

British Columbia declares state of emergency as wildfires force 22,000 from their homes

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British Columbia's New Democratic Party government declared a province-wide state of emergency Saturday as rapidly spreading wildfires forced close to 22,000 people from their homes and threatened thousands more.

The emergency was declared after the Bald Range wildfire exploded west of Summerland in the Okanagan Valley.

Cliff Chapman, director of provincial operations for the B.C. Wildfire Service, told reporters Saturday that the weather conditions which fuelled the rapid spread of the fire in Summerland had been "never seen before," explaining, "The conditions we face in B.C. right now, in particular in the southern third, are explosive."

As of Monday afternoon, some 21,400 people from over 12,000 properties remained evacuated, with a further 11,000 on high alert. One person has been confirmed dead, and the province's major population centres in the south are facing yellow and orange air quality warnings.

First detected Friday evening, the fire expanded to roughly 50 square kilometres within three hours and by Saturday had burned more than 100 square kilometres, racing toward Okanagan Lake. All 12,000 residents of Summerland were ordered to evacuate, while orders spread through Peachland and surrounding communities.

Helicopters diverted from firefighting operations rescued more than 50 people trapped by the advancing flames. Premier David Eby acknowledged that homes and other property had been destroyed, although officials have not yet established the full toll.

Even before the losses around Summerland can be assessed, the devastation this season in British Columbia is immense. Separate fires in the Cariboo region and on the Okanagan Indian Band reserve have destroyed about 350 buildings, most of them homes. Some 230 homes were destroyed by the Bradley Creek fire alone.

More than 100 wildfires were burning across British Columbia over the weekend, with nearly half classified as out of control.

The devastation driven by capitalist-induced climate change shows no concern for arbitrary international borders.

Just to the south of British Columbia in the United States, hundreds of homes have been destroyed and thousands of residents displaced by rapidly spreading fires in Spokane, Washington.

Canada's fire season this year has forced thousands to flee their homes, including in northern Ontario and the Northwest Territories. Smoke from these fires has poured across the continent, choking millions.

Across the Atlantic in Europe, fires have sent thousands fleeing for their lives and blistering heat has caused more than 25,000 deaths.

The increasingly ferocious wildfire seasons sweeping the globe are directly bound up with the burning of fossil fuels. A World Weather Attribution study released Thursday found that global warming has sharply increased the likelihood of the extreme fire weather experienced this summer.

Combining observations with climate models, researchers concluded that the most intense seven-day fire weather in the Northwest Territories was made about five times more likely by 1.4 degrees Celsius of global warming, while prolonged 30-day conditions were made twice as likely. In Ontario, both measures were made about twice as likely.

The study warns that simultaneous fires and their rapid growth are stretching personnel, aircraft and equipment, while Indigenous and remote communities face disproportionate dangers because of limited evacuation routes and inadequate infrastructure.

"If you care about anyone but the super-rich, you have to stop burning fossil fuels, because the impacts are here and are now and have huge consequences for all lives and livelihoods of people in all countries," study co-author Friederike Otto stated bluntly at a press conference.

The worsening climate catastrophe and increasingly urgent warnings from climate scientists have been met by the Canadian ruling class with criminal indifference.

Earlier this year, the trade union-backed NDP government in BC indicated that it would not renew its FireSmart Community Funding and Supports program, which provides training and advice to help residents of high-risk communities to mitigate fire damage. It eventually provided a one-time \$15 million top-up as a sop to popular outrage.

Demands from experts for the establishment of a national wildfire-fighting force to coordinate efforts across Canada have been ignored by the federal Liberal government. Canada is the only member of the G7 without a national wildfire firefighting agency.

Governments that claim resources are limited when communities need wildfire prevention, the training and deployment of professional firefighters and infrastructure upgrades to adapt to new climate conditions have repeatedly mobilized enormous sums when the interests of the ruling elite are involved.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* has documented, Ottawa

committed just \$800 million to wildland fire response, prevention and mitigation from 2019 through 2024. This is a pittance compared with the \$650 billion mobilized to sustain corporate Canada during the opening phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, \$41 billion in military expenditure in 2024-25 and \$8.5 billion in fossil-fuel subsidies in 2024.

Under Prime Minister Mark Carney, the diversion of society's resources into militarism has accelerated. Ottawa increased defence spending by more than \$9 billion in 2025-26 to reach 2 percent of GDP, approximately \$63 billion, and has pledged to meet NATO's new target of 5 percent by 2035.

