

JUST WORDS

The Stories of Working People In Our Community

Episode 38: Rose

Welcome to Just Words—the stories of working people in our community.

The hunger strike.

It's a tool that was used by Gandhi to stop riots and massacres...English suffragettes went on hunger strikes when imprisoned—and in 1981 ten Irishmen died while on hunger strike as they protested British control over Irish politics.

Could a hunger strike work today, in 2007, to help cleaners at Camden yards get a raise?

The reason I am wearing this yellow band is because me and ten other people, it is going to be 11 people all together, that are going to do the hunger strike outside of the stadium. To put pressure on the MD stadium authority to give the cleaners a living wage, and we're going to have the hunger strike and that's our demand.

That's Rose Menustik, who used to work as a cleaner at Camden Yards. She now organizes with the United Workers Association, a human rights organization that represents the cleaners. They allege bad working conditions at the stadium and want a raise from 7 dollars an hour to \$9.62, Baltimore's living wage. The UWA has been negotiating with the Maryland Stadium Authority since April, but recently, talks have stalled.

We picked Camden Yards baseball stadium because it is the largest employer of day laborers, we talked to the MSA, three, four meetings. We gave them a September first deadline but now they don't want to do much with us. They don't want to commit to our demands. They don't want to agree with us. They just want things to stay the way they are, and we are tired of the way things are. People are really being treated badly, and we've told them about the human rights violations of the workers. We've told them about the bad working conditions and they always say, we'll look into it, we'll get back to you, we want to work with you in good faith. But they never do anything; they just tell us what we want to hear. So we have just decided that we are going to have a hunger strike.

The hunger strike will begin on Labor Day-September 3rd. Rose knows it won't be easy.

Yeah it makes me a little nervous because I have never done a hunger strike before. This is pretty traumatic, pretty drastic. But this is serious; we want them to know we are serious. We're not playing games anymore.

The fight for a living wage at Camden Yards is only the first step in what the United Workers see as their struggle to change the lives of low-wage workers throughout the city.

We also want to after we win the living wage for the cleaners down there we want to go to the Baltimore convention centers, the public schools that hired also through temp agencies, and the office buildings downtown that people clean? we also want to go to these places and get a living wage for these people too. See we are going to one thing at a time and that is how we are going to end poverty in this city and that is our main goal so people don't have to keep living in poverty. So they can get out of poverty. That is the main goal for our organization.

We approached the Maryland Stadium about appearing on this program, but they ceased responding to our requests.

Next week – we will visit the site of the hunger strike.



a 360° view of the people and stories behind the issues

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Music: Beta Band, *Dr. Baker*

Produced by Jessica Phillips. Hosted by Marc Steiner.

Through a grant by the Open Society Institute-Baltimore. Visit them on the web at www.osi-baltimore.org.