Thousands evacuated from their homes as wildfires rage across Canada

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More than 900 wildfires are currently burning across Canada, with dozens of them out of control. Over 120 of these are raging in British Columbia.

Residents of well over 2,000 properties had been evacuated in Canada's West Coast province under 32 orders as of Friday. By Sunday evening, the province reported that a further 5,000 residents had been ordered to leave their homes over the preceding 24 hours. Sections of the Trans-Canada Highway have been closed due to the flames. Close to 900 properties were ordered to evacuate on Friday alone due to the Pear Lake wildfire, which was burning out of control near Clinton, while most of the evacuations on Saturday and Sunday came in the north Okanagan due to a fast-moving fire near Vernon.

In Northern Ontario, over 3,000 residents from at least 13 communities, including 12 First Nations reservations, were forced to flee their homes in mid-July. The Ontario fires, which began accelerating around July 13 during a major heat wave, drove the highest air quality pollution levels ever recorded on the North American continent as the smoke carried across the Great Lakes, impacting over a hundred million people in both Canada and the US.

They also placed the lives of thousands in imminent danger, including at the Namaygoosisagagun (Collins) and Whitewater Lake First Nations. Indigenous leaders have complained that they were given government evacuation orders only one or two hours before their communities were engulfed in flames, and next to no support in fleeing to safety. Namaygoosisagagun First Nation Chief Helen Paavola has said her community burned to the ground in less than an hour "without warning from any ministry and without assistance from anyone."

In a clear violation of the Railway Safety Act and Labour Code on July 13 near Armstrong, Ontario, Canadian National sent rail workers down tracks that had been in the epicentre of the fires for over five weeks. The workers—as documented in the tweet below—were "encased in flame." They were forced to abandon their train, fleeing on foot, and were later treated for smoke inhalation.

Much like the profit-before-lives imperative of the ruling class during the COVID-19 pandemic and the abandonment of public health measures, decisions about whether to run production, transport freight, or send workers outdoors during hazardous conditions are driven by employers' calculations about their bottom line and shareholder returns. No restrictions or safety measures were put in place to protect workers at plants, factories, and other worksites across industrial locations in Ontario and the US Midwest. Some workers at Ford's Michigan Assembly Plant in Wayne and the Dearborn Truck Plant required hospitalization after being forced to work in the sweltering heat and bad air.

For more than two decades, Canada has experienced severe wildfires, including the devastating blazes in Kelowna, British Columbia, in 2003 and 2009, and the catastrophic Fort McMurray, Alberta, fire of 2016. A record-breaking year for wildfire activity was registered in 2023, with over 6,000 fires burning more than 15 million hectares of land.

Climate change is the key factor driving the rapid increase in the scope and intensity of wildfires. Warmer temperatures remove moisture from trees and vegetation, creating ideal conditions for blazes to erupt. Higher wildfire activity in turn fuels climate change. If the carbon emitted from Canadian wildfires in 2023 was considered as a country, it would have produced the four-highest emissions in the world, behind only China, India and the United States.

Yet Canada remains the only member of the G-7 without a national wildfire firefighting service. The job of suppressing fires and coordinating emergency responses remains in the hands of the provinces and territories, with the federal government offering only the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre to coordinate resource sharing, and limited wildfire research capabilities. As part of its sweeping austerity program in the 1990s, the federal Liberal government gutted the Canadian Forest Service from 2,200 to 700 staff, undermining environmental research capabilities.

At the provincial level, the adherence by governments of all political stripes to the straitjacket of public spending austerity has left fire suppression efforts chronically overstretched, while mitigation and prevention efforts remain totally inadequate. While acknowledging that warmer temperatures and drought conditions produced by climate change are the main cause of Canada's prolonged wildfire seasons, experts stress that the failure of governments to take the issue of fire prevention seriously has massively exacerbated the crisis. Funding for proactive forest management, including clearing vegetation and other flammable debris, has been neglected or simply ignored.

