A Major Crisis of the Capitalist System

The 9th Open World Conference (OWC) against war and exploitation at the initiative of the International Liaison Committee (ILC) of Workers and Peoples will be held in a few months, in autumn (fall) 2017. This conference will take place as upsets in the world order continue to develop. As we went to press with this edition of The Truth/La Vérité, US President Donald Trump arrived in Brussels to meet with leaders of the European Union (EU) and to take part in a summit meeting of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), after making a visit to the Middle East. Trump, who during his election campaign had brandished the notion of protectionism and an end to American interventionism, is nevertheless following in the footsteps of his predecessor Barack Obama. He has taken up the demand expressed by the latter that the NATO member countries raise their military spending to the level of 2 percent of gross domestic product (GDP). And already a certain number of EU member countries have announced increases in military spending.

Crisis of American imperialism
But even before the summit meeting of NATO, an organization whose task is to ensure the "maintenance of order in Europe" where it is implanted, the United States succeeded in getting the organization involved in the international coalition against Islamic State (ISIS), despite the previous reticence of several countries such as France and Germany. These American demands are an expression of the fact that, for many years now, American imperialism is proving unable to master the international order all by itself. The crisis gripping the world renders the task unbearable for the United States, which thus has an absolute need to use its allies in Europe or on other continents as auxiliary forces for the tasks of counter-revolution. On his return from the Middle East, Trump meant to pressure the main EU and NATO countries into greater involvement, in order to stem the disintegration taking place in the Middle East. Like his predecessors, and following in their footsteps, during his visit to Israel Trump proposed an umpteenth "peace plan". This occurred while the hunger strike of Palestinian political prisoners was in its second month, expressing the continuing resistance of the Palestinian people against the policies of the State of Israel and American imperialism.

The Middle East at War
It is significant that Trump’s voyage to the Middle East took place in two stages: the first in Saudi Arabia, the second in Israel, two countries whose relations with the United States had deteriorated during the Obama presidency. In both countries, Trump developed the same theme: that the common enemy of both the Arab regimes and Israel is Iran. By brandishing the Iranian question, he sought thereby to restore relations with these two traditional pillars of American imperialism in the region. But the threats proffered toward Iran have not been followed by acts. Thus for example the nuclear agreement signed with Iran under Obama has still not been thrown into question. In fact, this is about putting pressure on the recently elected Iranian president, who was the author of the nuclear agreement with the United States and is in favor of opening Iran up to the world market. One should bear in mind that 70 to 80 percent of Iran’s industrial production is nationalized. The president of the Islamic Republic wants to move toward the privatization of national enterprises, in the name of opening up to the world market. Finance capital, notably US finance capital, is poised to invade Iran, and the Trump administration is the weapon by which it intends to open the borders. But this policy of Trump and the US administration comes amid a situation of generalized instability.

"Out with Temer!"
On the other side of the planet, in Latin America, the Brazilian people have taken massively to the streets to demand the resignation of the putschist president, Temer, whose complete and utter implication in affairs of corruption have been revealed by the press. The mobilizations are taking place across the country, and notably in Brasilia, the federal capital. The situation is such that Temer has called upon the armed forces in an attempt to restore order, provoking dismay even within his own camp. For to see the army in the streets reminds every Brazilian of the coup d’État of 1964 and the military dictatorship which followed. As stated in the declaration of the O Trabalho current (Brazilian section of the IV International):

"Yes, the hour has come for the broadest mobilization. If Temer says that he will not resign, then it is time to overthrow him and give the people a say through a presidential election. But how can one oust Temer while leaving the present corrupt, putschist and reactionary Congress intact, allowing it to implement the ‘reforms’ which wipe out rights? New members of parliament must also be elected to a sovereign Constituent Assembly!"

A statement by the Workers Party (PT) leadership has corrected the demand made by the PT parliamentary
group – the resignation of Temer – by coming out clearly in favour of “immediate direct elections” for the presidency. But the party's state congresses have gone further, calling for “early elections, Lula as president, with a Constituent Assembly” (see article on Brazil).

To the north, in Venezuela, the opposition backed by American imperialism is provoking demonstrations and violent incidents in a bid to overthrow the government of Nicolas Maduro. A seesaw movement is developing in Latin America between Brazil and Venezuela, expressing the movement toward revolution and counter-revolution.

The Growing Dismemberment of the European Union

This crisis is not peculiar to Latin America, it is a world crisis. It is the crisis of the American ruling class and the imperialist bourgeoisies of Europe. Trump arrived in Brussels amid a European Union in the course of dismemberment.

Indeed, the European Union is confronted on the one hand by the demands of the imperialist trusts fighting each other there, trampling underfoot the prerogatives of member States, while at the other end of the chain the resistance of workers and peoples undermines the foundations of the imperialist States. The institutions of the European Union are no longer adapted to the economic war waged by finance capital and the big trusts at world level and in Europe. From the point of view of finance capital, all that remains of the gains obtained by workers through their class struggle in the different countries of Europe since 1945 must be destroyed.

It is significant that the attacks against the Labor Code or protective labor laws are developing simultaneously in various European countries such as Italy, Spain, France, etc. And it is this offensive, which is leading the class struggle to be concentrated upon the defense of class gains.

These last months, the European Union has experienced a leap forward in the advancing dismemberment of its institutions, materialized in the British “Brexit” process. It is not Brexit, which has opened the crisis; it is rather that Brexit is an expression of the crisis, and spurs it on. In Italy, the defeat of Renzi in the referendum that he called led to his resignation, and in the workers' vote against the constitutional reform that he sought may be seen their rejection of the labor law reforms too.

In Germany, the continued collapse of the SPD in successive regional elections, far from strengthening Merkel, compromises the chances of putting together a new "grand coalition" after the general legislative elections scheduled for September 2017.

In France, the presidential election has been a mark of the decomposition of the institutions of the V Republic: for the first time, both the two main parties, that of the Right and the Socialist Party, were absent from the second round (see article on France). As stated in the May 13 resolution of the national leadership of the French section of the IV International:

"1. A sequence of 60 years of this country’s political history is coming to an end.

We can never repeat it often enough: it is upon the stolid, massive and permanent resistance of the working class – kept of course within the framework of the institutions – that the bonapartist institutions established by De Gaulle in order to integrate and overcome the class have broken their teeth.

The sigh of relief expressed by the bigwigs of this world at the announcement of Macron’s election soon gave way to worries. They have measured the anger and rejection expressed in the fact that 16 million voters (abstentions, blank and invalid ballot papers) refused to vote in the second round of the presidential election, despite the blackmail which consisted of accusing them of playing into the hands of the extreme Right.

Sixteen million, an all-time record!

And that after the spectacular and unprecedented breakthrough of 7 million voters in favor of the candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon in the first round, in order to demonstrate their support for his ‘kick them out’ campaign and their readiness to go all-out in breaking with the whole system and all its parties.

Everyone has grasped that, in relation with the developing crisis of the imperialist system at world level, a confrontation is inevitable in the short term, and they are going to try to prepare for it.

2. If the crisis of the institutions of the V Republic has reached a high point, if the parties which relayed each other to ensure their functioning more or less, are in ruins, let us not forget for an instant – to employ Lenin’s formulation – that the institutions "will never fall (...) unless they are pushed". And Macron, however weak he may be, continues to have them at his disposal. (...).

3. Let us return to the disposition of the various class forces at the outcome of these elections. Because of the collapse of the parties which have, with highs and lows, structured the workers’ movement throughout its history, finance capital no longer has at its disposal the ‘Popular Front’ card with which to drive back and defeat the class.

It will try to turn toward the sole factor of order, which is today susceptible to avoiding a full frontal clash with the class: the leaders of the workers’ movement. Finance capital will push Macron, in his fragile situation, to try to circumvent the obstacles of the previous period (mobilization against the El Khomri labor law), to renew the points of contact with these leaders (or a fraction of them) in a process of ‘concertation’.

A situation which, after five months of mobilization against the El Khomri law, after a May Day mobilization breaking with the CFDT, will take all the political tensions to a new degree within the class organizations, requiring that we on our part extend and deepen the relations organized around the March 25 national conference. And this all the more so given that, under pressure and by their very nature, these leaders will seek arrangements and deals that cannot fail to provoke rejection and refusal on the part of the
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overwhelming majority of cadres and militants. This was already the case as regards May 1 and the Macron vote.”

Reorganization of the Working Class in South Africa and Elsewhere

The place of the working class and its organizations is a central factor. At the southern end of the African continent, a new trade union confederation has held its congress and is in the course of emerging in opposition to COSATU.

For the IV International, the way out, in order to halt and oppose this march toward barbarity, can only be the expropriation of capital.

The October Revolution triumphed a century ago (see the dossier on the workers’ insurrection of May 1937 in Barcelona). To celebrate the October Revolution signifies, for the IV International, that it has contemporary relevance, that there are lessons to be learned from the fight waged by the Bolsheviks, who were able to build a revolutionary party and anchor it among the masses in the very process of revolutionary developments, allowing the working class to take power and expropriate capital.

A century on, the capitalist system is in a major crisis of unequalled amplitude. Developments in the world, and especially in the United States after the election of Trump, and the crisis of disintegration in the Europe of the old imperialist powers, open a situation of generalized instability and uncertainty, and open immense revolutionary perspectives.

Quite obviously the IV International does not make recognition of the validity of its program a condition for joint action. Which is why it is fully participating, alongside worker-militants, political and trade union activists, in the preparation of the 9th Open World Conference (OWC) against war and exploitation. This will not be a pacifist conference, but a conference aimed at regrouping representative militants from diverse sectors of the workers’ movement. This regrouping of militants implanted in the working class, in peasant and national movements, aims at organizing, on a world scale, a pole of regroupment with a view to participating in the reorganization of the working class and the workers’ movement.

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The editorial board of The Truth/La Vérité