



**BUILDING POWER**

# TOWERS OF POWER

And more and more  
and more and more  
And more of less  
than ever before

– Yasiin Bey, “Life in  
Marvelous Times”

Fact #1: Toronto has more construction cranes than any other city in North America.

Fact #2: Toronto’s desperate affordable housing crisis is only getting worse.

Emergency shelters are bursting at the seams, over 100,000 people are on the waiting list for public housing, and rents continue to skyrocket, even before the Conservative Doug Ford government axed rent control on new buildings.

The same Ford government scrapped the \$15 minimum wage increase planned for January 2019 as a favour to big businesses, affecting two million workers in this province.

The crisis we face is entirely preventable. There is no lack of resources, only political will. Housing and wealth are being stockpiled in the hands of a few at the expense of everyone else. This is a crisis of hoarding.

How is this possible? At its root this is a question of power: who is organized enough to ensure their interests are protected by decision-makers?

The booming condo industry is one place where the rich decide to park their assets. Toronto Mayor John Tory owns a multi-million dollar unit in One Bedford, a condo referred to by Toronto Life as the “Tower of Power” for its concentration of affluent residents.

Of course it’s not only the super-rich who own condos in Toronto. With home ownership increasingly out of reach, more and more working people in cities take on massive debt to buy micro-sized condo units.

This pamphlet looks at the web of power relations in the condo construction boom. We begin on the ground floor, quite literally, with the cleaners who service these buildings and the challenging realities they face.

# JUSTICE FOR JANITORS

Toronto is quickly becoming a city for the rich to live in and the poor to travel to work in.

– Joven Villatoro,  
JFJ member

For the past seven years, Emma Llanes has worked as a cleaner at the Icon Condos on Wellington St. Before that, she worked the night shift as a janitor in a downtown office building.

Emma spends over two hours commuting to work every day from Jane and Sheppard due to the prohibitive cost of housing in the city core.

She suddenly found herself with a new employer when the property services manager retained by the condo board awarded the cleaning contract to a new company last year.

Luciano Janitorial Services came in with a low bid and started cutting corners: Emma and her four co-workers were given three rags to clean two entire condo buildings. Luciano threatened to make them pay for additional garbage bags.



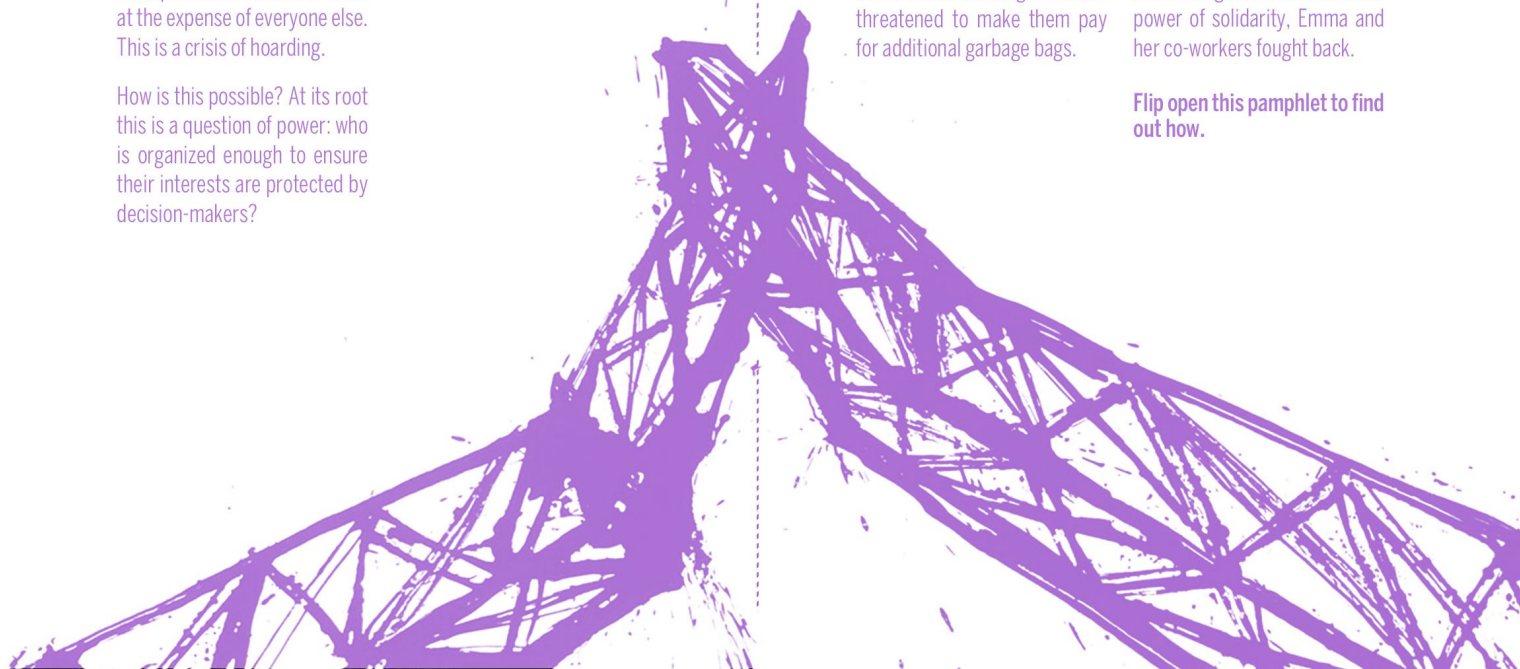
The cleaners at the Icon Condos are union members with SEIU Local 2’s Justice for Janitors campaign, which has 10,000 members across Canada.

