

# IFPTE *Outlook*

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## TEAMwork Secures Win for Local 161

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# TEAMwork Secures Win for Local 161

**A**fter a year of hard bargaining, TEAM/Local 161 reached an agreement with MTS Allstream Inc. (MTS)—without the inclusion of a company-imposed defined contribution (DC) pension plan.

The deal was reached on February 23rd after a marathon, twenty-two hour bargaining session. As reported in the October-December 2007 issue of the IFPTE OUTLOOK, MTS tried to strong arm the Bargaining Committee by issuing a date-specific termination of the collective bargaining agreement and an implied threat to impose unilateral changes to TEAM's terms and conditions of employment—both effective February 25, 2008.

On April 1st, members voted overwhelmingly to ratify a

three-year agreement, which was unanimously recommended by TEAM's Bargaining Committee. One of the Bargaining Committee's key goals was attained when management removed the DC plan from the bargaining table. The DC plan was a flawed attempt to impose a two-tiered pension plan system upon the Local. TEAM also maintained their right to challenge the introduction of a DC plan for new employees based on the unsettled multi-union defined benefit (DB) pension lawsuit.

"I'm very happy with what we've achieved," said Bob Linsdell, Local 161's Business Manager. "We were able to look [management] in the eye, and there was nothing they could have threatened us with that would have made us cave. Our





members gave us a clear mandate to fight this DC, and we gave our commitment to follow through on that mandate."

**Other highlights from the agreement include:**

- Wage increases of 2.0, 2.5, and 2.5 per cent, effective in February of each year (2007-2009), with full retroactivity;
- The variable pay (merit) plan was extended to employees in the lower pay grades, and increased to 6 percent for upper grades;
- New protection for TEAM members against the contracting out of TEAM bargaining unit work, and a reduction in the number of allowed contractors (to 70 from 90);
- Scope of TEAM recognition is not restricted to Manitoba;
- New protection against discrimination and harassment in the workplace and for union activity;
- New wording for parental, bereavement, and compassionate care leave;
- Improvements in layoff provisions, including employees in danger of being laid off replacing contractors, and up to four weeks of training so that they may do so; and
- A new labour-management committee to deal with outstanding and new issues.

The role of TEAM's members was crucial to their success, and through the use of the Communication Action Network (CAN), they maintained contact, grew member involvement, and were able to continually exchange information throughout the process. In fact, their participation demonstrated to MTS that the bargaining issues were far more important to the members than they had anticipated coming into negotiations.

"Becoming part of a larger labour body was a crucial step in TEAM's victory," Linsdell said. "I don't believe we could have achieved what we have without the IFPTE, and their expertise in developing communications networks and organizing," he said. "Their expertise in how to rally members, connect and keep them informed, and listen to them was invaluable." IFPTE Representatives Bill Fitzpatrick, Brian Lawson, and Anna Liu were all active in TEAM's organizing and negotiations.

Said IFPTE President Greg Junemann, "This bargaining session has been, at times, a long and exhausting affair; however, we are delighted that we now see the results of an overwhelming display of solidarity and teamwork. We congratulate everyone involved, particularly the members of this proud Local."

For the first time in its history, TEAM also had support from the wider labour movement. "We had some of our own resources, but we had offers of financial resources from Local 160, the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL), and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC)." Said MFL President Darlene Dziewit, "You all did an outstanding job, in extremely challenging circumstances, given the anti-union, anti-worker stance taken by the employer." TEAM's win against MTS essentially protected the pensions of 6,000 Manitobans.

The Local's members turned down MTS Allstream's "final offer" last September, with a remarkable 85 percent of employees voting. Linsdell said "The members deserve to

feel good about this win. We asked them to vote "NO" to the company's 'final offer' and they did just that."

TEAM's Unfair Labour Complaint seemed to be a catalyst that compelled MTS to drop the DC from negotiations. The Canada Industrial Relations Board (CIRB) recognised TEAM's complaint against MTS as both serious and significant, and expedited the hearing. At the February 19th hearing TEAM argued that MTS's attempts to impose the DC plan was a violation of the Canada Labour Code. The violation would have been even more egregious given TEAM's \$100 million dollar pension lawsuit which is still pending before the court. Moreover, the company tried to make the DC a condition of renewal of TEAM's collective agreement.

TEAM sought a CIRB directive to remove the proposal from the bargaining process, and a declaration from MTS that key aspects of their November 27th offer be preserved if they removed the DC proposal from the negotiations. With MTS's removal of the DC plan from the bargaining table, the major roadblock, as well as TEAM's complaint before the CIRB, was swept away.

"Local 161 members' determination was remarkable," Linsdell said. "The members were strong. Even those who'd be most vulnerable to a lockout, for example single parents and single income families, weren't wavering."

Heartfelt congratulations were expressed by IFPTE's Secretary-Treasurer Paul Shearon. "Congratulations to the Bargaining Committee, and most especially the members. As a union, you have a proud history, yet the Local has moved so far in such a short period of time. You held off this attack by MTS Allstream and redefined your negotiations for the future."

After this impressive win, the time had come for the bargaining committee and CARs to 'let their hair down' and enjoy their victory. On May 14th, TEAM held a "thank you" celebration. The event was relaxing and enjoyable, and allowed the members to spend some well-deserved time together. This celebration was to also thank those supporting organizations who assisted TEAM throughout the process. Representatives from Local 160, IFPTE, IBEW, the Winnipeg Labour Council, the Manitoba Federation of Labour (MFL), Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), and the Telephone Retirees Association of Manitoba (TRAM), joined TEAM's legal team (D'Arcy & Deacon), bargaining team, executive committee, and Communication Action Representatives for the event.

As for the company's other unions in Manitoba, the IBEW has settled their contract - without the DC - and with similar pay increases and company health plan contributions. The CEP is currently in conciliation with MTS due to scheduling and seniority issues. The DC is still on the table for the moment because it is attached to a proposal yet to be addressed. It goes without saying that TEAM will support CEP's members to achieve their common goal—the total elimination of the DC pension plan.

With their labour relations issues behind them—for now—TEAM members have moved forward and can now fully focus on a bright and fulfilling future in their careers with MTS.

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