and immigrants alike, more and more, came to look up to the council and the central government for the provision of such basic amenities as: schools, health care, security, sanitation, markets, justice, etc.

Even though traditional authority is very much in existence in Accra, it has no responsibility for the effective administration of the town.

### References and Notes

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2) Until the British bought out the Danes in 1850 and the Dutch in 1874, Accra was *de facto* divided into three to wit, Danish Accra, Dutch Accra and British Accra.

3) Acquah, Ione                      1958   Accra Survey, G.U.P., p. 22

4) *Ibid.*

5) Weber, Max.                      1958   The City. Translated by Don Martindale and Gertrude Neuwirth, The Free Press, N.Y.

6) Acquah, Ione                      1858   Governor's Dispatch to Secretary of State, *op. cit.* P.22

7) Stewart, M.                      1958   The British Approach to Politics. London., p. 196.

8) *ibid.*

9) Kimble, D.                      1963   A Political History of Ghana : 1850 – 1928, G.U.P., pp. 185 – 6.

10) *ibid.*

11) *ibid.*

12) *op. cit.*, P. 187

13) *ibid.*

14) See                              1894   Gold Coast Gazette. P. 341

15) Kimble, D.                      1963   *op cit.* Pp. 422 – 3

16) *ibid.*

17) *ibid.*

18) *ibid.*

19) *op. cit.*, p. 424

20) *ibid.*

21) Acquah, I. *op. cit.*, p. 26

- 22) Crooks, J.J. 1923 **Records relating to the Gold Coast Settlements.**  
Dublin. Pp. 325 - 328
- 23) *ibid.*
- 24) Kimble, D., *op. cit.*, p. 191
- 25) *ibid.*
- 26) Wraith, R.E. 1967 **Guggisberg, O.U.P.**, p. 208
- 27) *op. cit.*, p. 209
- 28) *op. cit.*, p. 210
- 29) Metcalfe, G.E. 1922 **Report of the Town Council Committee, Accra.**,  
*op. cit.* P. 589
- 30) *ibid.*
- 31) *ibid.*
- 32) Guggisberg 1927 **Last Annual Message at the Budget Session of  
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- 33) Quarcoopome, S.S. 1987 "The Rejection of The Municipal Corporations  
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pp. 24 - 49, I.A.S., Legon.
- 34) *ibid.*
- 35) Maxwell, J. 1928 **Gold Coast Handbook.**, Accra, Government  
Printer ( p. 176)
- 36) Gold Coast Gazette 1927 p. 1650
- 37) Editorial 1927 **Gold Coast Leader**
- 38) Quarcoopome, S.S. 1988 "Party Politics in Accra: 1927 - 1945" in  
**Universitas** Vol. 10. University of Ghana, Legon.
- 39) The Accra Town Council Ordinance No. 26, 1943

40) This Committee was set up by the colonial administration to advise on constitutional reforms of the Gold Coast after serious riots and political unrest.

41) Nsarkow, J.K. 1958 "The Report of the Coussey Committee" in *Local Government in Ghana*, G.U.P., p. 92.

42) See L.N. 201, *The Municipal Council Ordinance, 1953* and *The Accra Municipal Area Wards Order, 1953*.

43) See *The Local Government (Accra Metropolitan Assembly) Establishment Instrument, 1995*.