

Workers Struggles: Asia, Australia and the Pacific

17 April 2026

The World Socialist Web Site invites workers and other readers to contribute to this regular feature.

South Korea: Hyundai subcontract workers demand negotiations

Seoul Hyundai subcontract workers rallied on Wednesday outside the Hyundai Motor Group headquarters in Seocho-gu to demand negotiations in line with the August 2025, Trade Union and Labour Relations Adjustment Act. The protest was organised by the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) and Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU).

The amendment established a legal basis for subcontracted employees to bargain directly with principal employers. Any entity that substantially controls workers' terms and conditions of employment is recognised as an "employer." Principal employers include Hyundai Motor, HD Hyundai Heavy Industries and Hyundai Steel.

After the amendments came into force on March 10, over 20,000 subcontract workers from 58 branches of the KMWU submitted formal bargaining demands to 18 principal employers. About 1,000 subcontractor unions have demanded negotiations with over 300 main contractor workplaces, but only around 30 have initiated the negotiation process.

The rallying Hyundai workers came from several branches of the KMWU, including the Hyundai Motor and Kia branches, Hyundai Motor's non-regular workers' branch, and several affiliates. Hyundai Motors has not agreed to begin negotiations with subcontracting unions. Workers want job security to counteract mass layoffs due to increasing use of factory robots.

A Korean Confederation of Trade Unions representative called for Hyundai Motor to commence immediate negotiations or face three months of general strikes commencing in July.

India: Uttar Pradesh police attack workers protesting for minimum wage

A five-day protest which began on April 10 by 30,000 workers from different factories in Noida, Uttar Pradesh, turned violent when police intervened. Roads were blocked and vehicles burned after police began physically attacking the protesters. Many workers were arrested and charged. The Uttar Pradesh chief minister threatened striking workers with disciplinary actions and dismissal.

Workers were demanding the minimum wage on par with the newly set wage for factory workers brought into law by the neighbouring Haryana state government. Workers rejected an offer of interim increases.

Motherson automobile factory workers in Rajasthan demand minimum wage

Around 1,500 Motherson spare parts factory workers at Bhiwadi, in Rajasthan, protested on April 14 to demand minimum wages. Workers, including women, maintained their action in defiance of violent physical attacks by police. Many were arrested.

Jharkhand: Terminated Tata Motors workers end protest at Jamshedpur plant

Terminated workers from the Tata Motors factory at Jamshedpur, Jharkhand ended a 30-hour factory gate protest on Wednesday, following assurances from the government. The District Labour Commissioner provided a written assurance that the department would examine their demands and take appropriate action.

The workers had seven demands. These are an end to the alleged harassment of workers under the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS), reinstatement of workers allegedly terminated on false charges, resumption of apprenticeship programs, absorption of TMST recruits into the Tata Motors payroll, including diploma training and job guarantees and permanent employment opportunities for second-source workers. Workers also want settlements (within three months) for families of deceased employees and a job for one family member, fair and transparent elections for the Tata Motors Workers' Union.

The auto workers said that the next phase of the protest would take a more aggressive turn, potentially including a blockade of all company entry gates if their demands are not granted.

Aurizon Coal train drivers in New South Wales strike for pay rise and better conditions

Rail Tram and Bus Union (RTBU) members from four New South Wales coal rail terminals serviced by Aurizon Coal struck for 30 hours on April 12 as part of ongoing industrial action seeking improved pay and conditions in Aurizon's proposed enterprise agreement. The action followed a two-day strike on March 22 in response to management's refusal to pay workers participating in legally authorised partial work bans.

After 11 months of negotiations Aurizon offered a 19 percent pay increase over four years. Some 97 percent of RTBU members rejected the offer. Workers want a 29 percent wage increase over 3.5 years and a

\$7,500 upfront cash payment along with improvements in conditions. Workers are demanding the “reset” pay increase to compensate for sub-inflation increases during the COVID pandemic.

The RTBU said it has “serious concerns” about Aurizon’s management culture. The company was recently referred to the rail safety regulator over allegations of bullying and coercive behaviour towards its workforce. Last month the Fair Work Commission found Aurizon had taken unlawful industrial action against its workers, directing employees to leave or not complete work simply because they would not confirm whether they would drive a vehicle displaying an RTBU campaign sticker.

