

Liberals want province to help laid-off workers at North Atlantic

MHA for the area says government's hands are tied

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LABOUR
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The provincial Liberals are calling on the government to get involved in a dispute at the North Atlantic refinery in Come By Chance.

Monday marked the start of the fifth week of an information picket held by some temporary and part-time workers who have been laid off.

At the heart of the matter is the company's decision to contract out construction work.

Liberal Leader Yvonne Jones met with the workers, their union and the company last week.

She says it's time the Williams government steps in to save the 100 to 200 jobs.

Tony Penney is a spokesman for the workers who have been holding the information picket.

"From the look of it right now, that's the only help we got is really from these leaders of our communities, and our politicians ... to try and straighten this out," says Penney.

"The bottom line is (the company is) doing us wrong."

But company spokeswoman Gloria Warren-Slade says the issue isn't about rehiring workers.

"The issue is we have decided to contract out work," says Warren-Slade.

"Over the years, we've been running a refinery and a construction business. So, in order to now concentrate our efforts more on our expertise, which is refining ... we don't want to have our management time taken away from running a refinery to going into running a construction business anymore, because we found in the past we weren't doing a very good job of that."

But she says the issue is not with the quality of

work of the laid-off workers.

Warren-Slade also says the company has encouraged the contractor to hire some of the former employees, but she says that has to be up to the contractor.

Penney says the new company isn't going to hire the workers on the picket because most don't have union cards.

Penney also wants to know where Calvin Peach, the MHA for the area, is.

"He hasn't shown his face on our picket line in five weeks," says Penney.

Peach admits he hasn't been on the line with the workers, but he says he's been diligently working behind the scenes to try to help the workers.

Peach says he's met with the union, the company, mayors in the area and has talked to some of the workers.

But he says there's not much government can do that it hasn't already done.

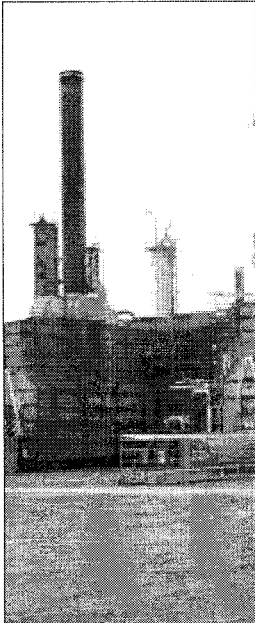
"It's a private company that's been operating here. And they have a unionized shop and our hands are tied, really," Peach says.

He says the union has told him that it has grieved the contracting out of work and that it should be going to arbitration soon.

Penney says the workers on the line are slowly going to Alberta or finding other jobs in the area.

"I think that's (the company's) plan, to hope we are going to go away."

He says the laid-off workers will hold their picket for as long as they can — at least for another two or three weeks — unless the company reverses its decision.



Several heating units at the North Atlantic Refinery are shown in a file photo. The Liberals are asking the Williams administration to step in to help workers laid off by the refinery. — Telegram file photo