

Five workers left without jobs, severance

Liberals blame government, government blames Abitibi

BY DAVE BARTLETT dbartlett@thetelegram.com

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Who's

to blame that five former AbitibiBowater workers are jobless and will not get severance or holiday pay?

The Liberals say the provincial government is because it bungled the expropriation of Abitibi's assets without ensuring the workers would be protected.

But Innovation, Trade and Rural Development Minister Shawn Skinner says the company is responsible because of the collective agreement it has with the unions which represent the workers.

For the second day in a row in the House of Assembly, Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones hammered the government Tuesday over the issue.

"When you expropriated those assets, you must've looked at what liabilities you were expropriating as well," she said.

When the province's energy corporation, Nalcor, took over the paper company's electric generating assets at the end of last month, 17 employees moved to Nalcor. But five others were bumped out of their jobs by more senior workers as per their collective agreements.

Skinner said both unions representing the employees were consulted and both agree with the government that it's the company that should be held accountable.

He also said the employees knew they would be bumped out of their jobs. "They were issued their bumping notices by AbitibiBowater and it is our position, Nalcor's position and the position of the union that represents these members, that it is AbitibiBowater that owes them the benefits that are due to them," he said.

Skinner noted the unions filed a grievance — and an arbitrator will be assigned to sort out the mess — after the company said the workers were not its responsibility.

"(Abitibi has) made a heartless decision, in my opinion, to indicate to these employees that they will not be following through on their obligations," Skinner said.

But Jones accused the government of passing the buck to the company and said the issue arose because the province was too hasty to expropriate.

"You failed to provide for the workers and I ask you, what is government and Nalcor going to do to ensure that these workers get the benefits that are owed them, because the company says 'it's not on, they now work for you,'" Jones said.