

European heat wave devastates France

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By late Monday afternoon, 15,000 hectares of forest had burned, and 31,000 residents and tourists were evacuated from various localities in France's Gironde area into seven emergency shelters. Forest fires are currently burning throughout the Mediterranean, across Spain, Portugal, Croatia, Greece, France, and Morocco.

These massive fires are being driven by a record-breaking heat wave across France and Europe, the second of this year following temperatures in the high 30s°C in mid-June. Meteorologist François Gourand told the French Press Agency that conditions in southwestern France were a "heat apocalypse." On Tuesday, temperatures are expected to reach 41°C in Paris.

Several record high temperatures were recorded across Western France on Monday. According to MeteoFrance, Brest recorded a temperature of 39.3 degrees, a massive 4.2 degrees higher than the previous record from the heat wave of August 2003. Records were also broken in Nantes (42°C) and Saint-Brieuc (39.5°C). The highest temperature recorded on Monday in France was 42.6°C in Biscarrosse, this broke the record of 41.7°C which was only set during last month's heat wave.

Fifteen departments in Western France were under red heat wave alert until early Tuesday morning, while most of central, northern, eastern and southern France remain under an orange alert.

The Gironde region is currently facing two huge forest fires, one near the town of Landiras and the other in La Teste-de-Buch. The police prefect of Gironde, Fabienne Buccio, said on Monday that the fire is still spreading and that "the situation is not fixed." As of Monday afternoon, over 1,700 firefighters are fighting the blazes with the support of nine water-bomber planes.

Landiras, which has 4,100 inhabitants, has been fully evacuated and the residents placed into temporary

shelters. Many in La Teste-de-Buch, which has a population of over 26,000, have also been evacuated.

David Brunner, a firefighter with 30 years' experience, leading the efforts to extinguish one of the fires told *Le Monde*, "It's never-ending. I've never known a fire like this." A 26-year-old evacuee from La Teste-de-Buch told the newspaper, "We're climate change refugees."

The fires have been ablaze since July 12, when temperatures in the area were already in the mid-30s. Since Sunday, the fires have been fanned by record-breaking temperatures over 40 degrees Celsius and gusts of over 50 kilometers per hour on Monday. Although temperatures are due to drop in the Gironde region from Monday evening onwards, the Tuesday forecast is still dry with an increased wind speed of 70 kilometres per hour on Tuesday.

Forest fires of this extent in July are highly unusual, with the peak season usually in late August. Already in France this year over 32,800 hectares have been burned in forest fires, nearly five times the 7,000-hectare average for mid-July. Across the EU nearly 350,000 hectares have burned this year—three times larger than the mid-July average. Before the traditional forest fire season even begins in August, the losses are approaching the average of 500,000 hectares that has traditionally been lost over the course of an entire year.

The spread of forest fires across Europe in July has been caused by exceptionally dry ground, following an unusually dry spring, high winds, and back-to-back heat waves. The fires in the Gironde region have been further fueled by its high concentration of maritime pines, which have very high amounts of flammable resin.

The heat wave and the fires point to the impact of climate change across Europe and internationally. Over 1,000 people have already died from heat exhaustion in Portugal and Spain over the past week. It is likely

France will also see many heat-related deaths. Few measures have been taken to protect the elderly and vulnerable in France, while in many cities and regions temperatures have or will exceed the peaks reached during the two-week heat wave of August 2003, when 15,000 people in France died from heat exhaustion.

While the current fires in the Gironde appear to have had natural causes, in the middle of last month's heat wave the French army started a five-day forest fire in the Var region while testing Caesar guns, a 10-metre truck-mounted artillery piece. Eighteen of these guns, which cost €5 million per unit, have been sold to Ukraine as part of France's support for the NATO-led war against Russia.

Significantly, beyond the impact of the wars, the fuel burned to transport the worlds' militaries alone accounts for 6 percent of global carbon emissions. EU armies produce 24.8 million tons of CO2 per year, with the French army accounting for over one-third of that total.

Capitalist governments around the world have refused to invest in forest fire prevention methods and proper fire-fighting equipment, which would save hundreds of thousands of hectares of forest every year, billions of euros of destroyed property, and countless human lives. Recent forest fires in Algeria, Portugal and California, which claimed hundreds of lives and destroyed entire towns, have not led to any appreciable change in policy. It is clear that the major world powers are not simply unwilling but unable to mount any effective, globally-coordinated response.

While they take utterly inadequate actions to combat global warming and protect the population, there is a blank cheque for arms and weaponry to fund NATO's war with Russia in Ukraine that threatens to escalate into a third World War. The EU collectively spent over €198 billion on its armed forces in 2020. As France spends €41 billion on war and its military machine but neglects vital infrastructure amid global warming, tens of thousands of people are forced to flee their homes from deadly forest fires.

The fires raging in the Gironde and across the Mediterranean basin underline the necessity of mobilizing the working class in a struggle against militarism, war and the capitalist nation-state system. This is the only way to overcome the obstacles to mounting an internationally-coordinated campaign to

halt global warming and deal with the effects of climate change.



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