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Job Losses, Broken Promises after Bell MTS Merger

4-5 minutes

Treaty 1 Territory, Homeland of the Red River Métis, Winnipeg MB-
Manitoba Liberals say Bell MTS needs to be held to account for breaking its promise to Manitobans to keep jobs in the province, when Bell MTS has put workers through round after round of downsizing and layoffs while cutting back on basic investments in the province.

In May 2016, Bell Canada Enterprise Inc. (BCE), announced its intention to purchase MTS for an estimated 3.9 billion. One of the first decisions of the newly elected PC Government of Brian Pallister in 2016 was whether to support Bell's buyout of MTS. Critics were concerned that the lack of competition would mean higher prices and worse service for Manitobans. The PCs supported the merger anyway.

The change of ownership eventually occurred in March 2017. Bell made a series of commitments to Manitobans when the merger took place - including making Winnipeg the hub for Bell's Western Canadian operations, and making new investments in service.

Instead, Bell reduced its footprint in the province, and through multiple rounds of layoffs has reduced investments in maintenance

and service expansion.

TEAM - IFTPE Local 161, which represents Bell MTS workers, says there have been nine rounds of downsizing from their bargaining unit alone since the Bell MTS merger. The most recent one was just announced on May 9th, targeting up to 31 positions in Information Technology for reduction, almost a quarter of remaining IT jobs in TEAM. Since 2015, TEAM jobs in Manitoba have been cut by over 50% down from over 1,200 to less than 600 today, with almost 300 jobs lost under Bell in the past 5 years.

And it's not just TEAM jobs that Bell is cutting from Manitoba, both IBEW Local 435 and Unifor Local 7, which represent technicians and clerical and call centre employees here, have also experienced significant reductions from their memberships.

"Instead of increasing investments, Bell MTS reduced investments in our province by cutting jobs, and they are outsourcing work when there are qualified people in Manitoba who can do the jobs," said Dougald Lamont, Manitoba Liberal Leader and MLA for St. Boniface. "Bell MTS hasn't kept its end of the bargain, and the PCs are letting them get away with it."

TEAM currently represents almost 600 working Manitobans employed by Bell Canada across a variety of fields of work including, IT, Network Engineering, Sales, Marketing, Business Administration, Customer Operations, and Finance.

According to Erin Spencer, TEAM's Executive Director, "We're in negotiations with Bell right now, fighting to increase job opportunities for our members and to keep skilled, well compensated telecommunications jobs in Manitoba. Bell admits the jobs can be performed in Manitoba and that employees here

have the skills and qualifications to do the work but won't provide us with the opportunities. There appears to be no shortage of work available throughout Bell, jobs are being posted with multiple possible work locations across the country, but Manitoba is excluded time and time again."

Liberals say it also appears workers are being pressured out of the union in various ways if they want to take on national roles with the company.

"Bell's not bringing job opportunities to Manitoba because they would be union jobs," continued Spencer, "Our members have been told if they want access to national roles they have to relocate and leave their current pension plan and union. Bell said they bought MTS to grow it, not shrink it, but all we've seen is reduction after reduction."

"These are good, high-paying Manitoba jobs in a company that has cut back everywhere. Bell MTS needs to be held to account for not keeping up its end of the bargain," said Lamont.