

# LABORPRESS

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## RWDSU Local 3 Demands New Contract

By Marc Bussanich, LaborPress City Reporter

Cars, taxis, trucks and buses honked their horns as they passed Bloomingdale's flagship store on 3rd Avenue on Wednesday, April 18 to show their support to the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union Local 3 members who rallied outside the store to demand a new contract from the company.

About 2,000 members, who work as sales clerks, shelf stockers and clerical workers at the 100-year old store, have been working without a contract since March 1. Both the union and company agreed to a 60-day extension so that negotiations could continue, but that window is slowly closing.

Cassandra Berrocal, President of RWDSU Local 3, said that the union is now at a crucial time in the negotiations because of the company's position to eliminate its nine percent share of health care contributions for each employee.

Some of the company's other proposals, to the union's chagrin, is a new rating method in determining each worker's productivity, as well as reducing the number of workers covered by a new collective bargaining agreement, leaving them without union protection.

In contrast, the union is seeking "substantial general wage increases each year of the contract, including for waiters and waitresses," among some other proposals.

Berrocal told LaborPress that the union wants the elimination of what's known as Associate Development Reviews of salespeople because "we believe it is not fairly applied to our members. The company's sales' expectations for our salespeople are beyond achievable."

Another point of contention between the two entities is that the company wants a seven-year contract, while the union is seeking four years.

Cassandra said she's hopeful that the two sides will reach an agreement before or by May 1, but if there is no agreement by then, "we'll have to take it to our membership."

Stuart Appelbaum, RWDSU's President, told LaborPress that Bloomingdale's is doing extremely well, and that it's time that the workforce be treated with dignity and respect.

"If Bloomingdale's parent company, Macy's, can invest \$400 million to renovate its flagship store at Herald Square, it certainly should be investing in their workers as well."

During the rally, Appelbaum told Local 3 members that company sales are up 5.6 percent from last year and is enjoying improved financial performance across the board for three consecutive years.

“Company executives have described business as ‘terrific.’ Business is so good that Macy’s CEO Terry Lundgren’s compensation jumped 23 percent last year,” Appelbaum said.

Allen Mayne, an RWDSU International representative who has been involved in the contract negotiations, said that both sides are talking, but the company hasn’t been responsive on the economic issues.

“They want to take from one area to give to another area,” Mayne said. For example, the company wants to take money committed to members’ medical benefits and then direct it towards members’ wages.

“They say the members will be earning higher wages, but at the expense of their health care benefits,” said Mayne.

What is frustrating to the union’s negotiating team is that four years ago the union agreed to the company’s request to pare back members’ wages, but now that the company is successful the union is asking the company to recognize the workers’ past sacrifices.

“We feel what the employees deserve is much more than what the company is willing to give, so we’re still at a considerable distance on this issue, but at least we are talking professionally,” Mayne said.

The United Food and Commercial Workers Union’s Vice President Richard Whalen told the rallying Local 3 members that, “You are at the leading edge throughout the country. The retail industry is looking at this struggle and what you do here will set the tone for the whole industry nationwide. This is a very, very important fight for both labor and the middle class.”

He told LaborPress he hopes recent organizing victories at other chains such as H&M and French Connection will attract other non-union retail workers to approach the union about organizing.

Carlos, who works as a supervisor on the nightshift, has been at Bloomingdales for 25 years. He says that the workers need better health insurance and a better salary to cover the cost of living.

While CEO Lundgren supposedly earned \$14.5 million last year, Carlos said he’s earning about \$14 an hour.

“If the company is successful, we deserve to have the same success,” he said.