

# Opinion

## Legon VC on honorary degrees, and dumsor politics is back!

**Abura Epistle**

By Colin Essamuah



I WAS really dumbfounded by the content of a speech delivered by the Vice Chancellor of the University of Ghana, Legon, Professor Ebenezer Oduro Owusu, on the propriety and public usage of honorary degrees early this week in spite of all the problems facing the university and Ghana as a whole.

Seriously, after reading him, I was convinced that the Vice Chancellor was hitting around a nail when the head was begging for the decisive hammer.

Then the tiresome politics of dumsor reared its head once again, and is likely to be with us for a while, as we endeavour to industrialise our country without steady power and studiously avoid the lessons of the earlier dumsor.

The most damning story, however this week, and which hasn't got appropriate treatment in the media, is the announcement by the Finance Minister, Mr Ken Ofori-Atta, at a post-budget workshop in Koforidua, that owners of expensive mansions in prime residential areas would, as from next year, be compelled to prove how they acquired such properties.

Really, I would never have believed such a policy reminiscent of the dreaded Citizens Vetting Committee of the revolutionary, military regime of the Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC) would find favour in the constitutional government of the

property-owning New Patriotic Party (NPP).

I accompanied the late Victor Owusu to the CVC in PNDC days around 1983, then chaired by the late Major Adutu of the army. Major Adutu, a Kwahu man, actually asked Victor Owusu, whether he had paid tax on the €120,000 that he got as funeral donations following his mother's death in 1980!

That a variant of this palpable absurdity dreamt up for the purposes of sheer persecution in a military regime, is possible in constitutional, democratic rule, is proof that history repeats itself, once as tragedy, then later as farce, as Karl Marx put it.

### Honorary degrees

Professor Owusu should be asked only two questions regarding his quaint views on honorary degrees and their public usage by its recipients. The first is rather obvious; why give honours to a person and then turn around to say he/she cannot use or flaunt them?

The second is not so obvious, why do medical doctors call themselves doctors when their MB and ChB are both bachelors degrees? In fact, we call experienced surgeons Mr not Dr.

If one uses the title or honour as given by a recognised institution, who is defrauded when the title is deployed by the recipient?

Honorary titles are presumed to have been earned by the recipients though

they did not undertake a course of study. The University of Ghana VC may do well to read on the attitude of the famous English lexicographer and man of letters, Dr Samuel Johnson, who pointedly throughout his life used his Oxford honorary degree.

The famous musicologist and foundation fellow of the Institute of African Studies at Legon, Dr Ephraim Amu, did not earn his title by studying advanced counterpoint at any music school. It was an honorary degree. He rather learnt music under the tutelage of the late Rev. J.E. Allotey-Pappoe of the Methodist Church who did not have a degree, but a diploma in music. Why must I refrain from calling him Dr Amu?

In earlier times, from the days of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) to the United Party (UP) to the Progress Party (PP) of Professor Kofi Abrefa Busia, such rank academic pomposity was a pastime of party stalwarts with reference to the honorary degree used by and for President Kwame Nkrumah, their arch foe in everything, and in comparison with Drs Danquah and Busia.

But Nkrumah wrote and published widely than all these UGCC, UP and PP leaders combined, and his works are still studied in institutions all over the world even today and will continue to be so studied for the foreseeable future.

The Legon boss would have done us a huge public good by having their ultramodern medical centre operate fully as it is capable of rather than being bogged down now in meaningless quarrels over funding and staffing.

The hospital does not belong to former President John Mahama or the NDC but to the people of Ghana. Why did our Vice President have to go to Britain when facilities exist here intentionally unused, perfectly capable of looking after him?

Why did my brother, Emmanuel

Agyarko, have to travel all the way to America to die when the facilities at the University of Ghana Medical Centre are capable of detecting any hidden cancers timeously and begin a relevant treatment?

Emmanuel and his older brother, Boakye, the former energy minister, were the very first to donate a vehicle to the NPP in 1992 and were enthusiastic about the party as many others hid in their bedrooms then but out loud now. They were true founding members of the NPP. May he rest in peace.

### Dumsor politics

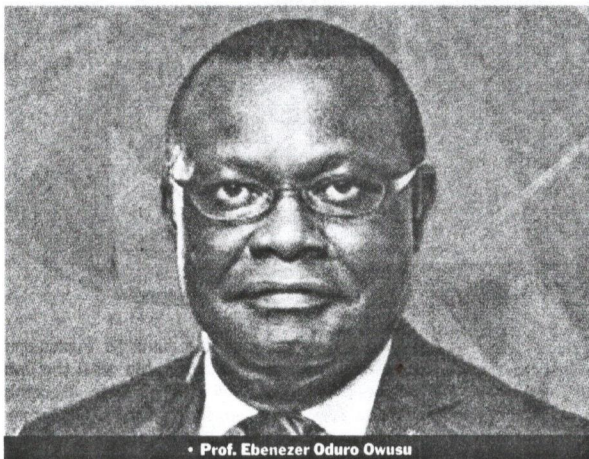
Which brings me naturally to the strange politics of dumsor revisited recently. Former President Mahama and his government kept telling us he wanted this country to be the energy hub of the West African region and was working to make Ghana have the capacity to export energy to neighbouring countries for hard currency.

Knowing this, what does "excess capacity" mean? This is baffling when it is met with the problem of gas shortages etcetera because we all remember then running mate Dr Bawumia telling us that dumsor in the Mahama

regime was a problem of finance, that is, management, and an elected NPP government would have better managers to find us the money to get what would be needed to power the electricity-producing plants?

At least I know billions of cedis were ostensibly saved by President Akufo-Addo from the much-condemned sole sourcing public contract function of government. Now is the time to apply those funds to conquer dumsor once and for all.

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• Prof. Ebenezer Oduro Owusu