

Ontario to Bordeaux to Spokane: The escalating climate crisis and the fight for socialism

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More than 65,000 people have been evacuated from Spokane, Washington, as a complex of wildfires burns through working class neighborhoods and forces the displacement of roughly one in four of the city's residents. For the second time in two weeks, a major city might go up in flames as climate change induced by capitalism continues unabated.

The climate crisis worldwide is increasingly dire. The fires earlier this year in Canada and northern Minnesota, the fires currently burning in Africa and the Middle East, and the fires across Southern Europe that threatened to burn down Bordeaux are other examples of modern extreme weather events. All are the result of the anarchic nature of capitalist production, above all, of fossil fuel industries spewing greenhouse gases into Earth's atmosphere at an unprecedented rate.

And the warming is getting worse. A recent study by the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research found that, over the past decade, Earth's average surface temperature has increased by roughly 0.35°C (32.63°F), compared with just under 0.2°C (32.36°F) per decade from 1970 to 2015. This calculation is after removing the effects of El Niño, volcanic eruptions and solar cycles, and appears across five major global temperature datasets with more than 98 percent statistical certainty.

The Spokane Complex Fire is one of the emerging dangers. It is composed of the Old Trails, Autumn Lane and Fairview fires, ignited on the afternoon of August 1 and spread rapidly through the city driven by winds gusting between 35 and 45 kilometers (56 and 72 miles) per hour. As of August 3, the complex had burned approximately 8,026 acres at 0 percent containment, destroying roughly 700 structures. Incident Commander Tom Clemo told the *Spokesman-Review*, "Probably the largest, most destructive fire in Washington's history

occurred yesterday afternoon."

The neighborhoods hardest hit, Indian Trail, Balbo and communities in northwest and north Spokane, are predominantly working class. Roughly 5,000 homes were under evacuation orders. Patients and staff at the Mann-Grandstaff VA Medical Center were evacuated, and the facility closed. More than 400 people took shelter at the Spokane Convention Center. Officials warn the destroyed structure count will rise as crews access burned areas.

Workers also face increasingly dangerous air quality. Spokane's AQI hit 218 today, "unhealthy," and is expected to hit 300 or more, "hazardous," tomorrow. At these levels, even going outside for mundane and routine tasks places workers at risk for difficulty breathing and heightens the risk of asthma attacks, lung disease, heart disease, stroke and more. The smoke has spread across much of North America, reaching as far south as Nevada, as far east as Minneapolis and well into British Columbia and Alberta. Thousands of firefighters from across the country, as well as Australia, have traveled to eastern Washington to combat the blaze.

At the same time, Washington Governor Bob Ferguson, a Democrat, issued a groveling statement on social media, announcing his conversation with President Donald Trump to access "federal assistance," claiming that Trump "expressed his concern for the people of Washington." Ferguson finished his kowtowing by writing that he "deeply appreciate[d] the President taking time to have this conversation."

Trump has in reality spent the better part of a decade campaigning to gut even the most minimal attempts to combat climate change. In his first term, he removed the United States from the 2015 Paris Accords and has been a consistent champion of reviving coal power plants across the country. He also spearheaded the rescission of the

Environmental Protection Agency's Endangerment Finding on climate change, opening the door to removing even more restrictions on the ability of corporations to pollute the atmosphere and destroy the planet's ecology.

And while Trump has taken very active measures that effectively accelerate climate change, he has purged the very scientists who have been sounding the alarm over the consequences of global warming. This includes warning that the record heat, prolonged droughts and accumulated forest fuel will produce increasingly devastating wildfires.

In Washington, this has manifested in the state suffering a drought for the fourth time in four years. As a result, the National Weather Service issued its first-ever "Particularly Dangerous Situation" Red Flag warning for Eastern Washington on Saturday. More than 1,000 fires have burned approximately 450,000 acres across the state in 2026, the worst season since 2021. As of August 3, between 15 and 17 major fires were burning on 250,000 to 262,000 acres. The Sinlahekin Fire tripled in size, cut power to roughly half of Okanogan County, and remains at zero percent containment.

The Kaiser Canyon Fire on the Colville Reservation has burned more than 129,000 acres, destroying homes, approximately 120 archaeological sites, and a Shaker Church, all of which are immense cultural losses to the Colville tribes and humanity as a whole.

The destruction in working class neighborhoods and among indigenous tribes stands in stark contrast to the wealth that could provide the basis for fighting the fires and taking measures against climate change. Amazon, Microsoft, Starbucks and Boeing are headquartered in Washington or have their roots there, and oligarchs such as Bill Gates, Steve Ballmer and Jeff Bezos each have a net worth of more than \$100 billion. The combined fortunes of the state's billionaires dwarf the cost of any conceivable emergency response, firefighting infrastructure investment or climate adaptation program. Yet workers in Spokane are sleeping on cots at the convention center and waiting to learn whether their homes still exist.

And this is nothing compared to Trump's \$1.5 trillion military budget request for the war in Iran and further wars abroad. Trillions more are spent on bailouts to the banks and major corporations after every major economic shock.

The gutting of firefighting resources and the lack of action on climate change are entirely bipartisan. Wildfires, hurricanes and other extreme weather events

became prevalent under the Obama administration, which did not provide the necessary funding to develop more weather-resistant infrastructure, while Biden did nothing to reverse the reactionary trajectory set out under Trump's first term to undermine climate research and dismantle necessary protections for workers. It was under Biden in 2023 that wildfire smoke choked New York City in the same manner in which Detroit and Chicago suffered just weeks ago.

More fundamental, however, is the underlying contradiction bound up in capitalism itself. Climate change is an inherently global phenomenon, one that cannot be dealt with as long as rival nation-states compete for markets, resources and trade routes. Even ostensible efforts to mitigate climate change, in the form of carbon credits, has become a financial asset on which the oligarchy enriches itself.

The only real solution can come from the working class, the only genuinely international social force on the planet, and the one which is historically equipped to overturn the underlying cause of climate change, capitalism. This must be part of an international program and perspective directed toward abolishing the socioeconomic system that prioritizes private profit and replaces it with one that uses the wealth generated by the collective labor of the working class to meet human need.

The colossal wealth of the bourgeoisie, as well as that of the banks and major corporations, must be expropriated and used for the full compensation of every family that has lost a home or possessions, regardless of insurance status; emergency requisitioning of vacant housing to shelter the displaced; income protection for all workers unable to work due to evacuations; and the immediate mobilization of every available firefighting resource without constraint from cost. The fires burning today are the product of capitalism. Extinguishing them permanently requires socialism.



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