

# Canada should not need more red flags to prepare for extreme weather

The federal government needs to adjust course by continuing to fight GHG emissions while more fully embracing adaptation. Slowing the rate of climate change will buy time to adapt to weather that will be increasingly extreme.

Blair Feltmate



Opinion

**A**s Canada burns, swelters, or floods—sometimes all in one week—what will it take for all levels of government to prepare for extreme weather? The evidence is clear that action to date has been insufficient, and the costs are adding up.

In 2024, Canada set a record for insured losses of \$9.1-billion, to which we can add another \$27-billion in uninsured damage absorbed by governments, businesses, and individual Canadians. Twenty-five years ago, these costs (corrected for inflation and wealth accumulation) were about one-twentieth of those today.

Canada has the tools to limit the impacts of extreme weather that will certainly get much worse due to ongoing climate change. Let's consider some "red flags" that signaled the need to prepare for extreme weather that to date have been mostly ignored by federal, provincial, and municipal governments.

Environment and Climate Change Canada's 2019 report, *Canada's Changing Climate*

*Report*, said the country's climate "has warmed and will warm further in the future, driven by human influence [burning fossil fuels]. ... This warning is effectively irreversible."

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change followed Environment and Climate Change Canada's warning in 2021, reporting that, "it is indisputable that human activities are causing climate change. Human influence is making extreme climate events, including heat waves, heavy rainfall, wildfires, and droughts more frequent and severe."

Warnings continued. In 2022, the United Nations Environment Program declared, "there's no credible pathway to 1.5 C in place."

This is the heat threshold the earth must not surpass, relative to pre-industrial time, to avoid global economic and ecological failure. The planet hit 1.5 degrees Celsius in 2024-25.

Despite these warnings, optimists still pin hopes on movements—such as the Conference of the Parties (COP), which is

scheduled to meet in Brazil this November—to reduce global dependence on oil and in turn lower greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. They believe that this drop in GHGs will make adaptation pointless.

Is hope in COP justified? Probably not. In 1995, at COP1—that's 30 COPs ago—global oil use was 70 million barrels per day. In 2028, at COP33, the International Energy Agency forecasts oil use will be 106 million barrels per day, or 50 per cent higher than COP1.

Despite warnings surrounding extreme weather, federal spending on mitigating GHG emissions versus funding for extreme weather was 24 to one, respectively, from 2015 to 2024.

Canada needs to adjust course by continuing to fight GHG emissions while more fully embracing adaptation. Slowing the rate of climate change will buy time to adapt to weather that will be increasingly extreme.

Canada's National Adaptation Strategy (NAS), released in 2023, started down this path, and then stalled. Jerry DeMarco, Canada's environment commissioner, affirmed this lapse in his June 2025 report to the House of Commons.

The commissioner stated that the NAS "lacked essential elements to make it effective. The missing elements included a prioritization of Canada's climate change risks, an economic analysis to assign appropriate resources to different federal adaptation actions, a comprehensive fed-

eral action plan, and an effective framework for measuring and monitoring results."

The NAS called for "all hands on deck" to mobilize adaptation, supported by each level of government.

Tools to implement adaptation are available from many sources, such as the Standards Council of Canada, Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation, Insurance Bureau of Canada, and Canadian Red Cross. Canada has plenty of direction on adaptation.

As a cost-savings tool for Canada, adaptation is hard to beat. The Global Commission on Adaptation and the World Resources Institute independently recognize the return of investment of adaptation to be between two dollars and \$10 in savings (in avoided losses) per one dollar invested per decade. Any notion that adaptation is cost-prohibitive is wrong.

All lights are green for Canada to embrace adaptation. The well-being of the economy depends on it. Currently, the psycho-social costs of wildfires and floods are beginning to be tallied. In other words, soon there will be another red flag. Canada should not need more red flags to prepare for extreme weather.

*Dr. Blair Feltmate is the head of the Intact Centre on Climate Adaptation at the University of Waterloo. He was also chair of the Government of Canada's Expert Panel on Climate Adaptation and Resilience.*

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# The return of the wildcat strike?

Recent experiences demonstrate that strategic resistance, rooted in mobilizing co-workers and communities—rather than relying on lawyers, union staff, or political parties—can achieve results in the face of restrictive legislation.

