

Putting a Stop to Discrimination

Roberto Ramirez

Terrible Conditions, Insults

I started working at Golden Farm Grocery in 2005. The job was very hard. There were days that we worked from 4am to 7pm. We didn't have a lunch or food break. Then they hired a new manager and things got even worse. He demanded that we work faster and we couldn't answer back at all. If we did, we would be automatically fired. He hit some of my co-workers and insulted them.

Wage Theft

We spoke to our boss and told him what was happening, but he ignored us. Then we went to look for help outside of the store. We went to the Department of Labor, and they did an investigation of our situation. They found out that we were getting paid \$360 dollars a week for 72 hours of work. They also discovered that in his accounting books, the owner wrote that we had been paid \$637 dollars per week. He forced us to sign for it, even though we were getting paid much less.

Looking for Help

The Department of Labor investigated our employer, but we still saw no change in our situation. We decided to look for help from other groups. We met Lucas Sanchez and Kate Baruc who work with New York Communities for Change (NYCC). We decided to file a lawsuit for back wages and at the same time request an election to join a union.

After my boss found out about all this, he got us all together and asked us to drop the lawsuit. He tried to bribe us by offering to pay us minimum wage (\$7.25 an hour) plus \$10.85 for overtime. When bribery didn't work, he threatened us. Every day, he threatened to call immigration. He told us, "Keep the door open because one of these days immigration will come and you'll need a quick escape."



Above, Roberto joins with other workers calling for a just wage for everyone.

Due to this, my co-workers were scared and wanted to forget about the lawsuit and the union. But there were six of us who weren't scared. We kept organizing more people in the store. Finally, we won the election and the lawsuit for back wages. However, our boss refuses to give us a work contract. That's why we have called for a boycott of the store. Our struggle continues. This is the sad reality of the Golden Farm workers. That's why I've joined my friends and co-workers to learn English so that we will be able to stop the abuses by bosses like Sonny Kim.

Besides being a supermarket worker, Roberto Ramirez is a dedicated community organizer, a student, and a loving father. He has spent over two years fighting for better conditions at the store where he works in Brooklyn, NY. Roberto participates in classes through the NYCC ESL Program.

If you are an undocumented worker, you still have rights!

1. The right to be paid: You have the right to be paid minimum wage and overtime. If you do not receive all of your pay for time you worked, you can recover that pay.