

Ghana:

# Air Force Lt. Rawlings Returns

[AN] Ghana's new military government led by retired Air Force Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings received a number of demonstrations of support last week as it prepared to get down to the business of tackling the nation's serious economic problems.

Students and others organized impromptu rallies in the capital of Accra, shouting slogans such as "Jerry, Our Savior." And on January 7, Ghana's Trade Union Congress called a march to support the takeover and welcome the "holy war" on corruption that Rawlings has declared.

Even market women — a group that was blamed for hoarding when Rawlings mounted his first coup in June 1979 — extended a show of support, chartering ten buses to take them to Rawling's headquarters in the Burmah military camp. Ironically, they were turned away there by guards who accused them of contributing to Ghana's economic woes.

Rawlings and his backers in the military seized power for the second time on December 31, promising he would work for "nothing less than a revolution — something that will transform the social and economic order."

In 1979, Rawlings and the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council presided over the executions of eight top officials during their brief — and popular — rule, and much speculation currently centers on the fate of President Hilla Limann and the rest of his civilian government. So far the new junta, called the Provisional National Defense Council, has arrested more than 100 former officials, including Limann.

Though no charges have yet been issued against these detainees, the PNDC announced on January 6 that it is setting up "people's tribunals" to examine various "crimes against the people." The trials will be public but will not be conducted according to the procedures of existing courts — a system that Rawlings charges has often "enabled criminals to go free."

(The International Commission of Jurists immediately criticized this decision, arguing that Ghana already possesses a highly qualified bar with a tradition of fair trials in which defense rights are respected.)

Earlier the PNDC suspended the constitution, dissolved parliament, and declared that it would assume control over all government decisions.

Though by some accounts life was returning to normal in Accra last week, a number of emergency measures taken by the PNDC remain in force, among them: a dusk to dawn curfew; restrictions on foreign businesses; the closing of the borders and an airport shut-down; and the suspension of all political parties. In addition, the government has frozen the bank accounts of hundreds of prominent Ghanaians, including members of parliament, Cabinet officers and corporate executives.

At the same time, Rawlings and his associates have taken some steps to reassure those who might worry about the new administration. Rawlings said in his first speech that Ghana's business community "should entertain no fears as long as it remains honest and law-abiding." Subsequently, a dozen top business leaders were summoned to the Defense Ministry for a special meeting.

Rawlings also announced last week that civilians would soon join his administration. Charismatic and immensely popular, the 34-year-old Rawlings is a

striking contrast to Limann, a quiet scholar with degrees from four European universities. But in addition to his charisma, Rawlings enjoys a second major advantage as head of state: His four months of previous rule in 1979 are remembered as the only time in recent years when the ordinary Ghanaian could afford enough to eat.

The coup that put Rawlings in power two and a half years ago was staged by low-ranking officers, revolting against a military regime noted for its conspicuous consumption. One hundred and twelve days later, Rawlings handed power to an elected government, an occasion marked by high hopes that Ghana would return to the prosperity that followed independence in 1957.

With the Limann administration getting off to an unimpressive start, the Accra rumor mill was ever alive with stories of

another plot by Rawlings or his sympathizers. Fearing the former leader's popularity and the potential for another coup, Limann forced Rawlings to retire from military service in November of 1979.

Though it inherited an economy in disastrous shape after a decade of military rule, the Limann government has been widely criticized for bungling in economic matters: Deficit spending has more than tripled by some estimates, inflation continues unabated at more than 100%, and officials have been slow in coming up with a plan to revive the cocoa industry, only recently deciding to triple producer prices. The International Monetary Fund had been negotiating with Ghana for a major loan, but the Limann administration balked at the Fund's demand for a currency devaluation, fearing the political costs of such a move would be too great.

To add to all this, the ruling People's National Party was embroiled in controversy over a number of Limann's key appointments in the organization, and the government simultaneously faced a move by some members of Parliament to investigate allegations of kickbacks from foreign firms.

A cloud of uncertainty has hung over the Limann government from the outset. Only two weeks before the coup, Ghana Radio broadcast a statement reassuring the public that the latest rumors of a coup plot foiled at the last minute were untrue.

"So far as the government is aware," said Accra radio, "there is no foundation whatsoever in these newspaper allegations. The government will not hesitate to inform the general public if there should be any attempt to disrupt the peace of this country."



