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Bloomingdale's Workers Rally for Better Wages, Benefits

By Tracey Samuelson

Workers at Bloomingdale's flagship location on 59th Street rallied outside the store Wednesday, asking why the company's strong profits are not translating into better compensation for its workers.

"Bloomingdale's is just fine — no, they are doing more than just fine — they are raking it in," said Stuart Appelbaum, the president of the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union. He addressed a crowd of more than 75 workers and union members wearing green t-shirts.

The flagship store's roughly 2,000 unionized sales clerks, shelf stockers and clerical workers are demanding better pay and benefits from the iconic department chain. The current contract expired March 1, and the workers are in the midst of a two-month extension while negotiating with the store.

Bloomingdale's declined to comment on ongoing negotiations, but said they are working to find a solution that's "fair and equitable to both parties."

But workers say a fair contract would better compensate them.

"We're the ones who make their millions and we get nothing in return," said Elva Ruiz, who's currently on leave from the store's children's department while she gets cancer treatment.

In her five years working at Bloomingdale's, Ruiz said she's only received a 15 cent raise. She added that she sold \$541,000 worth of merchandise last year and is owed thousands of dollars in commission she has yet to receive.

Macy's, the parent company of Bloomingdale's, has reported three consecutive years of improved financial performance, Appelbaum told the crowd, adding that CEO Terry Lundgren took home \$14.5 million in compensation last year. Compensation for Lundgren in 2011 included a \$1.5 million salary, stock and option awards worth \$7.7 million and cash-based performance bonus of \$5.1 million, according to documents filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission

If workers are still without a contract May 1, they say they will consider the possibility of a strike.

“If that’s what it takes in order for them to give us what we deserve, then I’ll be right here on this picket line,” said Ethel Sorrell, who works in the store’s housewares section and has been with the company for thirty years. “I just want Bloomingdale’s to take a look at us and realize that most of on this line have been with this company for years — 30, 40, 20, 25 years...We’ve helped this company move up the corporate ladder, make their bonuses, get their raises, and now it’s time for them to look back on us and help us.”

With the Associated Press