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For immediate release

Cleaners' Union Members Dismissed in Opera House Purge—Union General Secretary Assaulted—Demonstrations Against Dismissals to Continue

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Notorious trade union blacklisting company Kier has dismissed five cleaners and porters from their jobs at the Royal Opera House. A sixth workers has received a final written warning. All six are members of CAIWU, the Cleaners and Allied Workers Union.

In what appears to be an illegal crackdown on trade union activists, workers with up to fifteen years of service at the prestigious landmark building in Covent Garden have been disciplined and dismissed for a range of alleged minor timesheet infractions and unauthorised absences. The alleged acts of gross misconduct include returning from holiday one day late, and falsely signing a timesheet for forty seven unworked minutes. All the dismissed workers have long records of unblemished service prior to the recent purge. Most of them have been working extra shifts in recent months to help Kier with staffing difficulties. All have willingly worked extra unpaid hours at times, as well as carrying out duties beyond the terms of their contracts. None of these factors were taken properly into account at the disciplinary hearings which led to the dismissals.

CAIWU is in possession of video evidence that General Secretary Alberto Durango was assaulted during a protest against the dismissals outside the Opera House on Thursday evening, March 15th. The assault appears to have been carried out by an opera-goer attending a concert to celebrate the centenary of Leonard Bernstein. The same member of the public also stole a number of items from the protestors as Opera House security staff stood by and watched. In a separate incident, Mr Durango was allegedly the target of an act of intimidation committed by a member of the Opera House's staff.

A CAIWU spokesman says the union is determined to keep fighting the dismissals. 'The protests will continue every evening throughout March, and longer if necessary', according to London Organizer Danbert Vanzetti. 'Our members are prepared to go all the way to Industrial Tribunal if they have to. Obviously we hope it won't come to that, and that Kier will do the right thing. But this has all the characteristics of a purge against union members at the Royal Opera House. Our members there recently won a campaign for the London Living Wage. It looks to us as though these dismissals and disciplinary sanctions are Kier's way of taking revenge.'

END

Notes to editor:

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