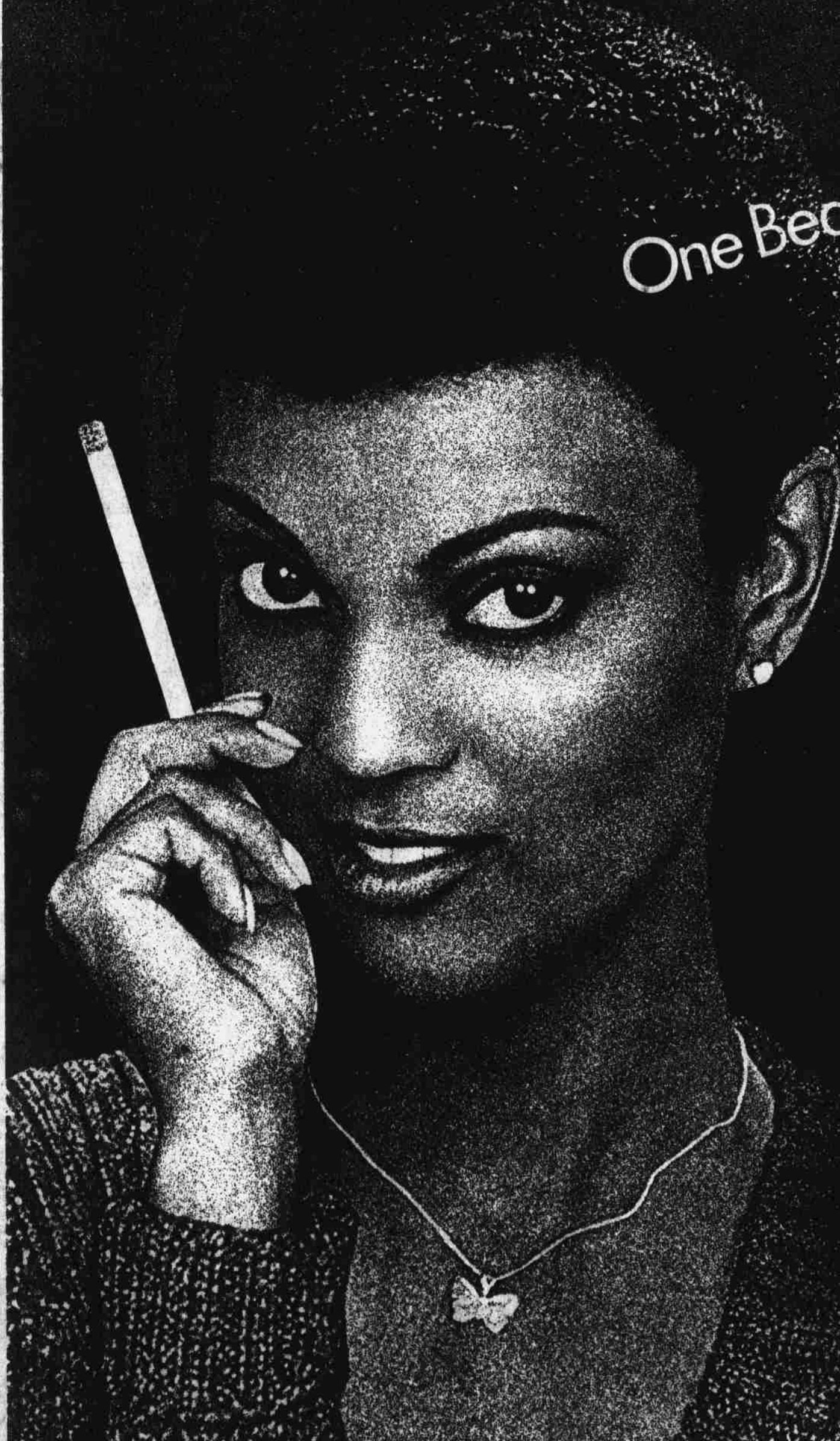
FORMER PRESIDENT VISITS ATLANTA'S NEW MAYOR — Former President Jimmy Carter waves to the press as he arrives at City Hall to make a courtesy call on Atlanta's new mayor Andrew Young. Young served as United Nations Ambassador under Carter until he was forced from office under pressure.

UPI Photo by Bill Crawford

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