1917 – 2017
One century ago, the October Revolution...

In February 2017, it will be a century since the beginning of the Russian Revolution, triumphing in October of the same year. Undoubtedly, throughout the year 2017, a truckload of calumnies, lies and counter-truths will be dumped on the Russian Revolution and the Bolsheviks. It isn’t our goal to commemorate an event or to celebrate an anniversary, an historical tip of the hat, as if the cycle opened by October 1917 was now closed, but to underline its current pertinence. The real content of this offensive against the Russian Revolution isn’t historical, but aims to affirm that capitalism is impassable and class struggle is an archaism.

To defend the October Revolution is to defend the fact that despite all the declarations, class struggle remains the motor of history and that a century after the October Revolution, the confrontation between capital and labor sharpens in a combination of barbarity and the resistance of workers and peoples. It is to reaffirm that, to save humanity, the class struggle opposing the proletariat to the bourgeoisie must lead to the expropriation of capital.

There are, of course, important differences between the current situation and that of 1917. We are still in the same historical period, imperialism, that Lenin characterized as “the era of wars and revolutions”. But, at the time of the first imperialist war, what was at play was the confrontation of different imperialisms for control of Europe and the world. It’s precisely this situation, which produced the revolt of the workers and peasants of the tsarist empire, leading to a proletarian revolution. It’s why Lenin and Trotsky said: “from the war surged the revolution.” The situation is different today. After the inter-imperialist confrontations of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945, American imperialism came out as the most powerful imperialism on a worldwide scale. But this dominant imperialism is in decline and crisis, reflecting all the contradictions and the crisis of the world capitalist system. The wars which are spreading to the four corners of the planet are at the same time the expression of the decomposition of this system and of the inability of the most powerful imperialism, the United States, to control the developments.

The workers’ movement is different as well. In 1914, the Menshevik Party and the revolutionary Socialist Party were mass workers’ parties. Even though, after the fall of the Tsar, they stood against the second phase of the proletarian Revolution, which opened in October 1917 on the expropriation of capital, they participated in the combat to bring down Tsarism. Formally their objective was the socialization of the means of production and, still formally, they were opposed to the Bolsheviks in the name of the necessary stage of bourgeois democracy, leading them in practice to the side of the counter-revolution. The current situation of parties who were, historically, workers’ parties has nothing to do with this. The overwhelming majority of these parties, even on
the formal terrain, adhere to the capitalist system and its “adjustment”.

“They dared!”
The IV International, for its part, considers, as its program of foundation states “the strategic task of the IV International doesn’t consist in reforming capitalism, but in overturning it”. And this is precisely the current pertinence of October 1917. “They dared!” It’s in these terms that Rosa Luxemburg described the position of the Bolsheviks. “The Bolsheviks showed that they could do all that a true revolutionary party could do within the historical possibilities (...). The most important problem of socialism is precisely the burning question of the moment: not a specific question of tactical detail, but the proletariat’s ability to act, the combativeness of the masses, the will to realize socialism. In this regard, Lenin and Trotsky are the only ones who can cry out with Hutten (hero of the German poet Schiller) ‘I dared!’ (…). They took an enormous step on the path of settling the score between capital and labor throughout the world.”

As Rosa Luxemburg underlines, the proletarian revolution triumphed in October 1917 because between February and October 1917 the Bolshevik Party acted to help the masses overcome obstacles, notably that constituted by the coalition government of the two principal workers’ parties and a part of the bourgeoisie. They did it on a line of unified front, by implanting themselves in the working class, by fully taking their place in the working class to finally gain the majority in the soviets.

Of course, the practical forms of party construction are not the same today as those taken in 1917. Integrating into Marxist analysis the Stalinist treason and its consequences for the workers’ movement, Trotsky called for the creation of the IV International. After Trotsky’s assassination by Stalin and the crisis of dismemberment of the IV International in 1951-1953, the majority of the French section, directed by Pierre Lambert, constituted the pole of resistance to liquidation and, by its action, contributed with its assembled forces to proclaim once more, in 1993, the IV International. But this was only possible by the rupture with the petite-bourgeois conception which was prevalent in the summits of the IV International after the war: that the IV International had a just program, that the party already existed and that this base was sufficient to address the masses to induce them to join. Pierre Lambert and his comrades, on the contrary, sought to implant themselves in the heart of the workers’ movement, to no more be “exiled within their own class”.

It’s the sense of the orientation set out by Pierre Lambert since 1948, which would be formalized in 1964 at the XIV Congress of the French section, defining the line of transition concerning the construction of the party (see in this issue the dossier on Pierre Lambert).

150 years ago
The crisis of capital gives birth to a barbarous market, not only through war, but also by the breaking up of nations and the liquidation of nation states, as well as by anti-worker counter-reforms. In this situation of the crisis world capitalist system, to assure its survival, it violently goes after “labor costs”, in other words the very existence of the working class, its achievements and its organizations. National frameworks must be tossed aside along with norms attached to these frameworks to atomize the working class. Therefore, there is a worldwide offensive, on all continents and in every country, to call into question the existence of the union organizations which are currently the organizational framework of the working class on a world scale, faced with the decomposition of the majority of the parties which were once workers’ parties.

The union organizations, whatever the policies enacted by their leaders, because they only organize salaried employees, are a materialization of the division of society into antagonistic classes: the exploiters and the exploited. In 2017, 150 years will have passed since the publication of the first book of Marx’s Capital, which lays bare the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation. This work opens with the following affirmation: “the wealth of the societies within which the capitalist mode of production reigns announces itself as an immense accumulation of merchandise.”

One hundred fifty years later, in the imperialist epoch of agonizing capital (the “wealth” of which Marx speaks isn’t that of the proletariat, but that of the capitalist economy), it is no longer simply a question of a fantastic accumulation of merchandise, but above all of an accumulation of capital which doesn’t find a way to materialize itself, which suffocates within the framework of the world market, and which the world capitalist system implode on a regular basis, menacing the disintegration of the world market. “The limit of capital is capital itself”, wrote Karl Marx.

The current menace of the bankruptcy of Deutsche Bank causes universal fear of a financial crisis of a greater magnitude than that of 2008-2009. “Germany, first in its class, could unleash a new financial crisis comparable to that of 2008. This
time, the bomb isn’t called Lehman Brothers, but Deutsche Bank. The difference being that the German bank is three times larger than Lehman Brothers. We are thus faced with an atomic bomb” (Le Journal du Dimanche, a French weekly newspaper, 2 October).

Crossing a new stage in the decomposition of the entire system of imperialist domination

The worldwide crisis is expressed at the two extreme poles of society: the rising of the growing wave of tens of millions of refugees, chased from their homes by war and poverty, on all continents, and the rising, based on the aggravation of the social crisis, of an unprecedented political crisis at the heart of the leadership of American imperialism. This gives a striking image of the impasse into which the system founded on private ownership of the means of production is dragging all humanity.

On one side, the “stock” of “surplus humans” chased from their lands and deprived of any place in society by the merciless war waged by the imperialist monopolies, through interposed militias (supported by massive bombardments by the US led coalition), to control natural resources; the rising of a wave fed by the chaos provoked by the pillage of the Middle East, of sub-Saharan Africa, of East Africa, but also the collapse of the countries of central America and entire swathes of the Asian continent (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma)... A wave, which can only grow, menacing the fragile balance of the countries it traverses in order try to find a homeland.

On the other, at the very summit of the edifice of imperialist domination, the unprecedented political crisis which has opened in the United States gives a shining example of the affirmation made by Trotsky in 1926: “The more the United States makes the whole world their dependent, the more they themselves fall into dependence on the entire world, with all its contradictions and upheavals in perspective.”

A “dependence” which demands that American imperialism, as the most powerful imperialism, must take the battle to distant outposts to save, in all its forms and on all points of the planet, the imperialist order, shaken by the chaos into which the system of private ownership of the means of production is dragging the world.

In this situation, the American dominant class would need a hard power, capable of crushing the American working class and the peoples of the whole world under its iron heel. But it only has a weak government in crisis. The American primary race only reinforces and expresses the crisis of the American dominant class.

The world situation exceeds the forces of American imperialism and constrains it not only to enroll behind it the imperialisms of second order of France England and Germany, but also to tie – depending on the circumstances – alliances with powers such as Russia and Iran, who desire above all to relieve the pressure which American imperialism places on them through the price war on oil and gas and through hard-hitting sanctions. Alliances with partners with contradictory interests, giving them an unstable character due to unceasing about-faces. The imbroglio in relations between the United States and the Gulf countries, Turkey, Kurdish forces, Russia and Iran... aggravates the sentiment of the incoherence which characterizes its foreign policy, at a moment when arms spending is crushing American public finance and condemns its infrastructure to dilapidation, causing a new step to be taken in the social crisis which invites itself to the forefront of the presidential debate.

At the end of Obama’s second term, the black question resurfaces in all its acuteness, while the rejection of the policy of the delocalization of “investors”, which is destroying the productive bases of the country and which is encouraged by the executive (the TPP project), turns violently against the two institutional parties whose crisis reflects that of the American dominant class; a crisis which will enter a new phase after the presidential election, no matter who wins.

The political crisis in the United States and the breaches it tends to open on all continents...

If the wave of revolutionary explosion which shook Tunisia and Egypt five years ago has had to roll back under the blows of repression, the explosive material of which it was composed continues to accumulate on all continents, in populations irremediably condemned by the decomposition of corrupt regimes who have made themselves the instruments of the requirements of imperialist pillage.

Faced with this menace of revolutionary explosion, the brutal initiatives taken by American imperialism to roll it back cannot escape the contradictions provoked by the crisis which is ripping it apart.

While it is pressed by the worsening of the worldwide recession, its attempts to reconquering what imperialism has had to concede, for example during the last 15 years in Latin America, are marked by the fear of opening Pandora’s box. To decide to bring down Dilma to erase the episode of the PT government and to replace him by Temer is to take an enormous risk. Especially since it is done at a moment when, before the eyes of the
vast majority of the peoples of the continent, it is openly engaged in the organization of a putsch in Venezuela.

The prevarication of American policy in the conduct of its high-risk operations in Latin America, an expression of the political crisis which traverses it, can only push the masses to engage themselves on the terrain where, overcoming the limits of the PT’s regime of class collaboration (or of Chavez-like Bonapartism), they see themselves constrained to take the only path still open, that which poses the question of the working class supported by the peasants and poor urban populations.

In this way, the crisis which shakes the heart of the system – an expression of the impasse into which the whole system founded on private ownership of the means of production is plunging – integrates itself, each day, in specific forms, as a determining factor of the situation and of the contradictions at work on each continent and in each country.

The crisis of the disintegration of the European Union

It isn’t the Brexit, which menaces the explosion of the European Union; it is only an expression of it. The result of the referendum which led the British government to decide to leave the European Union is simultaneously the expression and the symptom (a major symptom, considering the place of Great Britain in the world) of the degree of disintegration already attained by the whole architecture of the European Union, laboriously put into place in the 1950’s under the guidance of American imperialism.

A symptom among others, starting with the menace of the bankruptcy of the Italian banking system, which risks dragging with it (as was the case of Greece in 2011) the entire European banking system weakened by the ECB, combined with the measures taken after 2008 to, supposedly, protect the world financial system from systemic risk and... to favor, according to the European bankers themselves, the concurrence of American banks.

The needs for financial capital’s survival generate a barbarous general market, wars, the disintegration of nations, but also, within imperialist states, the path towards the dismantlement of the nation-state, toward privatization of the state and all its institutions. It’s an unprecedented situation, which reflects widespread decomposition. It’s also this path which pushes and pulls working class resistance movements throughout Europe: the mobilization, during several months, of workers in France, supported by the union axis CGT and FO, but also in Belgium with the forming of a union front, in Italy, in Germany, in Spain...

Not to forget the supposed “refugee” crisis, at the same time as the coming “American elections, Italian referendum, formation of the Spanish government, Austrian re-election, Hungarian referendum, then elections in France and Germany (...). These perilous votes reflect the fatigue of peoples coming from a too long crisis, but also of the impotence of politicians to treat the problems: inequality, integration, terrorism, etc.” (Les Echos, 29 August)

The decision taken by the British government to leave the European Union was the product of an unprecedented combination: the combination of the rejection expressed by the popular masses of the austerity policy conducted, in the name of the European Union, by Conservatives and Labor, and the crisis of the British bourgeoisie, a fraction of which seized the occasion of this referendum to turn away from a European Union “mired” in “stagnation”.

The European Union no longer corresponds, for important sectors of financial capital, to the needs of the situation, which the world is going through, even though it seeks to play its role on behalf of financial capital. It is no longer equal to the task, which they must achieve. It hasn’t been able to provide a framework permitting national states to overcome (on behalf of imperialist monopolies) the contradictory interests – fashioned by the history of the development of bourgeois society in the framework of national states – which continue to oppose them.

The European Union hasn’t been able to permit them, in the name of the best interests of a “harmonious Europe delivering peace and security”, to defeat the permanent resistance of their peoples. Its process of disintegration is irreparably under way.

In perspective, we see that the claim (as was made certain groups of the extreme left) that the victory of the Brexit – coming out of a referendum where the “yes” of the exploited was mixed with that of a portion of their exploiters – was a “victory of the British working class” was in fact a counter truth and a trick: to make, on the eve of the British referendum, the watchword “Break with the EU” a central watchword for all Europe sets up a hoax contributing to the disarming of militants and workers confronted by the demands of the European Union and, above all, by the policies of their respective governments, engaged in an offensive against the workers.

Such positions cover a political operation within which the impasse represented by the demand for the restoration of “national sovereignty” is
brandished to turn the masses away from the process in which they are engaged and which poses the question, in each country, of crushing the bourgeois government (whatever the form of their state) to take the power from the hands of the capitalist class.

"Thaelmann puts at the forefront of his conclusions the thought that 'Germany today is a toy in the hands of the Entente'. It is therefore a question, above all, of 'national liberation'.

However, in a certain sense, France, Italy and even England are also 'toys' in the hands of the United States. The Spanish dependence on America, which newly reappeared with the Hoover proposition (tomorrow this dependence will reveal itself in an even sharper and more brutal fashion), has a much more profound importance for the development of the European revolution than the dependence of Germany on the Entente.

Therefore – let us say it in passing – the watchword of the United Soviet States of Europe, and not only the isolated watchword of 'Down with the Versailles treaty!', is a proletarian response to the convulsions of the European continent.

But these questions are, nevertheless, only secondary questions. Our policy isn’t determined by the fact that Germany is a ‘toy’ in the hands of the Entente, but above all by the fact that the German proletariat, divided, weakened and humiliated, is a toy in the hands of the German bourgeoisie. ‘The most dangerous enemy is within our own country!’, taught Karl Liebknecht. Have you forgotten it, dear friends?’

Toward the world conference in 2017

The decision of the coordination of the International Entente of Workers (EIT) to call for an open world conference inscribes itself in the continuity of the initiatives taken since 1991 (Barcelona). We are no longer in 1991; the spreading war is an unavoidable reality of the internal politics of every country, on all continents.

A simple general denunciation of war and exploitation would today take the form of an abstract denunciation oriented towards a large array of pacifist or semi-pacifist organizations.

We must say it how it is: the war against ISIS is a pretext. There is the imperialist coalition’s staging of a war against “radical Islam”, against “barbarism”... which serves to pave the way in all countries for a policy of national union, stinking of racism and xenophobia, directed against all the social and political conquests of the world working class.

