

Wildfires devastate Indigenous lands, air

By Will Hodgkinson

Across the northern part of North America, wildfires continue to rage, threatening Indigenous lives and nations of people. Originally clustered in the First Nations occupied by Western Canada, the fires have spread across the country, with blazes reported as far east as the 13 First Nations in the province known as Nova Scotia. As of June 7, at least 423 wildfires are burning, of which authorities have said at least 246 are out of control. (Workers World, May 5)

So far this year, at least 2,200 wildfires have burned over 9.39 million acres of Indigenous land. This is the worst year for Canadian wildfires on record. (foxweather.com, June 5)

The wildfires continue to devastate First Nations and Métis communities, whose on-reserve citizens remain at disproportionately high risk from wildfires compared to other Canadian residents. Over the past month, thousands of Indigenous people have evacuated; many of them continue to go without electricity, clean water and adequate shelter. (The Narwhal, Aug. 10, 2021)

Recently, the fires have spread to the Algonquins of Barriere Lake and the Lac Simon Anishinaabe First Nation, forcing the residents to evacuate. As of June 6, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg Nation was also preparing to evacuate.

“It’s devastating at the moment,” said Casey Ratt, Chief of the Algonquins of Barriere Lake Nation in a June 6 Canadian Broadcasting Corporation interview. “We don’t know which way the fires will go because of the winds. We’re surrounded by fires in the north, east, west. It’s just a



Algonquins of Barriere Lake First Nation lands, Quebec, Canada.

PHOTO: WENDY RATT

scary time for our community.”

Residents and volunteers who have not yet evacuated report lacking access to masks and other basic safety protections. Canadian authorities have closed the Barriere Lake Nation’s nursing station, leaving those still in the area at risk.

Ratt said, “We can’t get any masks from [the station] or any type of medical services should something happen to our community members.”

Smoke from the fires has smothered Canada and has blanketed the U.S. Northeast. Air quality alerts remain in effect across both regions, affecting at least 90 million people in the U.S. and Canada. During the week starting June 5, the New York and New Jersey area experienced the heaviest smoke in the U.S. Northeast.

New York – worst air quality on Earth

On June 7, New York registered having the worst air quality of any city on Earth. Pictures and videos taken that day show the city shrouded in an orange-colored

smog that blotted out the daylight and made the streets and buildings unrecognizable.

According to health experts, breathing New York City’s polluted air for 24 hours is equivalent to smoking six cigarettes. This pollution disproportionately affects low-wage workers, the elderly, people with disabilities, immunocompromised people and unhoused people.

On June 8, the smoke moved south, covering Washington, D.C., which also ranked for a time as one of the world’s worst cities for air quality. (cnbc.com, June 7)

Despite the dire risks the smoke poses, New York City Mayor Eric Adams’ administration has kept schools and businesses open and refused to distribute masks or any other forms of protection. These policies are endangering the lives of hundreds of thousands of workers, children and members of other at-risk communities.

Adams’ response — or lack thereof — reveals once again the inability of the

capitalist state to respond to public health crises, such as the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, which continues to infect, disable and kill thousands of people. (Curbed, New York Magazine, June 8)

Given this, it is hardly surprising that the ruling class has taken no meaningful action to address the climate catastrophe causing wildfires to rage around the planet.

Instead, in much of the world dominated by imperialism, corporate fracking, oil drilling and pipeline projects continue to devastate the lands of Indigenous people, who protect over 80% of Earth’s biodiversity. Canada, a global hub for the mining and fossil fuel industries, is one of the planet’s largest CO2 emitters, releasing over 675 million metric tons of carbon dioxide every year. (worldometer.com, 2016 figures)

Instead of acknowledging the systemic causes of the climate disaster, the bourgeois media tries to “greenwash” capitalism by touting neoliberal “market solutions,” such as privatized wind farms, nuclear power plants and mass electric vehicle (EV) production. Yet all these “miracle” technologies, supposed to “save” the planet, rely on the exploitation of Indigenous lands and resources that are destroying the planet.

As Canada’s ongoing wildfire outbreak makes clear, the system of capitalist settler colonialism, which is causing the climate crisis, cannot solve it. To truly combat this crisis, the millions of workers affected by climate change must stand in revolutionary solidarity with Indigenous nations around the world, as they fight to dismantle settler colonialism and take back their stolen lands. □

Confront the class behind climate change!

By Arjae Red
Buffalo, New York

I returned on June 1 from a delegation to the People’s Republic of China, landing in JFK airport in New York City after nearly a month out of the country. On the train home to Buffalo, we were delayed by about two hours due to brush fires. I thought this was odd, having lived in Western New York my whole life. Wildfires were never something I remember having to be concerned with, but I didn’t think much of it.

When I arrived at the train station, the friend who picked me up mentioned how dry it has been, that it hadn’t rained at all in the weeks I’ve been gone. Again, I found it strange, because droughts are also not something we tend to deal with here. I brushed it off, thinking that maybe I just never paid it any attention.

A few days later, I awoke to the comforting smell of what I thought was a campfire, not uncommon on Buffalo’s West Side in the summertime. But when I looked out the windows and saw the skies and streets

thick with smog, I knew something was wrong. This was something I had only seen before on the West Coast.

With climate disasters intensifying across the U.S. and the planet, from California wildfires to more hurricanes in the Southern gulf, many people here have taken comfort in the idea of the Northeastern U.S.

being a sort of refuge from natural disasters, particularly near the Great Lakes. But vicious blizzards — like the ones that struck Buffalo this past winter, leaving over 100 people dead — and now the smoke from Canadian wildfires drifting down to choke the East Coast, shatter that illusion of safety.

Global warming is no hoax

It is crystal clear that climate change is deadly real, and that there is nowhere to hide from its disastrous effects.

