

Head of L.A. city union held in alleged theft of computer

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Josif Kahraman, executive director of the 5,000-member Engineers and Architects Assn., and his wife are arrested on suspicion of felony grand theft over a missing union laptop.

May 08, 2011 | By Ruben Vives, Los Angeles Times

The leader of the union that represents Los Angeles city architects and engineers has been arrested, along with his wife, on suspicion of stealing a laptop computer from the labor group, police announced Saturday.

Josif Kahraman, 51, executive director of the Engineers and Architects Assn., and his wife, Ani, 31, a union volunteer, were arrested on suspicion of felony grand theft about 9:50 p.m. Wednesday at the union's headquarters in downtown Los Angeles. The couple were released the next day after each posted \$20,000 bail.

Kahraman had overseen the union's day-to-day operations and served as its chief labor negotiator. His wife was an administrative volunteer.

The couple were accused by other union members of taking a laptop computer, said LAPD Lt. Paul Vernon.

The couple denied taking it, but after being interviewed by police, a union member reportedly removed the laptop from a hiding place, Vernon said. "They were trying to keep the owner — the union in this case — from having that computer," Vernon said. "That's a theft."

The LAPD said the investigation into the matter was ongoing.

The couple's attorney, Lara Yeretsian, said they had done nothing wrong.

"These are unfounded allegations," she said. "I can very comfortably tell you that a crime was not committed. There was never at any time any intent to deprive anyone — especially the union — of the laptop."

The arrest comes at a time of apparent upheaval for the union.

In a letter released to its membership recently, the union announced that Kahraman was being placed on a leave of absence "effective immediately," along with labor representatives Michael Davies and Richard Sanchez.

A second letter stated that board members Frank Giles, Jeff Paxton and Aida Tomines had been suspended on unspecified allegations of misconduct.

"The charges are of a serious nature and, if true, jeopardize the ability of your Board of Governors to handle sensitive information and maintain confidentiality on serious issues affecting our union," one of the letters states.

The union said a review panel would be formed to investigate the allegations against the board members.

The union represents 5,000 employees in the city of Los Angeles and is the oldest continuously operating city union, according to the group's website. Created in 1894, the union has members in a wide variety of departments.

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