The workers and their new employer share a common background as migrants from the Philippines, but have little else in common with their boss.

Luciano opened up contract negotiations by demanding that employees give back 2 of their paid sick days, pay for 80% of their benefits, and accept paltry raises that did not account for the rising cost of living in Toronto.

When Emma and her co-workers did not accept these concessions, he locked them out. Through their union and the power of solidarity, Emma and her co-workers fought back.

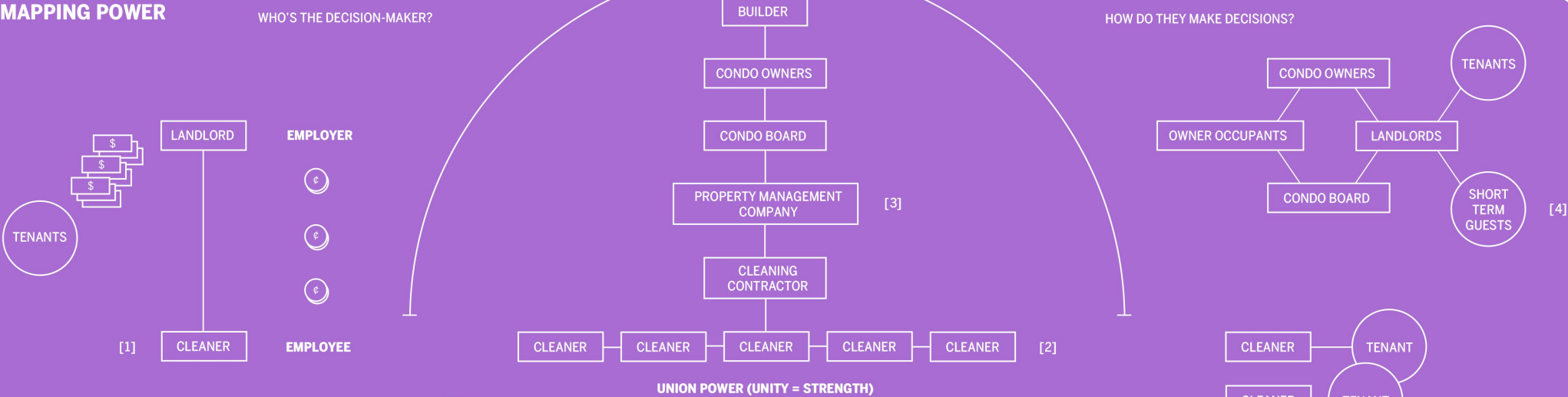
**Flip open this pamphlet to find out how.**





# BUILDING POWER

## MAPPING POWER



## TAKING ACTION

### APPLY PRESSURE

Workers made the lock out visible to residents by organizing morning info pickets outside of the condo.

Residents were asked to take a flyer and sign a petition addressed to the condo board.



### SOLIDARITY WORKS

After issuing a call for support, fellow union members came out to, along with organizers from Fight for \$15 & Fairness and Anakbayan, a Filipino youth organization, adding new energy to the info pickets.

Earlier this year, JFJ provided support to another union during a tough strike, and they were happy to return the favour by attending pickets and contacting the employer.



### AMPLIFY YOUR MESSAGE

Solidarity efforts and social media updates helped draw media attention and bring greater scrutiny upon the employer.

### SEE THE BIGGER PICTURE

A key part of JFJ's strategy is raising standards via "city-wide bargaining" with the largest employers...

...but it's just as important to take on bad employers in order to show that workers will not put up with any abuse!

### BREAK THE ISOLATION

Connecting with residents was no easy task, especially those hurriedly marching to or from work in the nearby financial district. This atmosphere of alienation is a common characteristic of modern capitalist society.

However the cleaners and their supporters persisted and had many genuine conversations with residents. Quite a few recognized the cleaners, were thankful to them for their work, and felt upset by the unnecessary lockout.

## LEARNING & ADAPTING

### [1] FOLLOW THE MONEY

In a traditional employment relationship, employees have a direct relationship with their employer: a GM autoworker works in a facility owned and operated by GM. Similarly, a cleaner works directly for the owner of the building. In this scenario, a profit-seeking landlord will aim to maximize the amount of rent he can extract from tenants while minimizing any expenses for services like cleaning and the general upkeep of the building.

### [2] EXPLOITATION, REFINED

Cleaners in condo buildings often have a less direct kind of employment. They are stuck in a "race to the bottom" outsourcing model that creates conditions for deeper exploitation. Whereas landlords generally have an interest in maintaining their buildings (longevity = more rent), condo builders make all their profit up front. The future risks and responsibilities of ownership are transferred to the new owners of condo units.

### [3] GOING IN CIRCLES

Condo owners elect members to a condo board to administer their condo corporation. However, condo boards regularly delegate their power to property management companies. These companies may then tender contracts for other companies to fulfill various aspects of their responsibilities. In the case of the Icon Condos, we come full circle, as Del Property Management is a related business to Tridel, the original builder of the condos.

### [4] THE GHOST HOTEL EFFECT

A striking feature of the Icon Condos is the high number of residents who are short-term guests using AirBnb-like services – at some times: 6/10 residents. This "ghost hotel" phenomena makes the decision-making structure even more diffused. Because they do not reside in the building, the people who own the units rented on these short-term stay services are simply inaccessible to the locked out workers during info pickets.



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