The condition of Canada's fire services shows the consequences of these priorities. The Great Canadian Fire Census reported 123,608 active firefighters in 2024, 71 percent of them volunteers. Almost half of departments were using out-of-date apparatus, while nearly one-third said they lacked adequate training to confront wildfire threats.

At the same time, Eby's government is accelerating the resource-extraction and fossil fuel burning agenda which is stoking the climate crisis. Its "Look West" strategy, which has been accelerated by the sharp crisis in Canada-US relations since Trump returned to the White House, seeks \$200 billion in private investment over a decade by speeding up major projects and expanding mining, oil, liquefied natural gas (LNG) and defence-related industries. The Ksi Lisims LNG project is among \$88 billion in proposed major projects the government says could move ahead within three years.

The NDP's conduct flows from its character as a right-wing capitalist party. Federally and provincially, it uses "progressive" rhetoric and its intimate ties to the trade union apparatus to contain working-class opposition and subordinate workers to the requirements of Canadian capitalism.

The trade union bureaucracy is indispensable to this operation. In 2022, after 95 percent of 30,000 BC General Employees Union (BCGEU) members voted to strike, the union bureaucracy shut down the struggle and pushed through a below-inflation settlement that passed with just 53 percent support. The teachers', hospital workers' and other public-sector unions followed with similar real-wage-cutting agreements.

Stephanie Smith, then BCGEU president, simultaneously sat on the BC NDP executive that disqualified Anjali Appadurai from the party's 2022 leadership contest. Appadurai's campaign, which prominently featured action on climate change as part of a supposed turn to the "left," threatened Eby's coronation.

These organizations provide the NDP with its "labour" credentials, while suppressing independent working-class struggles against austerity. Their support allows Eby to posture as a friend of working people while his government imposes wage restraint, abandons promised relief and fast-tracks corporate investment.

Eby and the NDP are following in lockstep the right-wing course set by Carney's Liberals in its nationalist "Team Canada" agenda—the nationalist policies adopted by corporate Canada to defend its interests in response to Trump's threats to annex the country and crash its economy.

The former central banker has declared his intention to make Canada an "energy superpower," with the twin aims of expanding

oil and natural gas exports to boost corporate profits, and strengthen Ottawa's geopolitical position under conditions of sharpening conflicts between the major powers over natural resources. Carney's first official act as prime minister in March 2025 was to sign an order in council eliminating the consumer carbon tax. Reporters were ushered into the first cabinet meeting to film him signing the order, in political theatre modeled on the Trump administration. Carney explicitly linked the measure to a broader drive to make Canadian corporations more "competitive."

The Trudeau Liberal government laid much of the groundwork. It purchased and vastly expanded the Trans Mountain pipeline while popular opposition to fossil-fuel infrastructure has meanwhile been met with repeated crackdowns.

Armed RCMP units repeatedly raided Wet'suwet'en territory over protests against the Coastal GasLink pipeline. In 2016, Liberal Natural Resources Minister Jim Carr publicly raised the possibility of deploying the military against pipeline protesters before subsequently walking back his comments.

Tens of billions of dollars are made freely available for corporate profits, military rearmament and strategic resource projects. Regulations are swept aside and the repressive apparatus of the state is mobilized when these interests are threatened.

Meanwhile, working people facing wildfires, toxic smoke, mass evacuation and the destruction of their communities are left with emergency declarations issued after catastrophe has struck, and overstretched crews confronting increasingly uncontrollable conditions.

Liberal, Conservative and NDP governments all defend the capitalist profit system that drives the climate crisis and blocks the coordinated response required to confront it. Economic life remains subordinated to private accumulation and divided among rival nation-states pursuing competing corporate and geopolitical interests. These conditions make rational international planning to halt global warming impossible.

A genuine response to protect the population requires a massive expansion of professional firefighting forces, modern equipment, forest management, evacuation infrastructure and climate-resilient housing. Most fundamentally, the power of the financial oligarchy over social life must be broken and the production forces placed under democratic control, so that a scientific plan can bring about the rapid shift away from fossil fuels for energy production and usage internationally.

The social resources consumed by corporate subsidies, fossil-fuel expansion and preparations for war must be redirected toward human need. Achieving this requires the independent political mobilization of the international working class against capitalism and the socialist reorganization of economic life under democratic public control.



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