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Pittsburgh Business Times - 2:19 PM EDT Tuesday

Steelworkers back Iraqis, call for better working conditions

[Dan Reynolds](#)

Representatives of Iraqi trade unions joined with their counterparts at the United Steelworkers in Pittsburgh Tuesday to decry working conditions in Iraq and call for international support to reinforce the labor movement in the occupied country. About 75 people attended the public forum.



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In the meeting held at USW headquarters at Gateway Center, Downtown, Falah Awan, president of the [Federation of Workers Councils and Unions of Iraq](#) called on his American co-unionists to assist him in demanding that the Iraqi government write a labor code as part of efforts to craft a constitution in that country.

Mr. Awan said his union represents approximately 18,000 workers.

"I call on you in the name of Iraqi labor to support us and to support our federation," Mr. Awan said.

Mr. Awan said Iraqi workers are fired at will and have no control over their working hours. He said women and children are being exploited in the Iraqi economy and that the government of Prime Minister Ibrahim al-Jaafari is doing nothing about it.

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"Because the groups who are in power don't respect any human value in this society," Mr. Awan said.

Amjad Ali Aljawhry, a FWCUI representative who lives in exile in Canada, said Iraq's economy is in shambles with as high as 70 percent unemployment. He said corporations that have the contracts to rebuild Iraq are giving jobs to workers from other countries and shutting out Iraqi citizens.

He said Iraqi workers have no health and safety standards. He said the situation is particularly bad for medical industry workers, who are exposed to disease without the proper protection.

Jim English, secretary of the USW, said the situation in Iraq reminded him of post-World War II Europe.

He said one of the key elements of reconstructing the economy of Europe after the second world war was the support of the Truman administration for the European labor movements.

"One of the first things that Hitler did when he took over was to ban the trade union movement," Mr. English said.

Maurice Henderson, a spokesman for the USW, said the USW had formed alliances with trade unionists in Brazil, Australia and Europe in the past and will extend similar support to trade unionists in Iraq.

"We are in full solidarity with our brothers in the Iraqi movement," Mr. Henderson said.

MR. REYNOLDS may be contacted at dreynolds@bizjournals.com.

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