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Who owns this school?

Posted By: EMMANUEL AHANONU on: November 12, 2015 In: Campus Life No Comments



•The NMTI gate

It was established 37 years ago by Nigeria and Germany to provide skilled manpower for the steel industry. But the story changed when the German teachers withdrew 20 years ago. Since then, the ownership of the National Metallurgical Training Institute (NMTI) in Oba, Anambra State, has been enmeshed in controversy. EMMANUEL AHANONU (NYSC Enugu) writes on the school's challenges.

Its name does not ring a bell, yet the National Metallurgical Training Institute (NMTI) is a tertiary institution. Located in Oba, a sleepy town in Onitsha North Local Government Area of Anambra State, the school, with no fewer than 1,000 students, can arguably be said to be the most quiet campus in the land.

It was founded in 1978 by the German government to train middle-level technical manpower for the steel industry. The then military Head of State, Gen. Olusegun Obasanjo, built the school after reaching an agreement with the German government on the provision of equipment and teachers for the training of youths in extraction and purification of metals.

While NMTI continues to churn out graduates yearly, all seems not to be well with the school. Investigation by CAMPUSLIFE showed that it has been abandoned by its founders – the Nigerian and German governments. With no sustained funding, the school is also grappling with the challenges of recognition of its certificate and academic curricula.

Last month, students protested against the non-recognition of the school's Ordinary National Diploma (OND) certificates. The protesters blocked the Onitsha-Owerri Highway, leaving travellers and motorists stranded for hours.



The protest was ignited by an alleged omission of the institution's name on its OND certificate. Some students of the school, who applied for Higher National Diploma (HND) at the Petroleum Training Institute (PTI) in Effurun, Delta State, were allegedly denied admission because of the omission.



It was gathered that NMTI issued certificates with the name



•The school administrative office

"National Metallurgical Training Institute Certificate" to some students, while others got certificates bearing "Metallurgical Training Institute".

When the dust settled, one of the protesters lay dead – allegedly from police bullet -prompting the school's closure.

The victim whose name could not be ascertained at press time was said to be a graduating student. He was allegedly hit by a bullet fired by a policeman attached to the bullion van of a bank in Onitsha.

It was learnt that the policemen, who were accompanying the bullion van, fired shots to disperse the protesting students. But, the protesters remained on the road, and a policeman allegedly shut at them. The victim was hit in the chest.

But the institute is disputing the students' claim that its certificate is not recognised. Its Deputy Director for Consult, Mr Bode Fakuade, told CAMPUSLIFE that the school certificate could not have been rejected by any institution.

He said most of the students denied admission into HND programmes at the PTI did not meet the requirements. The unsuccessful applicants, he said, completed their OND at NMTI last December and applied for HND in April. This, he said, violated PTI's admission guideline, which made it compulsory for OND holders to undergo one-year Industrial Training before going for HND programmes.

He said some NMTI students, who finished two years ago and had completed their compulsory Industrial Training, were admitted at PTI.

While admitting that the school has its academic challenges, Fakuade said the unrest may have been instigated by some of the unsuccessful applicants under the guise that other institutions are rejecting NMTI's certificates.

The management tried to stop the unrest when it got mind of it. The school invited students to a meeting over the matter, but many of them did not turn up.

Fakuade said: "When we learnt about the protest, we quickly made effort to nip it in the bud. We invited the students for a meeting to make clarification about the omission. But, a few of them showed up. We were looking for alternative platform to reach out to the students when we learnt they had blocked the Onitsha-Owerri Highway in protest."

He said the management closed the school to prevent a further break down of law and order.

Fakuade said: "When the protest broke out, we thought it could be contained by the management. This was why we did not invite the police in the first place. I personally led the school team to plead with the students to leave the highway and meet with the management. They were not ready to listen to us. We got report of a student's death later. This is why we closed down the school indefinitely."

Findings by CAMPUSLIFE showed that NMTI was effectively run until 1995 when things changed following the sanctions against Nigeria for the unjust killing of Niger Delta environmental activist Ken Saro Wiwa and eight others by the late Gen. Sani Abacha junta.

Nigeria's diplomatic face-off with the European Union then led to the departure of the German teachers at NMTI.

Following their exit, the school has been battling with academic recognition. Although it is still being run by the Federal Government, students are complaining its ownership remains vague.

Established as the Metallurgical Training Institute under the repealed National Steel Council Decree of 1978, it was learnt that the management has been making efforts to reposition the school through a draft bill to the National Assembly for its nationalisation.

The bill, it was learnt, is still pending at the National Assembly. In anticipation of the National Assembly passing the bill, the management added the "National" to the name of the school. With the delay in passing the bill, the National attached to the school's name became controversial, provoking students' questions on its ownership and recognition of its certificates.

The school has become covered with weeds when CAMPUSLIFE visited the school last weekend.

Students appealed to the government to consider their plight, urging the passage of the bill that would ensure the school's nationalisation. They also appealed to the management to re-open the school to enable them complete their programmes.