



Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union
c/o 88 Fleet Street, London EC4Y 1DH
Tel: 075 900 98084 / 079 045 52106 Email: office@caiwu.org.uk

For immediate release

Attacks on Facebook Cleaners' Working Conditions Extended — Removed Union Rep Faces Possible Dismissal — Key Workers Victimised and Punished Despite Promises — Further Protests Planned for September 10th and 17th

London, UK — 8th September 2021

Attacks on the working conditions of cleaners at Facebook's central London offices have been stepped up this week.

For over a year, the Facebook cleaners have been fighting against increases to their workloads during the pandemic. These include the addition of five entire floors at 10 Brock Square, effectively doubling the cleaners' duties. The increases have resulted in exhaustion and sickness among cleaning staff, leading to an increase in absences and piling further pressure on the remaining cleaners. They have also resulted in an inevitable decline in cleaning standards, about which CAIWU understands JLL, Facebook's facilities management contractor, has complained repeatedly.

The long-running dispute culminated two weeks ago in the removal of the cleaners' trade union rep, Guillermo Camacho, from the Brock Street site, apparently at the request of JLL. Camacho stands accused of multiple failures to fulfil his responsibilities as cleaning supervisor, and his employer, Churchill Cleaning, states it is contractually bound to comply with JLL's request. Yet the reality is that he has a previously unblemished record acquired over seven years as supervisor at the site, while his removal followed on the heels of a cleaners' protest against Churchill's attacks on their working conditions. CAIWU believes it is a clear case of trade union victimisation in which both Churchill and JLL are complicit.

Camacho now faces a strong likelihood of losing his job, since JLL is refusing to allow him to return to site and Churchill has been unable to find suitable alternate employment for him.

Cleaners at Facebook's Rathbone Square offices are now facing a similar situation, with Churchill apparently intent on replicating its Brock Street actions at Facebook's main London HQ.

Monica Arribasplata, the kitchen cleaning supervisor at Rathbone Square, says that she returned from annual leave on Monday September 6th to be informed by Churchill's contract manager that due to the reassignment of another team, she would be required to relocate to Facebook's Shaftesbury Avenue offices. Arribasplata has a lengthy history at Facebook, including suffering a severe electrical injury a couple of years ago that has left her fragile and vulnerable. When she pointed out that her contract was to work as a cleaning supervisor in the kitchen at Rathbone Square, the contract manager demonstrated the company's level of concern for its employees by laughing in her face. The episode resulted in Arribasplata experiencing a severe panic attack and having to be hospitalised by ambulance. She is presently off work at the instruction of her regular manager, but with no clear idea what fate awaits her on her return.

Incidents such as these demonstrate beyond any reasonable doubt where Churchill's primary concerns lie.

The company, which only took over the Facebook contract from Bidvest Noonan in January, appears to be attempting to complete a restructuring plan originally conceived by its predecessor a year ago in September 2020. At that time the cleaners mounted a successful campaign of resistance to the plan, led by Camacho and with support both from CAIWU and from Brock Street colleagues employed directly by Facebook. The campaign took place against the backdrop of Facebook's public promise that it would continue to pay contingent workers unable to work due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

This time, however, Facebook has remained silent on the issue. Despite repeated approaches from CAIWU, the company will only say that the cleaners' situation is a matter for their employers and is none of Facebook's concern. Whether this position remains sustainable in the face of escalating opposition and protests remains to be seen, but CAIWU organizer Danbert Vanzetti thinks it unlikely. 'The bad publicity from all this is bound to bite them in the end,' he says. 'The cleaners won't give up. They're already talking about the possibility of going on strike, and if they do, people are bound to blame Facebook whether it's actually their fault or not.'

While industrial action remains a possibility, the cleaners are concentrating for now on protests and generating publicity for their cause. Another pair of protests is planned for this Friday, September 10th, outside 10 Brock Street NW1 3FG at 4pm and 1 Rathbone Square, W1T 1FB at 5pm, with more to follow on Friday 17th. In the absence of any substantial changes to the situation, the cleaners have indicated their determination to hold weekly protests every Friday until the reorganisation stops and their workloads are returned to a reasonable level.

Protests:

Friday September 10th, 4pm: 10 Brock Street, NW1 3FG

Friday September 10th, 5pm: 1 Rathbone Square, W1T 1FB

About CAIWU: The Cleaners & Allied Independent Workers Union is a registered trade union representing over a thousand workers mainly in London's cleaning industry. We believe that every human being is entitled to dignity and respect in the workplace, and it is our mission to help our members fight for this basic right, along with others like fair pay, terms and work conditions.

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Notes to editor:

For more information, please contact the CAIWU communications office:

communications@caiwu.org.uk

Tel: 07927 451 462

<https://caiwu.org.uk>