Rising temperatures and lack of rainfall are causing wildfire seasons in the U.S. and Canada to begin earlier

Air Quality Index - Particulate Matter

301 – 500	Hazardous
201 – 300	Very Unhealthy
151 – 200	Unhealthy
101 – 150	Unhealthy for Sensitive Groups
51 – 100	Moderate
0 – 50	Good

and last longer. The wildfires in Canada, which have been spreading for about six weeks, have burned through an area bigger than the entire state of Maryland. If this pattern continues, Canada will have its most destructive

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WW COMMENTARY

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MUNDO OBRERO WORKERS WORLD this week

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wildfire season in recorded history.

New York City climbed to the top of the list of worst air quality measurements in the world, peaking at an Air Quality Index rating between 350 and 400 on June 7, depending on the source of measurement. On the same day in Buffalo, the AQI reached at least 242. AQI is used by U.S. government agencies to measure air pollutants, with anything over 100 considered "unhealthy for sensitive groups," over 150 considered "unhealthy" for everyone, over 200 "very unhealthy" and over 300 "hazardous."

At the time of this writing, on the afternoon of June 8, Pennsylvania, Delaware and Virginia are being hit hardest, all with over 200 AQI, with the cities of Lebanon and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, topping 300. An increased rate of hospitalizations for people with respiratory illnesses has followed the week of smoke.

Just like with all disasters caused by imperialist monopoly capitalism — be they the climate catastrophe, war, poverty or hunger — the system breeds the problem, while individuals are left to fend for themselves. Unwilling to change the capitalist economic relations that underlie the problem, the ruling class's only solution is to tell us to wear a mask or buy an air purifier, ignoring that many people lack the money or transportation to go out and buy a purifier.

Climate catastrophe and white supremacy

During the outbreak of COVID-19 (the pandemic which is ongoing but largely ignored by the government at this point), people were told to stay home to avoid exposure to the virus. The most vulnerable in our class are forced to commute across cities on public transport, compelled by economic necessity to work regardless of air quality or other factors. This leaves Black, Brown, Indigenous and migrant workers — and all workers who do not have the option to work from home — at a particular risk. Houseless individuals are also at high risk.

This is just one way in which climate collapse is intimately tied in with systemic white supremacy and capitalist colonialism, as part of the global imperialist system with the U.S. ruling class at its helm.

The archetypal force of imperialism — the U.S. military — is also one of the largest polluters on the planet. Black, Brown and Indigenous peoples and migrants have always faced the brunt of imperialist violence, as well as climate destruction. Meanwhile capitalists like Elon Musk and Jeff Bezos, who are responsible for the mess, absorb themselves in their fantasies of a great escape to outer space, leaving the planet they've ravaged to burn to ash behind them.

The overwhelming majority of humanity — the working class and oppressed people of the world — cannot afford to be as shortsighted as their capitalist oppressors. We must understand that there is no easy escape for our class, and that the only way forward is a radical transformation in the mode of economic production. That is, a break from capitalist relations based on endless accumulation of profit and toward a socialist economy that puts the needs of the people and planet first and foremost.

This type of solution is possible, and many radically progressive measures have been taken by socialist countries, from the People's Republic of China making a systemic transfer away from fossil fuels, to the country-wide effort toward mass reforestation in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Decades of industrial pollution have been turned back in just a few years in China. The sky's the limit for what we can do through planning on a socialist economic foundation. Only this type of systemic approach can address climate collapse at the scope necessary to save the whole planet.

It's not too late, but it will require a deliberate effort on our part. By "our" I mean the whole working class. Every one of us has a role to play, not simply by recycling or buying an electric car but by organizing with our co-workers and neighbors to put a stop to this system and usher in a new world in which we can all flourish. □

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Workers World Party is a revolutionary Marxist-Leninist party inside the belly of the imperialist beast. We are a multinational, multigenerational and multigendered organization that not only aims to abolish capitalism, but to build a socialist society because it's the only way forward!

Capitalism and imperialism threaten the peoples of the world and the planet itself in the neverending quest for ever-greater profits.

Capitalism means war and austerity, racism and repression, attacks on im/migrants, misogyny, LGBTQ2S+ oppression and mistreatment of people with disabilities. It means joblessness, increasing homelessness and impoverishment and lack of hope for the future. No social problems can be solved under capitalism.

The U.S. is the richest country in the world, yet no one has a guaranteed right to shelter, food, water, health care, education or anything else — unless they can pay for it. Wages are lower than ever, and youth are saddled with seemingly insurmountable student debt, if they even make it to college. Black, Brown and Indigenous youth and trans people are gunned down by cops and bigots on a regular basis.

The ruthless ruling class today seeks to wipe out decades of gains and benefits won by hard-fought struggles by people's movements. The super-rich and their political representatives have intensified their attacks on the multinational, multigender and multigenerational working class. It is time to point the blame at — and challenge — the capitalist system.

WWP fights for socialism because the working class produces all wealth in society, and this wealth should remain in their hands, not be stolen in the form of capitalist profits. The wealth workers create should be socially owned and its distribution planned to satisfy and guarantee basic human needs.

Since 1959, Workers World Party has been out in the streets defending the workers and oppressed here and

worldwide. If you're interested in Marxism, socialism and fighting for a socialist future, please contact a WWP branch near you. □

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Vol. 65, No. 24 • June 15, 2023
Closing date: June 14, 2023

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Workers World (ISSN-1070-4205) is published monthly by WW Publishers, 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404, New York, NY 10001. Phone: 212.627.2994.

Subscriptions: One year: \$36; institutions: \$50. Letters to the editor may be condensed and edited.

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Periodicals postage paid at New York, N.Y. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Workers World, 121 W. 27th St., Suite 404 New York, N.Y. 10001.