Moreover, Canadian capitalism's ruthless plundering of the natural environment to extract ever greater profits puts human life in greater danger. The rapid expansion of resource-extraction towns is increasing what researchers refer to as the "wildland-

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urban interface," areas where built-up towns and cities directly border forests or land with lots of vegetation that serves as prime fire fuel during dry periods of weather. The dangers contained in this process were exemplified by the more than 2,000 properties destroyed in 2016 by the wildfire in Fort McMurray, a resource town built essentially in the middle of nowhere over the past four decades to facilitate the extraction of oil and other natural resources from Alberta's tar sands by the profit-hungry energy corporations. Governments at all levels facilitate this process by enforcing low corporate taxes and business deregulation.

Provincial governments continue to allocate the bare minimum of funds for fire suppression. In Ontario, Premier Doug Ford's right-wing Progressive Conservative government allocated a mere $135 million for firefighting in 2025, but ended up spending more than twice that sum ($271 million). For this year, just $150 million has been allocated, even though everyone knows that more resources will be required. The end result of this deliberate underfunding is that permanent staff and suitable infrastructure cannot be maintained. As far back as 2016, reports have repeatedly criticized Ontario's wildfire suppression efforts for the failure to retain and recruit personnel.

A similar picture exists in British Columbia, which has been governed by the New Democratic Party since late 2017. Environmental organizations have criticized the government's failure to invest in active forestry management, which has resulted in the closure of several mills in recent years and the consequent loss of forestry expertise. A report earlier this year by the BC Auditor General pointed to serious problems in disaster management in the province following a fire in June 2021 that destroyed much of the village of Lytton. According to the investigation, "At the time of the fire, the province did not have a comprehensive legal framework to guide disaster recovery, and its funding mechanisms did not anticipate the scale of the village's needs.

"The province expected the village to lead its own recovery, but the village lacked the staff and funds to do this."

In February 2026, BC had only a meagre $25 million available for its Fire Smart program, an initiative that aims to provide education and training to residents about how to reduce the risk of fire damage. The responsible government minister admitted that the program "ran out of money."

Tackling wildfires and the problem of climate change that is their root cause requires a global strategy. The disruptions to weather patterns linked to climate change are no less indifferent to national borders than the smoke from wildfires that has blanketed wide swathes of the North American continent. The global character of the crisis is underlined by the wave of fires tearing across Europe, which have displaced hundreds of thousands of people from France to Turkey, Greece and Spain, and the drought conditions gripping large parts of Africa, leaving millions of people to starve.

However, this necessary international collaboration is prevented by crisis-ridden capitalism, whose irreconcilable contradictions are deepening the antagonisms between the major powers and driving the escalation of world war as they fight for access to resources, markets and cheap labour. This reality was underscored by the response of US President Donald Trump to the wildfires. The fascist occupant of the White House, who has openly denied climate change and removed virtually all restrictions on fossil-fuel exploitation, threatened to impose "a big tariff" on Canada because of the smoke from its wildfires that crossed the border into the United States.

As part of the ongoing trade war between the two countries, Trump is already pledged to introduce a 50 percent tariff later this month on Canadian imports that do not fall under the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement. The Trump administration is thereby intensifying its avowed goal of crashing the Canadian economy in order to turn the country into the "51st state" of the US.

The Canadian ruling class has responded with retaliatory tariffs of its own, the whipping up of reactionary "Team Canada" nationalism, and a turn to stronger economic and military-strategic relations with the European imperialist powers and other countries. Their opposition to Trump does not reflect any rejection of his reactionary agenda of imperialist war and the destruction of workers' democratic and social rights, as can be seen by the sharp escalation of austerity, rearmament and authoritarianism in Canada. Rather, Ottawa wants its rights as a junior partner of Washington to be recognized so that it can continue to pursue its predatory global interests in alliance with US imperialism.

However these inter-imperialist tensions play out in the coming months and years, they serve as a roadblock to all efforts to deal with climate change and all of its disastrous consequences, including wildfires and the systematic destruction of the natural environment. That can only be accomplished through the mobilization of the international working class on the basis of a socialist program to establish a workers government committed to deploying through democratic planning all of society's resources and scientific knowledge in the interests of the vast majority of the population, not the financial oligarchs and their bank balances.

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