

Distell workers down tools and picket

By [Liezl Human](#)

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About 50 Distell workers stopped work and picketed outside the Adam Tas production site in Stellenbosch on Monday morning and [continued striking on Tuesday]. They are demanding that Distell give their union of choice, Solidarity, recognition and bargaining rights.



Some Distell workers in Stellenbosch picketed on Monday demanding that the company recognise their union Solidarity. Distell says membership numbers are too low for recognition. Photo: [Liezl Human](#) via [GroundUp](#)

The striking workers included warehouse workers, machine operators, order pickers, and cellar staff, among others. Distell is South Africa's largest alcohol producer, with brands such as Klipdrift, Savanna, J.C Le Roux, and Hunters. The company is currently [merging with international giant Heineken](#).

Shop steward Cederik Arendse said that about 187 workers have decided to join Solidarity but Distell is refusing to recognise the union and give it access to the workplace. Solidarity is the largest union at the Adam Tas site, he said.

Distell spokesperson Dennis Matsane said to [GroundUp](#), "While we respect the union's right to strike, we do not believe the strike is warranted nor does it have merit". He said bargaining rights are awarded to unions with a minimum of 20% member representation at the national level.

Solidarity took the matter to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) last year. The CCMA recommended that Solidarity reach the level of 20% membership at national level at Distell in order to get bargaining rights.

Matsane said that 120 Distell workers were members of Solidarity, of whom 105 worked at Adam Tas. Nationally, Distell has a total of about 3,700 workers and at Adam Tas there are about 640 workers, but these numbers do fluctuate, he said.



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Arendse said many workers are still cautious about joining Solidarity because it has not been recognised by Distell. He said that the two other unions in the workplace - the Food and Allied Workers Union and The National Union of Food, Beverage, Wine, Spirit and Allied Workers - were not helping workers enough during bargaining and did not consult workers before concluding negotiations.

“We want the union of our choice,” said worker Belinda Appollis. “We want a union who will fight for our rights.” Appollis said that some members of Solidarity weren’t striking because they were afraid of losing their bonuses. The striking workers intend to stay away from work until Distell gives in to their demands.

Matsane said Distell would “continue to engage the union with the hope of finding common ground”.

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