The Thailand cave rescue and the humanitarian hypocrisy of imperialism

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Millions of people across the globe have been riveted to the live media coverage of the efforts to rescue 12 members of a boys' football team and their coach from a flooded cave complex in northern Thailand.

The discovery of the lost team members, nine days after they disappeared into the Tham Luang complex on June 23, seemed little short of miraculous. No less remarkable have been the grueling—and thus far successful—efforts to bring them out alive.

The boys, ages 11 through 17, and their coach, 25-year-old Ekaphol Chantawong, appear to have maintained their spirits and cohesiveness under the frightening conditions of being trapped underground in the darkness, without food and surrounded by rising water.

Four of the boys were brought out of the cave on Sunday, and four more on Monday. The last four and their coach were expected to be rescued today.

The divers who carried out the rescues were compelled to make an 11-hour round trip, leading the boys, some of whom couldn't swim, through submerged passages so narrow that they must remove their air tanks to pass.

The dangers involved in the operation were underscored by the death on Friday of a former Thai Navy SEAL who was returning from a mission to deliver oxygen tanks to the cave. Rescuers concluded that they had no choice but to proceed nonetheless, given the threat of monsoon weather raising the water level in the caves, even as oxygen has diminished to dangerously low levels.

The entire rescue effort has been characterized by an outpouring of human solidarity and concern for the fate of the young people trapped beneath the earth, together with international collaboration and the deployment of immense resources to achieve the aim of bringing them out alive.

Of the 90 expert divers participating in the dangerous rescue, over half were volunteers who rushed to Thailand from abroad. Chinese cave rescue experts have worked alongside US personnel, while a team of drainage specialists from the Netherlands arrived on the scene to help with pumping the water out of the cave.

While the self-sacrifice and immense skill of the rescuers, along with the international cooperation and seemingly unlimited resources that have been mobilized behind the effort, are inspiring, they inevitably raise the question of why similar qualities cannot be brought to bear upon the far larger daily tragedies and catastrophes confronting millions of working people and youth around the globe.

The answer lies in the global domination of capitalism. The profit system not only subordinates the social good to the accumulation of wealth by a wealthy elite, it prevents the mobilization of international resources in a rational manner by upholding the division of an increasingly economically integrated world into rival nation-states. Beset by intractable economic, social and geopolitical crises, world capitalism, with the US in the lead, produces only increasing financial parasitism, staggering levels of social inequality and a drive toward world war.

There are millions of young people trapped beneath the US-supplied bombs and missiles raining down upon Yemen in a brutal Saudi-led war backed by Washington that has brought 8 million people to the brink of starvation. Last year alone, 50,000 Yemeni children starved to death, while thousands more lost their lives to bombings and a rapidly spreading cholera epidemic. There is no international rescue effort on their behalf, not to mention any media attention to their plight—only increased support from the US government for those

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who are killing them.

US wars and imperialist economic depredation have forced 68.5 million refugees from their homes, sending this vast population, many of them children, to the borders of Europe and the US. Far from rescuing them, the governments of Europe and America treat them as criminals bent on "infesting" their countries. In Europe, concentration camps for refugees are being erected in Germany and throughout the continent.

In the US, the Trump administration's "zero tolerance" immigration policy has meant the arrest and imprisonment of every refugee attempting to cross the border.

While much of the drama in Thailand has centered on the parents of the trapped youth keeping vigil outside the cave entrance waiting to be reunited with their children, in the US, thousands of young children have been ripped from the arms of their immigrant parents as a means of punishing and deterring refugees.

The hypocrisy of capitalist governments in the face of the ongoing cave rescue knows no bounds. Among those offering to send aid to Thailand is the extreme right-wing government of Hungary, which recently made it a criminal offense for any of its citizens to provide assistance to refugee children.

And Trump tweeted on Sunday: "The U.S. is working very closely with the Government of Thailand to help get all of the children out of the cave and to safety. Very brave and talented people!"

His administration proved wholly unable and unwilling to mobilize such bravery and talent, not to mention resources, when Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, killing at least 5,000 people and leaving the island devastated to this day.

In the first decade of the last century, during the heyday of imperialism, the German revolutionary Rosa Luxemburg called attention to the hypocrisy of the humanitarian pretensions of the imperialist powers in the face of natural disasters, given their murderous brutality in suppressing any opposition to their domination.

The disaster then was the eruption of Mt. Pelee on the island of Martinique, which killed some 40,000 people.

Citing the massacre of Africans by the British, Filipinos by the Americans, and colonial peoples in other lands by all the major powers, Luxemburg wrote:

"And now they have all turned to Martinique, all one heart and one mind again; they help, rescue, dry the tears and curse the havoc-wreaking volcano. Mt. Pelee, great-hearted giant, you can laugh; you can look down in loathing at these benevolent murderers, at these weeping carnivores, at these beasts in Samaritan's clothing. But a day will come when another volcano lifts its voice of thunder: a volcano that is seething and boiling, whether you heed it or not, and will sweep the whole sanctimonious, blood-splattered culture from the face of the earth."

Today, the stark contrast between the feigned concern and sympathy of Trump and other "beasts in Samaritan's clothing" for the young people trapped in the cave in Thailand and their brutality toward the working class and oppressed people around the globe is emblematic of a society dominated by inequality, violence and oppression, and ripe for socialist revolution.

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