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May 2, 2012

## Bloomingtondale's Workers Claim Big Gains in New Contract

MANHATTAN — Bloomingdale's workers ratified a new five-year contract Wednesday, which includes wage increases, improved benefits and more control over hours and scheduling under a new, five-year contract that the union negotiated, officials announced Wednesday.

The hard-fought deal, which came after a large rally by workers in front of the iconic flagship store on East 59th Street and Lexington Avenue, also includes a provision about returns — one of the biggest issues for workers.

Sales staff lose commissions on any item returned up to 180 days after it is purchased. That period will shrink to 120 days over the next five years — though it will not affect how long customers will have to make returns.

Workers told DNAinfo that store policies of accepting returns — even on damaged goods — might be a boon to shoppers but it eats away at their paychecks by nixing commissions.

The contract will also give workers a \$3.05 per hour wage increase over five years, lower costs for their existing healthcare plans as well as provide seniority protections and scheduling flexibility, according to Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Local 3.

Senior Bloomingdale's employees, for instance, will get first dibs on selecting hours, and all workers will get to choose one weekend off a month and which late nights they'll work.

"This contract is truly a miracle on 59th Street," Cassandra Berrocal, president of RWDSU's Local 3 said in a statement. "Overall, it's the best contract we have ever negotiated, and it will improve the lives of our members for many years to come."

The scheduling aspects of the contract were considered a major victory as advocates claim that retail workers have been struggling with underemployment and have been having trouble getting the hours they want — and deserve.

A recent study of the city's retail industry revealed that only 17 percent of workers have a regular schedule, the union noted.

The contract also includes paternity leave and LGBT nondiscrimination language for the first time. Commission rates for many will be increased and the employee evaluation system will be changed, according to the terms of the agreement.

"You're supposed to be a salesperson, but we do so much more," Damaris Morales, 46, who has been as a saleswoman at the store for 15 years, said at the April 18 rally. "We clean. We stock. We're therapists for the customers," she said, noting that her customers share with her intimate details of their sex lives, dating foibles and extramarital affairs.

"You have fun here, you just wish you were appreciated," she said before the new contract was signed.

Bloomingtondale's spokeswoman Anne Keating said that "last night's positive vote covered a significant portion of a new contract, but we still have some work to do toward full ratification. "