Carlo Fanelli



Opinion

Governments of all stripes have long leveraged the law to curb strikes, turning what were once exceptional interventions into routine practice. Against this backdrop, it was unsurprising when Jobs Minister Patty Hadju imposed binding arbitration through the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

What was surprising to many, however, was the refusal of more

than 10,000 striking workers to comply with the act. Air Canada CEO Michael Rousseau admitted to being "amazed by the fact that CUPE is openly not following the law."

This moment highlighted a fundamental tension between the abstract right to freedom of association, and recurring government efforts to restrict those rights when exercised in practice.

Canadian trade unions have increasingly relied on legalistic strategies, turning repeatedly to the courts to defend and advance their rights. The International Labour Organization provided an early forum to challenge Canadian government actions, and while the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms created new opportunities, their impacts have been uneven and modest.

In some instances, courts have rebuked governments for overreach, and in others, validated restrictions on collective action. Rarely, however, have these legal strategies expanded protections for non-unionized workers. Understanding the law can provide knowledge and some leverage, but legal victories seldom translate into meaningful bargaining power. Knowing one is being exploited offers little comfort if there is no practical means to challenge it.

Labour disputes are fundamentally struggles over the distribution of wealth and profits. But illegality and legitimacy should

not be conflated. Throughout history, breaches of legal norms have often paved the way for the expansion of rights we now consider basic.

Several wildcat strikes highlight this dynamic: the 1872 printers' strike fought for the nine-hour work day, inspiring Canada's first Labour Day; the 1945 Ford strike helped establish the Rand Formula; the 1965 postal workers' strike expanded public sector bargaining rights; the 1974 Elliot Lake miners' walkout set a precedent for occupational health and safety; and the 1999 nurses' strike in Saskatchewan and the 2005 teachers' strikes in British Columbia put the spotlight on issues including underfunding, gender pay gaps, and over-work.

More recently, the Ontario government invoked the controversial notwithstanding clause to impose a contract on 55,000 education workers and strip them of the right to strike, while threatening steep fines and jail time for non-compliance. Workers defied the law, drawing broad public support and sparking rumours of a province-wide strike. Under pressure, the government agreed to repeal the act if CUPE returned to negotiations. About a week later, a new agreement was reached.

The ongoing difficulty unions face in securing fair wages and better working conditions through conventional bargaining raises the

question of whether wildcat strikes may become more frequent.

For 40 years, as worker productivity increased, real wages declined. Low-wage workers are increasingly being pushed out of cities, as minimum wages no longer cover the basic costs of food, housing, and transportation. Today, one in three Canadians report financial hardship, and nearly half of all workers say they feel burned out due to unreasonable workloads, long hours, and understaffing.

On the other hand, between 2008 and 2022, top CEO pay doubled, corporate profits reached a 60-year high, and Canada's Big Five banks posted record profits of \$61-billion.

In this context, Canada's "productivity crisis" cannot be separated from its distributional crisis: falling productivity is directly connected to worsening job quality across sectors, characterized by growing insecurity, low wages, and limited opportunities for career growth or skill advancement. Supply-and-demand models increasingly fail to adequately explain this disconnect.

Canadian corporations have comparatively reinvested less in research, development, and new equipment. Instead, they have opted to hoard cash, and boost dividends and stock buybacks. Canada's economic structure—heavily reliant on resource exports and foreign investment

with a modest advanced industrial sector—exacerbates these challenges.

Labour advocates have long maintained that boosting output through investments in technology, upskilling and strategic industrial policies lay the groundwork for higher wages, improved living standards, and better-funded public services, as reflected in campaigns for a four-day work week.

These recent experiences demonstrate that strategic and organized resistance, rooted in mobilizing co-workers and communities—rather than relying on lawyers, union staff, or political parties—can achieve results in the face of restrictive legislation. Internal organizing builds confidence, fosters solidarity, and allows workers to shape the struggle on their terms, rather than being passive participants in bureaucratic procedures that individualize grievances.

Unions and organized labour are not synonymous. Many unions are not actively organized, and many organized workers operate outside union frameworks. Precarious work, though widespread today, is neither permanent nor inevitable. Only time will tell whether this renewed sense of worker emboldenedness endures.

*Carlo Fanelli is an associate professor and chair of the Department of Social Science at York University in Toronto, and the co-author of *From Consent to Coercion: The Continuing Assault Against Labour*.*

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