



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

For immediate release

Cleaners at the University of East London announce public protest alongside striking UCU members – Protest to take place on March 3rd – #Bethenext university to treat your cleaners properly!

London, UK — February 25th 2020

Cleaners at the University of London will hold a public protest in support of their #Bethenext campaign for improved working conditions. The protest will take place on Tuesday March 3rd – one of the days scheduled for strike action by UCU members at UEL as part of their ongoing 'Four Fights' campaign.

The joint action by cleaners and academic staff demonstrates the depth and breadth of concern over the cost-cutting agenda increasingly prevalent in universities, along with their failure to make significant improvements on pay, equality, casualisation and workloads.

The cleaners—employees of Nviro, a contractor providing cleaning and hygiene services to education, local government, social housing and commercial organisations—have decided to protest after failing to reach agreement with Nviro over pay and conditions.

Cleaners will join UCU staff beside their picket line near Cyprus DLR station between 0800 and 0900 on Tuesday March 3rd. They expect to be joined by supporters from the cleaners' own union, the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union, as well as members of the UEL students union. A recent petition in support of the cleaners' campaign was signed by almost 350 students and a similar number of staff.

The event will involve speakers from the cleaners' collective at UEL, and from CAIWU's General Secretary.

The cleaners' campaign is based on the tag line "#Bethenext organisation to treat your cleaners properly" — inspired by the university's recent marketing campaign encouraging students to "Be the next hero". In solidarity with the UCU's Four Fights campaign, the cleaners have identified the following four key issues of their own:

- Unfair pay
- Rising workloads
- Cuts to holidays & contracts
- Favouritism

Cleaners at UEL are paid virtually the same rate regardless of their skills or responsibilities. Nviro also refuses to award an appropriately higher rate to those in positions of extra responsibility. The company has even created a new position of 'Charge Hand', which confers all the responsibilities of a supervisor but at a rate of just 20p an hour above that paid to ordinary cleaners.

Cleaners say they are expected to complete the workload of two or three people in a single shift.

They also say that annual leave allowances have been cut. Cleaners who work two shifts in different buildings can even end up with no holiday at all, because holiday is allocated separately for each workspace. In this way, cleaners can be on leave for one shift, yet have to come in and work the other.

At the same time, Nviro have cut cleaners' contracts from 52 weeks to 29 weeks a year, or 39 in some cases. Nviro explain this by claiming that cleaners aren't needed during vacations, but this is not true, as cleaners are still required for events outside of teaching time. Nviro have also amended cleaners' contracts to terminate a month before the end of the academic term, but will then request that cleaners work shifts during that non-contracted time.

Cleaners also say that UEL is rife with favouritism. For example, promotions are routinely offered to staff who are friendly with managers, while being denied to cleaners who have worked for Nviro for up to a decade or more. Similarly, cleaners say they are denied access to training and development opportunities in favour of preferred colleagues.

Although the cleaners are continuing to negotiate with Nviro in an attempt to resolve the issues, their long term goal is an end to outsourcing. 'We want to be brought back in house,' a cleaners' representative states: 'We like working here. We like the university. But we don't like the way Nviro is treating us. There are few opportunities for development, almost no training, and no recognition of long service or positions of responsibility. We'd like to work for the university directly, and it would be cheaper for them to employ us rather than helping Nviro make a profit out of our work.'

He compares the issues faced by the cleaners to those at the centre of the UCU Four Fights dispute. 'We're facing exactly the same problems as the academics. In the end whether you're a lecturer or a cleaner, it all comes down to cost cutting and unfair workloads.'

The University of East London's cleaners say to the university, 'We know universities are being hit in the pocket by the government...but we also know that your senior Vice-Chancellor earns a quarter of a million pounds a year, so please don't make us pay the price.'

CAIWU's campaign web site is at: <https://caiwu.org.uk/uel/>

#BeThe Next Protest: Tuesday March 3rd, 8am at UEL Main Entrance, University Way, London E16 2RE

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.

About Nviro: Nviro is a cleaning and hygiene contractor which claims, according to its web site, to only seek commercial success 'in ways that honour ethical values and respect people'. It reported a turnover in 2019 of over £18 million and assets approaching £2 million.

About UEL: The University of East London describes itself as a careers-led university founded in 1898. It is currently engaged in 'Vision 2028', a '10-year strategy to transform our curriculum, pedagogy, research impact and partnerships to make a positive difference to student, graduate and community success.'

END

Notes to editor:

For more information, please contact Alberto Durango, CAIWU national organiser, on 075 900 98084 or Jane Kilpatrick, CAIWU Communications Officer, at communications@caiwu.org.uk

<http://www.caiwu.org.uk/>

<https://www.facebook.com/cleaners.branch/>