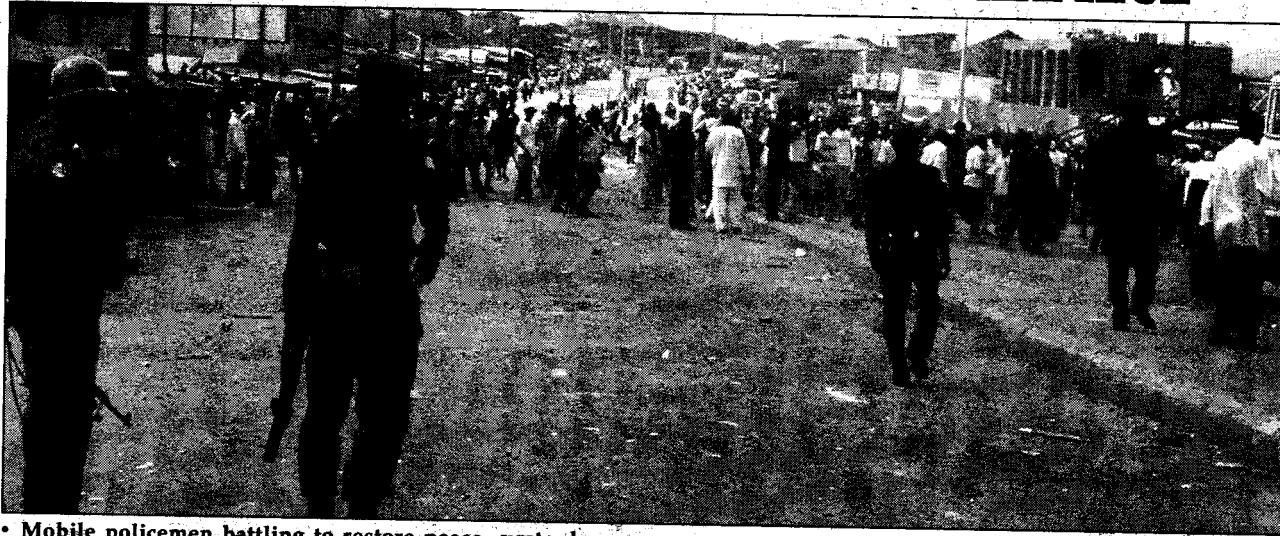


Five killed as NURTW, RTEAN members clash in Ekiti



• Mobile policemen battling to restore peace...yesterday

PHOTOS: TOYIN ANISULOWO

FIVE persons were feared dead yesterday and more than 50 others injured in a clash between members of the National Union of Road Transport Workers (NURTW) and their Road Transport Employers Association of Nigeria (RTEAN) counterparts in Ado-Ekiti.

The clash was over the control of a new motor park built by the Ado Local Government.

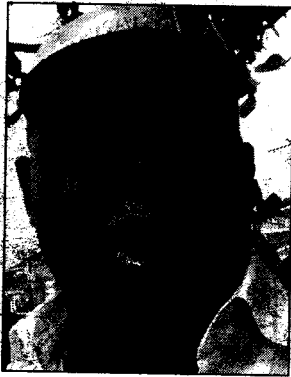
Commercial and social activities were paralysed as the union members freely used sticks, broken bottles, machetes, clubs, cudgels, knives and other weapons in the battle for supremacy. Residents fled as the feuding union members brandished weapons, while big objects were used to block the major highway.

The worst-hit areas included Old Garage, New Garage, Mugbagba, Okeyinmi, Oke-Ila, Atikanrinkan, Ijigbo and Oja-Oba where traders hurriedly closed their shops.

Broken bottles and other sharp objects littered the streets, seized by fierce-looking unionists with blood-shot eyes. They battled mobile policemen.

The crisis spread to nearby Ikere-Ekiti where pockets of violence among transport unions were reported. The mini-buses plying Ado-Ikere route popularly known as "Akoto" did not operate in the morning as the report of the clash in the state capital spread to the second largest town.

Policemen fired warning shots every time the members of the two unions surged towards one another.



• Mr Omolafe ...yesterday

From Odunayo Ogunmola, Ado-Ekiti other.

