

Spotlight turns a new leaf with collective agreement with retail union

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Workers at Spotlight have won a pay rise of more than 10% and the restoration of a raft of conditions under a new union-negotiated collective agreement.

The negotiation of the new agreement highlights the benefits of union collective bargaining for both workers and employers.

It also marks a significant turn-around for the national retailer.

Spotlight came under scrutiny during the Howard Government's Workchoices era for moving its staff onto Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs) that stripped back penalty rates and pay rises. In 2006, the company even offered an employee, Annette Harris, an AWA that traded away her penalty and overtime conditions in exchange for a 2c per hour pay rise.

But since engaging with the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association (SDA), Spotlight has embraced collective bargaining. In doing so it has improved the conditions of its 6000-strong workforce.

National Secretary of the SDA, Joe De Bruyn, said that the significance of the new agreement lay in its restoration of all of the penalty rates that were lost with the introduction of AWAs.

"It's not so much about the pay rises in the agreement," said De Bruyn, "but that these workers are again covered by an agreement, with the involvement of their union, that returns all of their penalties that had been lost - the rest breaks, the tea breaks - all of the things they used to have."

Among a number of improved conditions, the agreement provides for:

- A 10.4% pay increase over three years
- The restoration of penalty rates
- An extra week of redundancy pay for employees over the age of 45 (with At least two years experience)
- The right of employees to request up to three days of paid leave where a parent's childcare arrangements have fallen through, and
- Two days of unpaid carers' leave.

Employees will also be able to access natural disaster leave and paid leave will be available for voluntary firefighters.

Mr De Bruyn commented that Spotlight's re-entry into a productive relationship with the union represents "the most remarkable change in a company that the SDA has ever seen."



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"They've gone from a company that was not dealing with the union to one where, we believe, we've got a relationship as strong as if we'd been dealing with the company for the past 30 years."

"We hope that more retail employers will take on this enlightened approach under the new laws," said Mr De Bruyn.

Improved rights to collectively bargain are a central feature of the new Fair Work industrial laws, which came into effect from 1 July 2009.

The Spotlight agreement was voted up by more than 85% of staff in September and is due to come into effect on October 5.