

Union wants Govt intervention in mothballed steel plant



President of the Steel Workers' Union Timothy Bailey, right, speaks to former workers of the ArcelorMittal steel plant after a meeting at Cara Suites in Claxton Bay on Wednesday. PHOTO BY RISHI RAGOONATH

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The Steel Workers' Union (SWUTT) is calling on the Government to intervene in the drawn-out liquidation of the ArcelorMittal steel plant at Point Lisas, as the process is stalling payment of millions in severance to former employees.

Union members and ex-workers left Wednesday's creditors' meeting at the Cara Suites Hotel and Conference Centre in Claxton Bay, disappointed yet again. Despite TT Iron and Steel Company acquiring the plant, workers said the liquidator claims it has not received the full purchase sum, leaving workers unpaid nine years after the plant shut down.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, SWUTT President Timothy Bailey appealed to the United National Congress-led Government, urging it to rectify the inaction of its predecessor.

“I am calling on the new Government, which is saying that they are compassionate and are saying everybody wins. I am saying this is an ideal situation for your intervention,” Bailey said.

“The Keith Rowley-led PNM did nothing for nine years for steel workers for whatever reason, and we are saying that under the circumstances now, you cannot allow citizens of Trinidad and Tobago to go through that suffering and a liquidator to operate the way this current liquidator is operating.”

Bailey said TT Iron and Steel purchased the plant in 2023 for US\$30 million but only paid US\$3 million, which was passed to Plipdeco. He questioned why the plant was handed over without full payment, leaving nothing for former employees.

“We are hearing today that because the Dragon Deal fell through, we have to give TT Iron and Steel a ‘bligh’. I am saying that it is unfair that a justification can be made that you have not received as the liquidator the entire amount... and you could hand over the plant to TT Iron and Steel. If that is the case, you are supposed to hand over the plant to me and my members. This is total nonsense.”

He said the union supports the plant’s restart under new ownership, but prefers a clean sale that ends the liquidation process.

He argued that the current buyer received favourable terms not extended to others.

Under the previous sale agreement, any failure to complete payment within a fixed timeframe would automatically void the sale, with no refund.

Bailey questioned why this clause did not apply now, especially when workers’ severance and injury settlements, worth over US\$30 million, remain unpaid.

ArcelorMittal shut down operations in March 2016 amid global and local financial pressures, terminating 644 employees without severance.