



Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union
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For immediate release

Cleaners purged from major London co-working sites — WeWork requests removal of multiple trade unionists — Street protests to follow

London, UK — 14th June 2019

Five cleaners employed by CCM have lost their jobs at London premises of global co-working firm WeWork in the last few weeks. All five are members of CAIWU, the Cleaners and Allied Workers Union.

In what appears to be a calculated, if inexplicable, purge of its janitorial staff, CCM has dismissed five cleaners employed at co-working market leader WeWork in the space of just a few weeks. Each dismissal followed an intervention by a member of WeWork's staff to request the removal of the cleaner from the company's premises. Several of the dismissed workers were offered alternative roles by CCM, but were subsequently dismissed without being given a proper chance to consider the new positions.

The reasons offered by WeWork for the removal requests vary from a serious allegation of racism to a minor complaint about the cleaner having spoken out of turn to a WeWork manager—but in none of the five cases were witnesses or compelling evidence produced to support the allegation. In effect, five low-paid and vulnerable cleaners have been dismissed on the basis of unsupported accusations, the majority of which would not under any circumstances appear to constitute acts of gross misconduct deserving of dismissal.

The recent spate of dismissals appear to provide further evidence for an increasing trend of companies using the terms of their outsourcing contracts to avoid compliance with employment law. Under normal circumstances, a company cannot dismiss an employee without having conducted a proper disciplinary process first. However, outsourcing clients routinely insist on the inclusion of contractual terms with their suppliers reserving their right to determine who is and isn't allowed on their premises. If a client such as WeWork demands the removal of an individual, the service provider has no option but to agree—even when no reason or justification for the request is offered.

Under such circumstances, the employer is obliged to make reasonable attempts to find alternative work for the employee—as CCM claims to have done in the recent cases. But it is relatively straightforward for an employer to ‘fail’ to find a suitable alternative position, and as long as the client is amenable, this is certainly a far more straightforward way to remove an unwanted member of staff than by following the strict requirements of a disciplinary procedure.

WeWork represents the pinnacle of the developing co-working trend dominating the start-up and sole trader space. It presents itself as being at the vanguard of a new kind of approach to work through the emphasis it places on community and togetherness. This value system is encapsulated in the company’s key exhortations to its customers to ‘do what you love’ and that ‘We are in this together’ — though these are apparently not privileges it extends to its cleaners. ‘We are always honest and as transparent as we can be,’ proclaims the company’s website—though this is demonstrably not always the case.

The cleaners have no intention of accepting their dismissals without complaint. With the support of the Cleaners and Allied Independent Workers Union, they are planning a series of protests aimed at drawing attention to the recent behaviour of both WeWork and CCM. The first of these will take place at midday on Thursday June 27th outside WeWork’s main London location in Devonshire Square, just round the corner from Liverpool Street station. Protests will take place every Thursday thereafter until the cleaners are reinstated.

Protest against the dismissals: Thursday June 27th, 12 noon, outside WeWork, 8-10 Devonshire Square, London EC2M 4PL

END

Notes to editor:

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

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