



Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union
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For immediate release

Cleaners illegally dismissed from jobs at Italian Consulate — Scheduled contract handover doesn't take place — Mystery over who is now cleaning the consulate

London, UK — April 27th 2019

Six cleaners have been illegally dismissed from their jobs at the Italian Consulate.

The six cleaners, formerly employed by MSCS Cleaning at the Italian Consulate, Harp House, 83-86 Farringdon Street, EC4A 4BL, have lost their jobs under mysterious and almost certainly illegal circumstances. MSCS informed its cleaners that it would be handing the Consulate cleaning contract over to rivals Cleanology on February 11th 2019. But when they turned up for work that morning they discovered that the transfer had not taken place and they no longer had jobs.

Not knowing what else to do, the six cleaners, all members of the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union (CAIWU), approached the union for help.

Henry Tufnell, head of CAIWU's legal team, says he's never come across a situation quite like it. He says the workers' jobs should have been protected under TUPE, the rules that govern the transfer of outsourcing contracts from one company to another. But the particular circumstances of the case have made it almost to figure out who's responsible — MSCS who used to hold the contract, Cleanology who were supposed to take over but didn't, or the Consulate itself, which has so far declined to respond to all the union's enquiries.

The situation is made more complicated by the fact that Consulates are technically the territory of the countries they represent. So although the land it sits on is in England, Harp House is legally a tiny corner of Italy on the Farringdon Road. This means that it is subject to Italian rather than English law.

So far, all Tufnell's attempts to contact the Consulate in writing have failed to elicit a response. 'It's difficult to know what to do next,' he says. 'We can't even find out who's cleaning the building now, or who is employing them. Perhaps they've brought the

cleaning back in house—or maybe it isn't being cleaned at all. I might have to stake out Harp House to find out.'

It doesn't help that MSCS and Cleanology are both denying any responsibility. MSCS says the company has fulfilled all its legal obligations to the workers and can't be held responsible if Cleanology's takeover didn't go ahead as expected. For its own part, Cleanology argues that it has never been the cleaners' employer. To date it has offered no explanation for the collapse of the transfer, saying only that it 'will not be taking over this contract on Monday 11th February or indeed for the foreseeable future.'

All of which has left the cleaners feeling let down and betrayed by their former employer, by the consulate and by the law. 'It isn't right,' according to workers' representative Carlos Porco. The law is designed to protect us from getting fired. But because we worked at a consulate it doesn't seem to apply.'

Tufnell isn't so sure. 'Our members might have been employed to clean a consulate,' he says, 'but they were employed by a British-registered company and are covered by all the usual legal protections. It's just a matter of gathering the information we need to bring the case to tribunal.' It won't be easy, but Tufnell is determined not to give up. 'Apart from anything, we want some answers,' he says. 'Something has gone very wrong. We intend to find out exactly what that was and why it happened. We're not letting it go till our members have their jobs back.'

Protest against the dismissals:

May 1st 2019, 2pm, outside the Italian Consulate, Harp House, 83-86 Farringdon Street, EC4A 4BL

END

Notes to editor:

For more information, please contact Alberto Durango, CAIWU national organiser, on 075 900 98084 or Bruce Coker, CAIWU London organiser, at bruce@caiwu.org.uk

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