

Egypt: Workers say SCAF has no right to ban strikes

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Lawyers Ahmed Saif El-Islam and Khaled Ali, arguing on behalf of four independent unions, tell judges that the military council does not have a constitutional right to ban strikes.

Earlier today, Egypt's Court of Cassation postponed issuing its verdict in a controversial case that pits workers and independent unions against the ruling military council. The Court, which is based in the Cairo district of Agouza, has postponed its decision until 24 October.

Lawyers Ahmed Saif El-Islam and Khaled Ali, arguing on behalf of the plaintiffs, Real Estate Collectors Union and three other newly-formed, independent unions, told judges that the military council did not have a constitutional right to ban strikes, as it did in Decree 34 of 2011. Lawyers argued that the military council, therefore, could not try workers who decide to strike in military courts as it has done on a number of occasions since it came to power in February 2011.

For example, the lawyers argued, the military council was out of line when it sentenced five workers from the Petrojet Oil Company to a suspended one year sentence last June after they protested against management over full-time status grievances.

The court asked plaintiff lawyers to present it with documentation of the Petrojet incident and any other incidents in which the military prosecuted and tried other workers who protested or went on strike.

Meanwhile, 500 trade unionists and supporters held a spirited rally outside the court to back up the lawyers' efforts inside.

According to Haitham Mohamadain, a human rights lawyer who helped to organise the rally, protesters also demanded an end to all military trials by the military council, for all civilians and not just striking workers.

"We chanted: 'Strike is a legitimate tool against oppression and poverty' and 'No to military trials,'" Mohamadain told Ahram Online

After the court was adjourned, protesters marched to the Cabinet's headquarters in downtown Cairo to put Prime Minister Essam Sharaf, who supports military trials for strikers and other civilians, on notice. "Hey Sharaf, are you in? Remember you came up from a sit-in," protesters chanted.

On the way from the Court of Cassation to the Cabinet, protesters made a quick stop at Tahrir to express their solidarity with the 18-day-old sit-in in the square. "People met us with applause, and 200 people joined us in the march to the cabinet," Mohamadian told Ahram Online.

Mostafa Ali, Tuesday 26 Jul 2011

P.S.

* <http://english.ahram.org.eg/News/17402.aspx>

* The original version of this article incorrectly named Ahmed Saif El-Islam as Ahmed Saif El-Dawla.