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Janitors fight ends in victory without conceding on sick days and health benefits

5 Janitors working at a downtown Toronto condominium have negotiated a contract with their employer, Luciano Janitorial Services

TORONTO, ONTARIO – Janitors at the ICON Condominium towers in Toronto’s downtown entertainment district are celebrating a victory that will ensure they keep their health benefits and sick days after four months of tough negotiations with their employer.

“Thank goodness we have a union,” said Castaneto Villamor, a cleaner at the condominium tower for seven years. “We were able to stand up for ourselves against changes that would hurt us. This only worked because we stood together”

On Wednesday November 6 the cleaning staff at 250 & 270 Wellington Street W. ratified a collective agreement negotiated through their union, the Service Employees International Union Local 2. Their vote comes after nearly four months of being locked-out of the cleaning positions by their employer Luciano Janitorial Services.

Negotiations between Luciano Janitorial Services for the cleaning staff’s collective agreement broke down in July after the employer demanded the janitors give up two out of their four sick days, and change benefit contributions which would have raised the cleaning staff’s benefit contributions from \$200 to \$1000 yearly. In terms of wages, the employer offered an increase of 30 cents over three years. On July 9 after the group of janitors voted to reject the employers offer, Luciano Janitorial Services locked-out the janitors until they were ready to accept his offer.

“I’m happy to be returning to work,” said Joven Velasco, a cleaner supporting his family here and back in the Philippines. “It’s hard finding a decent paying and steady job these days. It was important we stood up for ourselves to make sure we kept what we had.”



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The janitors handed out flyers and petitioned residents outside of the icon condominium almost daily while struggling to find part time work elsewhere. They also held demonstrations with community allies

and local MPP's, including the MPP for Spadina-Fort York where the condominium is located, Chris Glover. While many of the residents showed support to the cleaners of their building, the ICON Condominium Board of Directors were silent throughout the labour dispute at their property. DEL Property Management, the property manager of the condo buildings also refused comment throughout the lock-out. Both the board of directors and property management claimed they had nothing to do with the labour dispute, but the cleaning staff maintained they were ultimately responsible for the working conditions in the condominium.

"I'm very glad the lock-out is over and we kept our benefits safe," said Emma Llanes, a cleaner at the building with six years of service. "It was a difficult period for me as it was hard to find a replacement job where I could earn health benefits. I needed my benefits for my heart medication, and now I don't have to worry about setting money aside to buy them."

The Service Employees International Union, Local 2 represents over 17,000 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

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