

# French hospital workers strike against Macron's health cuts

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While the Senate adopted the 2022 health bill on Tuesday, hospital strikes against the deterioration of the health system that began in March in Paris are now spreading throughout France.

Health Minister Agnès Buzyn and President Emmanuel Macron have turned down all the demands of hospital staff despite rising anger among workers. Already, Macron has refused to make any concessions to demands of “yellow vest” protesters that he put an end to his policy of austerity and war. He reacted by launching riot police against the “yellow vests,” leading to mass arrests of thousands of protesters, dozens of whom have been mutilated by the cops.

On Monday on the set of the BFM-TV news channel, faced with demands for an increase in staff and salaries, Buzyn dismissed out of hand “the idea of a new salary increase for carers.” She bluntly said, “But when the concern is purely about wages whereas it is the entire system that doesn’t work ... honestly, the problems won’t be solved just because I pay you more.”

Despite €400 million investments to create medical assistant positions and finance rural or territorial health care, the 2022 health project plans to cut €3.8 billion from health budgets. There is rising anger and concern among hospital staff, who fear a drastic deterioration in working conditions.

Hospital staff began striking in Paris in March, and these strikes have now spread to 95 emergency wards across France. Demonstrations are planned in Paris and in the provinces.

Faced with rising anger in the hospitals, the trade unions have called strikes to protest against the lack of resources at the University Hospital of Bordeaux, as well as of Libourne, Agen-Nérac and Pau. All hospital staff in the neurological and cardiological services at Albi are also on strike to demand “a better quality of care and acceptable working conditions.”

Staff at Lariboisière Hospital, in the 10th arrondissement of Paris, mounted a sickout in the night from Monday to Tuesday.

Terrified by this growing movement, the Macron government deployed police-state measures against hospital workers, with requisitions issued by the gendarmerie to deprive staff of their constitutionally protected right to strike and require a return to work. In the emergency room of Lons-le-Saunier, health workers were requisitioned by order of the police prefect. The authoritarian methods first used against “yellow vests” are being deployed against all workers in struggle.

WSWS reporters spoke to Fanny and Chloé, nurses at Saint Louis Hospital in Paris, who denounced the lack of beds and staff when there are more and more people who need them. “Before, people arrived at the hospital, and we had beds for them in separate rooms,” one said.

Chloé added: “Over the past year, a year and a half, that has changed. There are no more beds, they’re full. People sleep on stretchers in the emergency corridor all night long.”

Fanny pointed out that three or four years ago there was one caregiver for every 10 people, but now it’s one for every 14. “The problem is money. There is money, but it’s the politicians who decide what to do and we the people, we have no power to decide. We don’t feel anyone listens to us at all. Our work is not recognized in fact, but it is essential for the population. Our salary has not changed since 2010.”

Fanny told the WSWS that they can earn almost €1,700 a month, but have to work on several public holidays and weekends. She compared the deterioration in the working conditions and living standards for hospital staff to that of other civil servants: “My sister is a teacher. They always cut classes and there are more children in the classes. It’s like us, because they’re closing down the services.”

The WSWS also spoke to Maryline, who works as a

doctor in Nancy. She said that ruling circles “do not want to invest in hospitals. ... They are happy that public hospitals are deteriorating and that there are more private clinics, and that only those who can afford them can go to private clinics.”

She added, “There is now a crisis in the hospital system. They offer doctors 1,500 euros for 24 hours of work if they come to regions where there is a shortage of doctors. If someone doesn’t come to work, there’s a problem. But many employees have health problems, and in some services there are working conditions that are difficult, and people do not stay. Nurses are paid only 1,300 euros per month, but they have many responsibilities. We need more nurses and more caregivers. We can’t treat people like this anymore. When people wait, their health deteriorates.”

Fanny explained that there is plenty of money, but the Macron government and its predecessors are setting out to destroy social rights established by previous generations of workers struggles, looting the education and health system to extract more money from them. For the first time in 18 years, the Social Security system is running a surplus. This is due to the gutting of retirement pensions and family benefits in 2019 and 2020.

The policy adopted by the Macron government in its “social dialogue” with the union bureaucracies is deeply regressive. These austerity cuts in healthcare and the surpluses generated are used to finance Macron’s tax cuts for the rich and to finance the massive military spending increases, so that France and the EU can wage neocolonial wars in Africa and the Middle East.

The creation of a public health service that meets the needs of the masses requires a broader struggle of hospital staff, mobilizing together with other sections of workers in France and internationally. To this end, workers must create their own organizations of struggle, independent of the trade unions, to defend social rights and lead a political fight against war and the police-state preparations.



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