The Police, led by the Ado Area Commander, Mr Raheem Akande, an Assistant Commissioner of Police (ACP) and the Mobile Police (MOPOL) Commander, Mr Waheed Yusuf, maintained a buffer zone between the two warring groups in front of Wema Bank at Old Garage.

On the mayhem, Akande said: "What do you want me to say again, you have seen what happened; there was a clash between the NURTW and RTEAN and we are maintaining this buffer zone to ensure that normalcy returns."

All the banks in the area did not attend to customers.

Policemen fired several canisters of tear-gas at the mob who picked up the smouldering embers of tear-gas and threw them back. The entire area was enveloped by thick smoke.

Fleeing residents covered their nostrils with handkerchiefs as the tear-gas smoke spread and eyes became misty.

Many vehicles, includ-



• Mr Fasubaa...yesterday

ing those of RTEAN patrol and inter-city buses, were damaged. A truck belonging to a construction company which was making its way through the buffer zone was attacked by the irate unionists before the police intervened.

Intra and inter-city transport services were paralysed as the major motorparks being controlled by the two unions were shut. Petrol stations along the routes were also shut.

The Nation gathered that the clash resulted from a new motor park constructed by Ado Local Government; on the Ado-Ikere Road, which both unions insisted on controlling. It is to be commissioned in a week's time. None of the two bodies was ready to accommodate each other in the new park.

The Chairman of the NURTW, Mr Omolafe Aderiye, told reporters that his RTEAN counterpart, Mr Olanbiwonnu Rotimi (a.k.a. Metilo), wrote him about three weeks ago that both groups should work together but he (Aderiye)

told him that a law suit filed by the NURTW against RTEAN was in court and he would not subscribe to any working arrangement until the matter is disposed of.

According to Aderiye, about three days ago, he learnt that RTEAN members were holding a secret meeting to plot how they would take possession of the park which led him (Aderiye) to report the matter to the State Security Service (SSS).

"I appealed to my boys to keep calm and the SSS Director intervened when we learnt of the intention to cause mayhem. As the SSS Director and I were addressing our members, the RTEAN members were throwing all sorts of missiles. The suit we filed against them first started at the Federal High Court, Akure before moving to the Court of Appeal, Benin and it is now in the Supreme Court.

"I want to emphasise that the RTEAN does not operate in motor parks; they came into being when the state was created in 1996 and Ajibade Lane is their loading point, they have no right to be struggling with us for the control of motor parks, including the newly-constructed one at Arowolo along Ado-Ikere Road," Aderiye said.

When reporters visited the RTEAN office to talk with its Chairman, Rotimi, he was said to have gone out.

The Chairman, Caretaker Committee, Ado Local Government, Mr Taye Fasubaa, described the development as condemna-

ble and regrettable. He said the council built the new park for the convenience of the two rival unions.

"Unfortunately, they have not appreciated the need for peace in the town. We have envisaged the crisis and that's why we have made efforts to bring them together. I had invited Aderiye and Metilo to separate meetings last week with the aim of bringing the two unions together.

"I am just arriving from the palace where I have consulted with the Kabiyesi with a view to inviting the two unions to put an end to the crisis. Infact, I got out of my vehicle on my way to the office to talk to the feuding drivers unions.

"I was advised by security agents to leave the scene but we will continue to appeal to them to embrace peace. We are not going to commission the new park, until the two unions are reconciled and we are considering building a new park so that the two unions will have their separate parks", Fasubaa explained.

But the main opposition party, the Action Congress (AC) blamed the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP)-led administration for allegedly looking the other way as the state is gradually sliding into anarchy.

The party in a statement signed by the Secretary, Media Committee of its Governorship Campaign Organisation, Mr Yemi Adaramodu, entitled: "In Ekiti, Its one week, many troubles" criticised Governor Segun Oni for failing to ensure security of lives and property in the state since assuming power on May 29.

The AC recalled that the alleged leadership failure led to a protest by students of University of Ado-Ekiti (UNAD), the previous day and that the invasion of a market by soldiers deployed in the Government House at public expense has not been forgotten.

The latest bloody clash the AC referred to as "highly politicised drivers" was "a sign of state failure where peace had suddenly taken flight while anarchy and lawlessness became the order of the day." It said the scenario was consequent upon an alleged 'stolen mandate' of Ekiti people at the April 14 governorship election.