

## **Women's rights at the heart of the fight over pensions in France**

by Peoples Health Dispatch

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This year's International Working Women's Day in France holds special significance because of a nation-wide call by trade unions and people's movements to bring the country to a standstill from March 7

For the first time in the history of France, trade unions have called for a two-day general strike that will extend to March 8, International Working Women's Day. The general mobilization will begin on Tuesday, March 7, and it is expected to cause widespread protests all over the country. This is the first time since May 1968 that trade unions have issued a joint call for a general strike that will last for more than 24 hours.

While actions for March 8 have grown in strength over the past years, this year's mobilizations are expected to be particularly powerful. For the first time, it is social movements as a whole, and not the feminist movement alone, that is calling for the strike on International Working Women's Day. This is an essential element in the reinforcement of the fight for equal social rights, and a spark of hope for the future.

In recent weeks, there has been an unprecedented proliferation of initiatives and assemblies for the strike of March 7-8, as well as meetings to seek to connect them to other ongoing struggles.

### Links between women workers' and health rights

This year, International Working Women's Day actions in France will be a tribute to all the workers who will be the first to experience the effects of Macron's pension reform, many of whom are women, whose jobs are invisible, careers cut short, and salaries inadequate.

A joint press release by eight French trade union confederations and the five students' associations is calling for action on the inequalities that women are still experiencing in the workplace. "Even in 2023, women's salaries remain on average 25% lower than men's," warn the associations in their release.

The income gap between women and men persists after retirement as well, according to the trade unions and student's associations. "Twice as many women work until 67 years of age, the maximum retirement age, but they receive pensions which are 40% lower than men. Also, 40% of women are forced to retire early and thus receive only partial pension," they said.

Trade unions and peoples' movements are calling for a recognition of the link between women's, workers', and health rights on March 8. In a joint press release by trade union confederations including *Solidaires Unitaires Démocratiques* (SUD), the General Confederation of Labour (CGT), the National Coordination of Committees for the Defence of Hospitals and Maternity Hospitals, and collectives like *Printemps de la Psychiatrie*, the movements are calling for unity on March 7 and 8 against the pension reform.

"On March 7 and 8, let us stand united to block the unacceptable pension reform and the policies that are destroying our health and social security systems," said the associations in their press release.

The pension reform is intrinsically linked to the health system, as social protection cannot be separated from work and employment. Raising the legal retirement age would also lead to an explosion of sick leave, as well as to an increase of payments for social benefits.

On the occasion of March 8, the national collective Our Health in Danger and 25 other organizations, unions, feminist associations, and parties are issuing early calls for actions in the week of April 7, World Health Day.

"Let's mobilise together to counter harmful policies and carry out our demands for access to health care and social support for all, all over the country, and without financial, geographical, cultural, digital, social, gender, origin or administrative discrimination," said the collectives in the call.

Whole of society approach to women's rights

Women's demands cannot be reduced to the question of wages and retirement alone. A national collective of 31 feminist and social associations, including the People's Health Movement France, reminds all those who will be joining the protests

that: “March 8 is neither Mother’s Day nor Women’s Day—it is the international day of struggle for women’s rights.”

The collective’s broad perception of women’s rights is supported by a number of local associations and 11 left-wing parties, all of which recognize the essential role that women play in society. This is why this year’s March 8 actions will be an occasion to demand the end of social and economic inequalities and the violence which results from them. More simply put, they will be an occasion to remind everyone that, without women, the world stops.

At this point, it is impossible to predict for how long the strike wave in France will continue, and whether it will be victorious. As we approach March 8, however, one thing is certain: equality of men and women is a necessary precondition for any social victory, which cannot be achieved without the involvement of this half of the sky.

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