

Fixing the 'Leaky Condo'

IBEW Local 213, Vancouver, British Columbia, recently organized an all-trades union rally against shoddy construction. The rally took place in front of a major downtown residential high-rise building under construction. Local 213's Organizing Committee spearheaded the effort as a way to fight unscrupulous contractors using unqualified workers—not only in the electrical trade but also in many other construction trades as well—even though below-standards work is illegal in the Province of British Columbia. A nonunion contractor on the high-rise building, Lilly Electric, had earlier beat out the union contractor for the construction project.

Local 213 has filed complaints about this problem with Vancouver officials, but as of press time the city has taken no action, and neither have the Provincial authorities who are the licensing body for electrical contractors. Local 213 reports that contractors in Vancouver continue to break the laws, resulting in what the trades call "leaky condo" construction.

"When contractors can get away with anything they want, they obviously have no concern for the purchasers of these buildings. These contractors should be fined and have their licenses removed," said Local 213 Business Manager Charlie Peck. "The electricians intend to keep the pressure on and are continually looking for new ways to warn buyers of the potential hazards they may face." ❊

ORGANIZED Voices

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In 1986 I was working at a specialty store wiring ceiling fans. I needed to find full-time work and found a contractor willing to give me a job and teach me what I needed to know. This was in residential wiring. After about a year, this contractor went out of business. Then I found a job with another contractor doing commercial and industrial electrical work. I had been with that company eight years when I found out about the union.

On December 31, 1994, my wife, who is a hair stylist, was cutting a customer's hair. This client happened to be the vice president of IBEW Local 688. During the conversation, my wife mentioned that I was an electrician, and the customer asked her if I had ever thought about joining the union. He gave her

information about benefits, wages and pensions and left his phone number and that of the local union organizer.

Early the next week, I called the local thinking the information too good to be true. At the time I was making \$10 an hour after eight years with this company. Benefits were poor, and there was no pension. For the last year work had been slow, and I was lucky if I worked more than 32 hours a week.

After hearing about all the benefits, making a decision to leave my employer and become union was an easy choice. Our lifestyle has definitely improved. We are now able to pay our bills on time, eat out occasionally and enjoy the peace of mind that comes with job security and knowing there is someone out there looking out for my best interests.

I feel everyone has a right to earn a fair wage, and there should be more union organizers out there to look out for the American workers. ❊



Union members in the building construction trades rally in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, to "End Illegal Construction Practices." IBEW Local 213's Organizing Committee organized the noontime rally at the site of a high-rise residential building being built nonunion.