

BHP to cut 300 Pilbara iron ore jobs as unions impose sellout deals

Martin Scott
16 October 2026

Australian multinational mining giant BHP announced on October 14 that it will eliminate about 300 operational roles across its South Flank, Mining Area C (MAC), Newman and Jimblebar iron ore mines in Western Australia's (WA) Pilbara region. The company employs around 14,000 workers at the four operations.

It is not clear whether the 300 figure includes around 150 job losses already flagged at MAC in late August. At that time, BHP told workers that some roles would be made redundant as driverless trucks—already in use at South Flank, Jimblebar and in other parts of MAC—were extended to the MAC East pit.

The job cuts in the Pilbara come as unemployment continues to rise nationwide. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reported on Thursday that the jobless rate had increased by 0.1 percentage points in September to 4.7 percent, the highest level since October 2021.

BHP, the world's largest mining company in terms of market capitalisation, claims the cuts are in response to falling iron ore prices—down 14 percent since January—and higher fuel and shipping costs, resulting from the US-led war of aggression against Iran. In fact, the company reported US\$14.5 billion in iron ore earnings for the 2026 financial year, on the back of record-high production of 265 million tonnes, a figure it expects to increase by a further 12.5 percent in 2026–27.

The state Labor government tacitly endorsed the job cuts and signalled its commitment to ensuring they go smoothly. Pilbara Minister Amber-Jade Sanderson said the government would make sure “job and skills centres” were ready to help workers find alternative employment—a mechanism to divert workers away from a struggle against the multinational corporation slashing jobs to drive up profits.

The unions covering BHP workers in the Pilbara issued token denunciations of the job cuts, before immediately pledging their assistance in delivering them, by ensuring workers' opposition is diverted into safe channels.

The Western Mine Workers Alliance (WMWA), a partnership of the Australian Workers Union (AWU) and the

Mining and Energy Union (MEU), said it would meet BHP “to understand the details of how many roles maybe impacted and likely timeframes.” It would also seek “ways to reduce the number of forced redundancies and mitigate the impacts of this process for MAC members.”

In a similar vein, Electrical Trades Union (ETU) WA secretary Adam Woodage declared: “The ETU's engagement in that consultation will be robust, and we will require the company to provide proof that every redundancy is genuinely required.”

In other words, the union bureaucracies accept—with minor quibbles over details—and are promoting the framework presented by the company, that times are tough, cost savings must be found and there is nothing workers can do to prevent the destruction of their jobs.

In an attempt to cover over both the union's complicity and the underlying capitalist logic behind the job destruction, Woodage labelled the cuts a “senseless attack” and “another sad reflection of a once-great Australian mining company that has lost its way and forgotten its values.”

This is a fraud. These job cuts are not the product of moral failings by a company that has “lost its way,” but of an economic system in which everything is subordinated to profit. BHP workers cannot defend their jobs through appeals to the company's “Australian values.” Workers, wherever they are in the world, share their values with the global working class, not with the CEOs and shareholders of corporations that happen to be based in a particular geographical region.

The reality is that the three unions have been working for months to engineer a situation in which many BHP workers in the Pilbara are legally barred from fighting the destruction of their jobs. Under Australia's draconian anti-strike laws, introduced and repeatedly tightened by union-backed Labor governments since the early 1990s, workers can only take protected industrial action during narrow enterprise bargaining periods.

Two of the four targeted operations, MAC and South

Flank, are covered by a four-year enterprise agreement that BHP pushed through in early July by a tiny margin—just 938 of the 1,814 workers covered voted Yes.

While the bureaucrats made a show of denouncing this “non-union agreement,” the company was only able to ram it through because the unions presented workers with no alternative way forward. Despite overwhelming strike votes, little significant industrial action was ever called, and such stoppages as did take place were swiftly shut down in response to company threats to dock wages.

Moreover, the unions systematically isolated the MAC and South Flank workers from the around 450 operators and maintenance workers at BHP’s Port Hedland export terminal who voted overwhelmingly to strike for the first time in two decades. The bureaucrats ensured this action was delayed, allowing the company to secure the Mining Area C and South Flank agreement before any joint action could be taken at the mines and the port.

The first stoppage at Port Hedland, on July 16, lasted eight hours. The unions made no attempt to stop BHP’s use of strikebreakers, and did not allow a “hard picket”—that is, workers were prevented from blocking access to the terminal. All seven ships scheduled that day were loaded.

The unions then announced a 48-hour action for August 8–9. Days beforehand, the AMWU reduced this to 24 hours for its members. For the action that went ahead, the unions told workers to stay home: There was no picket line or demonstration.

No strike has been called at the port since then. After workers rejected another wage-cutting offer from BHP last month, the unions announced they would ask the Fair Work Commission for an intractable bargaining declaration, which would prevent workers from taking any further action and allow the pro-business industrial court to arbitrate the dispute.

The result is that thousands of BHP’s Pilbara workers have been divided up and their disputes have been tied up in Fair Work procedures and arbitration, leaving them legally powerless to fight as the company moves to destroy hundreds of jobs.

The BHP cuts are part of a broader wave of job destruction in mining and related industries. Mining employment in WA fell by 21,301 in the year to June 2026. Direct employment in the state’s battery and critical minerals industry fell 34.1 percent in 2025, including a 30.4 percent fall in lithium and a 54.3 percent fall in nickel and cobalt.

Recent cuts include:

- Gina Rinehart’s Hancock Iron Ore cut 300–500 jobs across its Pilbara operations in June.
- Mineral Resources shut down its Lucky Bay garnet mine near Kalbarri, WA, on July 1, impacting about 110 workers.

- In April, Premier Coal in Collie, WA, began cutting at least 120 roles, starting with contractors and labour-hire workers.

- More than 200 workers at the Buzzard iron ore mine in South Australia were stood down at the start of October, and up to 50 contractors also face losing their jobs.

- South32 has begun redundancy consultations at its GEMCO manganese mine on Groote Eylandt in the Northern Territory as it seeks to cut \$129 million in costs.

- At the Whyalla steelworks in South Australia, which also mines iron ore, the administrator confirmed 500 job cuts in September with the closure of the blast furnace, along with 100 labour-hire positions.

- Yancoal’s Ashton underground coal mine in the NSW Upper Hunter, which employs more than 300 people, is being closed in stages by early 2028.

Mining workers cannot fight back against these sweeping cuts behind the leadership of the trade unions. They are not workers’ organisations, but an industrial police force, defending “Australian” capitalism—and through it, their own material privileges—from the very workers they claim to represent.

BHP and other mining workers need to build rank-and-file committees, democratically controlled by workers themselves and independent of the unions. These committees should unite workers across the Pilbara, throughout the mining industry and more broadly in a common struggle against the destruction of jobs, wages and conditions.

Such a struggle means a fight against the anti-strike Fair Work laws, and its architects and ardent defenders, Labor and the union apparatus. The fight against job destruction therefore requires a political break with Labor and the building of an independent political movement of the working class, based on a socialist program.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact