

The new year begins

David North, Joseph Kishore
3 January 2012

As the New Year begins, there is a widespread sense that 2012 will be marked by tumultuous political and social struggles.

The events of the past year—beginning with the upheavals in Tunisia and Egypt and followed by the eruption of social protests in one country after another, including the United States—marked the transition to a new period of intensifying class conflict.

After more than three years of economic crisis, the great mass of the working class has lost confidence in not only the economic viability of capitalism, but also its moral legitimacy. The events of September 2008 and their aftermath are shaping the consciousness of people all over the world as profoundly as the Great Depression affected those who came of age in the late 1920s and 1930s.

The political leaders who rule in the interests of the financial and corporate elite have nothing to offer the people in the way of positive solutions. They cannot offer even a semblance of hope that tomorrow will be better than yesterday. The prevailing sense of despair found expression in the New Year's Eve remarks of German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who warned that for Europe, 2012 will “no doubt be more difficult than 2011,” and that the continent faces its “harshest test in decades.”

Economists are forecasting recession for Europe. The survival of the euro, established by the Maastricht Treaty signed 20 years ago, is in doubt. In Asia, including China, manufacturing is contracting sharply, the consequence of collapsing exports.

In the United States, the center of the massive speculation that set off the crisis, the official proclamations of a “recovery” are belied by record poverty and long-term unemployment. During the past year, the working class' share of the national income fell to its lowest level since records of this statistic began to be kept.

The “new normal” is mass unemployment, poverty and an unrelenting attack on jobs and wages. Anticipating the growth of widespread resentment of and opposition to pervasive social inequality, the ruling class is systematically dismantling the old constitutional structure of democratic rights. The drift to authoritarianism and outright dictatorship is, as always, bound up with the escalation of imperialist militarism. The so-called “war on terror” functions ever more nakedly as a pretext for the destruction of democratic rights.

Measures that the great mass of Americans would have considered unimaginable a decade ago have become, or are on the verge of becoming, routine. 2011 will be remembered as the year in which the president of the United States authorized the execution of an American citizen without any semblance of due process. In the final week of December, Obama signed a bill which allows Americans accused of abetting “terrorism”—no matter how vague the factual foundation of the allegation—to be turned over to military tribunals.

As in the 1930s, the economic crisis intensifies the danger of war. Underlying the threat of war against Iran is the relentless preparation of the United States for an open military confrontation with China. Nor is the United States alone in its commitment to military power as a means of securing global economic and geopolitical interests. The bombing of Libya marked the beginning of a new and bloody chapter in the history of European imperialism.

December 2011 marked the twentieth anniversary of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the state that emerged from the 1917 October Revolution. The end of the USSR, prepared by decades of Stalinist betrayal of the international socialist program and principles of the 1917 revolution, triggered a veritable orgy of capitalist self-congratulation and triumphalism. The epoch of

socialist revolution had ended, proclaimed not only the propagandists of the media, but also an army of academics. One of these intellectuals, Francis Fukuyama, captured the euphoria that followed the dissolution of the USSR when he proclaimed “The End of History.” The meaning of this phrase was all too clear: capitalism would exist forever.

How much has changed in 20 years! Amidst economic crisis, plunging living standards, widening social inequality, state lawlessness, ecological catastrophes and the ever-growing threat of a new world war there is an emerging mass consensus that capitalism has failed. The growth of social struggles, which have already involved tens of millions across the globe, signifies that the objective crisis of capitalism is becoming internalized in the subjective consciousness of the basic revolutionary force on this planet, the international working class.

As always in the initial stages of a mass movement, there is a chasm between the historic scale of the crisis and the existing consciousness of the masses who are being drawn into struggle. How could it be otherwise? The masses can learn only through the experience of struggles. They cannot overcome overnight the political disorientation and confusion that are the products of decades of misleadership and betrayals. The old organizations—political parties and trade unions—use whatever remains of their influence to suppress social protest or, where that proves impossible, to keep it within channels that do not threaten capitalist rule.

The social struggles of 2011 demonstrated the immense problems of political perspective and leadership on a world scale. The movements of social protest internationally remained largely under the domination of left-liberal, pseudo-radical and semi-anarchistic tendencies that oppose the political mobilization of the working class in the struggle for power on the basis of a socialist program. This has allowed the ruling class to regroup, and even, as in Egypt, go on the offensive against the revolutionary masses.

Occupy Wall Street and similar protests throughout the United States have, within just a few months, won broad popular sympathy. They have given voice to the widespread anger over social inequality and hostility to a political system controlled by the rich. But these movements, controlled by middle-class organizations

that are tied politically to the Obama administration, the Democratic Party and the trade unions, have neither the desire nor the ability to mobilize the working class in struggle against the capitalist system.

Nevertheless, the political radicalization that began in 2011 will continue in the New Year. The very contradictions, rooted in the nature of the world capitalist system, that drive the ruling class to repression and war drive the working class to socialist revolution. Its rights and interests can be defended only through the transformation of society as a whole—that is, through the conquest of political power, the ending of capitalism, and the reorganization of the global economy in the interests of humanity.

The beginning of the year is traditionally the time for resolutions: Make the decision to take up the fight for socialism by joining the Socialist Equality Party and building the Fourth International as the World Party of Socialist Revolution.

David North and Joseph Kishore



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact