

Egyptian Minister intervenes in Suez Steel workers strike

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Arrested strike leaders at Suez Steel, Amr Yusif and Abd-al-Ra'uf, were released after an intervention by the Minister of Manpower and Labour, former president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), Kamal Abu Aita. Meanwhile, the dispute over the implementation of the collective agreement continues.

Disputes at Suez Steel, a private sector company employing 2,200 workers on contracts and another 2,000 day workers, date from the signing of a collective agreement in February 2012. The agreement includes provisions to pay workers a profit-sharing bonus, and agreed a pay structure, health care and bonuses. The present dispute is about the implementation of a number of provisions in the agreement, most importantly the profit-sharing bonus.

12 workers were stopped from working and the employers filed police reports against them. Management refused to answer workers' demands, saying they must return to work before negotiations could begin. When the strike continued, police arrested two of the strike leaders and the army surrounded the factory. Following the arrests, the striking workers tried to block a key highway from Suez to Ain Al-Sokhna, but were prevented from doing so by the Egyptian army.

The workers have now been on strike at the factory in Al-Ataqa industrial zone in Suez for three weeks. Security Forces forcibly dispersed a sit in on factory premises by strikers on August 12 with a level of violence used that caused strong criticism of their actions.

Last week, the workers' leaders and the recently appointed Minister of Manpower and Labour, former president of the Egyptian Federation of Independent Trade Unions (EFITU), Kamal Abu Aita met in Cairo. IndustriALL Global Union Consultant Ahmed Kamel, in Cairo to hold a number of training courses for representatives of the new independent trade union structures, joined the discussions.

The discussions led to the release of the two arrested strike leaders and the minister further agreed to pay a month's salary for the workforce of the factory from the Emergency Fund of the Ministry. However the dispute remains at deadlock as the employer continues to insist that workers must restart work before any negotiations take place. Workers' leaders argue that they cannot ask their colleagues to start work without having a written agreement and payment of the delayed wages.

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P.S.

* <http://www.industrial-union.org/egyptian-minister-interven-es-in-suez-steel-workers-strike>