Aurizon transports about 40 million tonnes of export and domestic coal per year. According to the union, Aurizon’s net profit for the financial year 2025 was \$303 million.

Northern Territory iron ore mine workers stood down without pay

About 40 workers at the Nathan River Resources (NRR) Roper Bar iron ore mine in the Northern Territory (NT) have been stood down without pay with the company blaming the current fuel crisis.

An Electrical Trades Union (ETU) spokesman rejected the fuel crisis claim, saying the company had been in trouble for some time and not paid hundreds of thousands of dollars of superannuation to workers. “We’ve got 27 redundancies that haven’t been paid correctly. People haven’t been paid their wages for four weeks,” he said. A former worker told the media that he is owed \$40,000 in unpaid superannuation entitlements.

NRR management has refused to talk to the union or media. The matter was raised with the NT Country Liberal Party government, but the territory’s mining and energy minister wiped his hands of the issue saying, “The department’s role does not extend to the company’s day-to-day employment matters.”

The Australian Workers Union (AWU) responded by saying the situation was “not acceptable,” and called for staff to be redeployed. No further action has been called by the AWU or ETU.

BHP electricians in the Pilbara, Western Australia commence industrial action

About 60 high voltage electricians employed at BHP iron ore mine sites in the Pilbara region, Western Australia began industrial action on Thursday in their campaign for an enterprise agreement to replace current individual contracts. It is the first industrial action in the Pilbara region since the mining company de-unionised their operations in the 1990s.

Electrical Trades Union (ETU) members began two weeks of industrial action that included bans on overtime, callouts, higher duties and mentoring new employees.

Workers are demanding wage parity across the region’s mines to overcome the 30 percent wage differences in the current individual contracts, protection of current conditions, transparent annual wage adjustments, objective measurable career progression, recognition of travel time and time on call, and higher duties. The ETU threatened to strike if BHP failed to bargain in good faith and meet members’ demands.

The highly skilled electricians maintain a power network across BHP’s mine sites, worker accommodation and in the nearby town of Newman. BHP is the largest mining company globally and the second-largest public company in Australia.

Wilmar Bioethanol plant workers in Victoria take industrial action

On April 9, six key workers at the Wilmar BioEthanol plant in Yarraville, a suburb of Melbourne, commenced industrial action in support of their wages and conditions demands in a new enterprise agreement. Australian Workers Union (AWU) members have banned labelling containers leaving the factory and the use of forklifts. Products cannot be dispatched from the facility unless they are labeled.

Negotiations began at least six months before the last enterprise agreement expired in November 2025. The union has accused Wilmar of “unproductive and unsatisfactory behaviour at the bargaining table.”

In a ballot on March 19 the workers approved wide-ranging work bans and strike action, from one hour to indefinite stoppages, bans on overtime, use of radios, forklifts and the labelling of drums and containers.

The AWU has not made public its wages and conditions demands. In the 2022 agreement endorsed by the union workers received sub-inflation annual pay increases in a four-year agreement of only 2.93 percent. This was well below the consumer price index rate of the December quarter 2022 of 7.8 percent, followed each year by 4.1 percent, 3.8 percent and 2.5 percent. The current CPI rate for Melbourne is 4 percent and forecast to increase.

Wilmar International is a large highly profitable transnational company turning over \$US67 billion a year.

Library workers at Melbourne metropolitan councils join ongoing industrial action

On Thursday, library workers at Melbourne metropolitan councils, including Darebin City, Greater Dandenong City, Hume, Maribyrnong City, Melbourne City, Merri-bek City and Yarra City joined with council rubbish collectors, parking officers and a number of others to impose wide ranging bans for better wages and conditions in a new multi-employer enterprise agreement (EA).

The library workers action is in parallel with current industrial action by Australian Municipal, Administrative, Clerical & Services Union (ASU) colleagues that commenced on April 4 with multiple work bans and rubbish collectors striking for 24 hours.

The ASU is demanding an initial 10 percent wage rise, followed by 4 percent annual increases, along with improved safety and parental leave. The union says its members have lost 7 to 12 percent of their wages in real terms since 2021 and is blaming the governments rate capping policy for previous sub inflation wage growth. The state Labor government has limited council wage growth in 2026-27 to a below inflation 2.75 percent.



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