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## MEDIA RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Community rallies around Canada Line janitors to demand labour law loophole stop failing BC's most vulnerable workers

Over 50 of BC's rapid transit line cleaners are losing their jobs as a result of contract flipping - legal complaint filed against Tricom

**VANCOUVER, BRITISH COLUMBIA** – About 75 community allies rallied around GDI Integrated Facilities Services janitors on Monday afternoon in Vancouver who, up until today, cleaned the Canada Line. The workers have lost their jobs, and with them health and dental benefits and other modest improvements won in negotiations in March. The rally demanded the new cleaning contractor, Tricom Building Maintenance, rehire the workers and that the government close a loophole in the Labour Code to stop this ongoing problem in BC.

“September 18 marks my nine-year anniversary working on the Canada Line,” said Ernesto Panogan, a GDI worker whom Tricom refused to rehire. “My gift from Tricom is unemployment -- It is completely unjust how my co-workers and I are losing our jobs, our health benefits and our union.”

The Canada Line is part of the SkyTrain rapid transit line that runs from Vancouver to Richmond, and connects to the YVR airport and is owned by TransLink and InTransitBC but privately operated by ProTrans BC, a subsidiary of SNC Lavalin Group Inc.

GDI Integrated Facilities Services has cleaned the Canada Line for the past eight years and consistently received good reviews from Protrans BC. Tricom brought in new workers to avoid a unionized workforce according to [an unfair labour practice complaint](#) filed at the BC Labour Relations Board by the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 2. The cleaners' union says Tricom has violated the Labour Code by interfering with the formation of a trade union.

"Your fight for justice is also our fight for justice," said Hospital Employees' Union member Nelly Venezuela, addressing the GDI cleaners at the rally. "This is why we are also demanding



better labour laws. Laws that stop Union busting. We need labour laws that give all workers the security we deserve. We are with you all the way!"

"We believe the law needs to change so that workers facing a contract flip maintain their employment, their collective agreements, their rights and their union with a new employer," said President of the BC Labour Federation, Irene Lanzinger, with respect to the need for the new government to move faster in implementing successorship rights. It was one of the key issues raised by the B.C Federation of Labour in consultations for a review of the B.C Labour Code that took place earlier this year. "We will keep pressing the government to make those changes," she said.

Derrick O'Keefe, a candidate of the Coalition of Progressive Electors running for Vancouver City Council also attended the rally to support the janitors. O'Keefe emphasized the problematic nature behind public/private partnerships (P3), which the Canada Line was built on, and the continued controversies that arise when private companies are responsible for operating public transit services. "This shows why we must put an end to the era of P3 privatization of major public assets and their upkeep," he said. "The billions spent on public infrastructure like the Canada Line should guarantee good, secure, unionized jobs -- City Council shouldn't support any mega-projects that don't come with this guarantee."

Other speakers at the rally included Perry Sorio from Migrante Canada, a Filipino organization that supports migrant workers and is present in over one hundred countries. A large majority of janitors in BC's cleaning industry are of Filipino descent, many of whom came to Canada as migrant workers through the Temporary Foreign Worker Program. "The continued practice of contract flipping in this province must end – it's an attack on workers," said Sorio. "This is about respect and dignity in the workplace and workers will not stop organizing."

"Some immigrant workers have come to Canada from countries experiencing violence, instability and human rights violations, and now continue to face economic instability that pushes them to the margins," said Shireen Soofi from No One is Illegal, who also spoke in support of the janitors.

## BACKGROUND

In the cleaning sector, contracts are awarded through a competitive bidding process. Property managers regularly award contracts to the lowest bidders to increase profit margins and cut costs for the building owners. For janitors this means lower wages, losing any improvements achieved with the previous contractor, and pressure to clean more space in less time.

The BC Labour Code does not provide any successorship provisions, so when cleaning contracts are awarded to a new company, existing employees are required to reapply for the same job with the new contractor. The new company has no obligation to hire them.

This competitive bidding structure combined with weak labour laws creates a situation where companies can exploit contract flipping to circumvent collective bargaining agreements and consequently, erode working conditions.



**[See Legal Complaint](#)**

**Photos available upon request**

*The Service Employees International Union, Local 2 represents 16,000 workers across Canada including over 10,000 workers in the janitorial sector. The goals of SEIU's Justice for Janitors campaign is to organize janitors across a city or market, so together, workers can raise standards in the cleaning sector and reverse the race to the bottom.*

**For more information, please visit [www.justiceforjanitors.ca](http://www.justiceforjanitors.ca)**

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