There is a war of extermination of the peoples of the Middle East waged by imperialism for control of oil and gas. There is a war waged to make all traces of states disappear, as artificial as they had been since their creation; a war to return “humanity to the Stone Age” (to use the formula of Westmorland regarding Vietnam); a war charged with endlessly maintaining religious and tribal conflicts in the mosaic of peoples which make up the Middle East.

But also, a war charged with the orientation of the centers of decomposition produced by the flood of entire swaths of society towards a politico-mafia deviation, with inciting blind acts of terror, to try to succeed at imposing national union and defeat, in the name of collective security, the resistance of peoples. The struggle against the war is the struggle for the expropriation of capital, and this concerns principally the workers’ movement. It is the continuation of the Bolshevik’s combat in 1917, but in different conditions and in a different situation. The line of continuity has been preserved.

In this issue of La Vérité – The Truth, we publish a dossier in homage to comrade Marika Kovács, who recently passed away. Through her, it is the combat of the IV International for proletarian revolution, against the Stalinist bureaucracy, gravedigger of the October Revolution, it is the continuation of the Hungarian workers who, to defend socialism against Stalinist bureaucracy, formed workers’ councils in 1956, reconnecting with the combat of the Hungarian proletariat who, in 1919, at the call of the soviets of October 1917, formed their workers’ councils, crushed by the imperialist reaction.

The continuation of the combat of Pierre Lambert for the IV International

In this issue of La Vérité – The Truth, we publish an homage to our comrade Pierre Lambert, who was the decisive element in the combat for the reconstruction of the IV International and who brought a major contribution to the IV International as well as to all its sections, through the definition of the line of transition concerning the construction of the party. It’s this orientation defined by comrade Pierre Lambert, which is today put in to practice with tangible results.

In 1987, in the preface to the Peruvian edition of the Program of Transition, Pierre Lambert wrote: "And to accomplish the revolutionary tasks, there isn’t a ready-made solution. Marxism is the scientific method of the organized construction of the indispensable instrument for helping the masses themselves to work for their emancipation. But the solution doesn’t appear in any book. We begin with the IV International, we establish, with the help of the program, that there is no other solution to the crisis of humanity than socialism, guaranteed by the abolition of private ownership of large scale means of production and by workers’ democracy. Countless
difficulties have arisen. Others will arise. We will persevere.
And there is nothing contradictory in observing the complexity of revolutionary processes and concluding that, for the revolutionaries, things are simple. Things are simple: start with what is, and to understand what is, start with the Program. The victory of the world revolution has been delayed, the delays bring sufferings and failures; but the failures on the path of revolution, organized by the combined treasons of social democrats and Stalinists, bring particularly to light the strength of the revolutionary movement of the masses, the receptivity of the workers, of the youth, to political ideas, to the principles put forward in the Program of Transition. Nobody could foretell the inevitable steps, the unforetold combinations, by which the march toward the revolution would pass, but Marxism remains the only scientific method, because, by unifying theory and practice, it alone provides the only political means – thus organization – to raise the combat of the avant-garde to the height of the necessities of history.

To conclude, at the risk of repeating ourselves, we say: it’s based on organized practice that the events must be verified, it isn’t by words, but by life, that discussions and divergences will be settled. It is absolutely inevitable that the greatest diversity of political opinions develops, since the path to world revolution embracing hundreds of millions of humans, across all continents, will bring to the surface, everywhere, in all countries, in all organizations, the slag produced by the decomposition of the system of imperialism and bureaucracy, and the elements put forward in the search for progressive solutions. The whole will get jumbled up. The sorting will happen everywhere. Faithful to Marxism, to Bolshevism, to the principles of the program, we won’t let ourselves turn away from our path” (April 1989, preface to the Peruvian edition of the Program of Transition, cited in La Vérité, issue 60-61).
The slag has appeared. The sorting took place. The IV International will not let itself turn from its path.