



Media Release Rail & Maritime Transport Union
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Final Decision on Port Jobs a Huge Blow for Timaru

Prime Port in Timaru today confirmed that more than 50 jobs on the waterfront will be slashed by the end of September; something the Rail and Maritime Transport Union says is a direct result of government inaction.

Port workers in Timaru have been left hanging since early July when shipping lines Maersk and Hamburg Sud announced they were to cease calling into Timaru from the end of this month.

'This do nothing government is sitting on its hands while hundreds of jobs are being destroyed around New Zealand. In recent weeks we've had KiwiRail saying it'll lay off almost 200 track workers, Hillside Workshops put on the sale block, Solid Energy axing jobs in Huntley and at Spring Creek, Comalco cutting jobs at Bluff, Norske Skog cutting production in the Bay of Plenty and now these redundancies in Timaru,' said RMTU General Secretary Wayne Butson.

'The tragedy is that much of this could be avoided with sensible and timely government intervention. For example, the lack of a national ports strategy forces publically owned New Zealand ports to compete with one another and allows foreign owned shipping companies to dictate terms on the waterfront', he said.

'What is even more galling is that this National led Government continues to allow these very same shipping lines to be exempt from the Commerce Act so they can plunder our publically owned ports.

'The losers are hardworking Kiwis and their families who are left to pay the price for John Key and his mates sitting back and letting this happen. The social and economic costs of this inaction are huge; unemployment is a scourge that destroys communities especially as the vast number of the job losses are in our vulnerable smaller towns that are already struggling to survive under this Government', said Wayne Butson.

'Until sense prevails and government starts to actually govern and protect employment and conditions instead of pretending that all this should be left to the market to determine we will continue to haemorrhage jobs,' he said.

'It seems the only time this Government is prepared to intervene is when their monied mates are at risk and then they wade in as we saw in the South Canterbury Finance bailout'

'Many of the Prime Port waterfront workers are highly skilled, those that can will look at crossing the ditch to join thousands of their compatriots in Australia whilst the rest of us face a pretty bleak future here,' said Wayne Butson.

'Today is a black day for the people of Timaru as their town becomes the latest casualty of National's blind faith in market forces,' he said.