

## SEP meetings in Britain

# The bombing of Afghanistan and the new “Great Game”

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*The following is the text of a speech delivered by Chris Marsden to a series of four public meetings in the British cities of Sheffield, Leeds, London and Manchester. Marsden is the national secretary of the Socialist Equality Party (Britain) and a member of the editorial board of the World Socialist Web Site.*

Everyone here will be appalled by the carpet-bombing of Afghanistan. Everyone, I hope, will share the view that, whatever their personal sense of horror at the terrible events of September 11, the scale of the US response is neither commensurate, nor a rational means of bringing a handful of terrorists to justice.

The world’s richest country—the US—is raining down tons of high explosives on its poorest, an act that has created outrage amongst millions of the world’s most oppressed peoples and caused growing concern amongst the majority of workers in the advanced countries of Europe and, indeed, in America itself.

Aside from strictly humanitarian concerns, many people are increasingly worried that the bombing of Afghanistan is destabilising world affairs, heightening religious and ethnic tensions and threatening a far broader conflict throughout the Middle East, Africa and elsewhere.

To this must be added the realisation that already, in the name of combating terrorism, precious civil liberties fought for by previous generations and enjoyed for centuries are being abrogated.

We meet under conditions where Home Secretary David Blunkett has declared a state of emergency, ostensibly in order to allow Britain to opt out of Article Five of the European Convention on Human Rights and bring in the internment without trial of suspected terrorists. Internment, when it was used in a more limited capacity in the 1970s, led to the arrest of hundreds of innocent people and political activists with no record of terrorist activity. But a state of emergency, dismissed as a technicality by Blunkett, presages even more widespread attacks on democratic rights than those carried out in Northern Ireland.

The global economy, already in deep trouble, also faces being plunged into a recession of unprecedented depth, threatening millions with unemployment and hardship.

Clearly therefore, the events of September 11 have come to mark a profound shift in the world political and economic situation which must be subjected to detailed consideration. For the lives of tens of thousands and the future course of world affairs will be decided by the degree to which the international working class is able to formulate an independent response that will enable a progressive resolution to the present crisis.

## The collapse of the USSR

It is the position of the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* that the political origins of the events we are witnessing today must be traced back to the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

Before then, the Cold War had the effect of imposing a certain discipline on relations between the imperialist powers. The hegemony of the US was accepted by the other major powers as the bedrock of their common strategy of opposing the Soviet threat, conceived of not merely as an expansion of the USSR’s sphere of influence in various parts of the world but also as a euphemism for the danger posed by social revolution. At the same time, the domination over the working class by the Stalinist and social democratic parties generally served to keep the class struggle within circumscribed limits.

All of this has now changed. The collapse of the USSR began a new period in the affairs of world capitalism—the return to a more classical form of imperialist politics and with it relations between the classes.

We are in the midst of a new political epoch, one in which the major powers fight it out amongst themselves for global hegemony, while the ruling elite in every country launches a political and economic offensive against the social and democratic gains won by the workers’ movement.

The end of the Soviet Union has inaugurated a new version of what was historically known as the “Great Game”. It has opened up vast areas of the world for penetration by the US and the other major imperialist powers that was closed off by the October Revolution in 1917. Faced with the possible emergence of a challenge by the European powers and Japan, the US has spent the past decade engaged in a military campaign to preserve its global domination—the Gulf War of 1990-91, the two wars in Yugoslavia and now the war against Afghanistan.

September 11 has been seized on by the Bush administration in the US as a pretext to carry forward to a successful conclusion this international agenda, as well as the imposition of the domestic arrangements necessary in order to do this.

The International Committee of the Fourth International has a record without parallel in its efforts to analyse the political and economic causes of what must be understood as an eruption of imperialist militarism over the past decade, in which the leading role has been played by the United States—in the Gulf, Bosnia, Somalia, Kosovo and now Afghanistan. By doing so, we alone are in a position to arm the advanced workers, youth and intellectuals with a socialist programme on which to oppose the drive towards ever-more brutal conflicts and the accompanying offensive against the living standards and democratic rights of the working class.

Permit me to draw your attention to a number of key statements that are available on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

In May 1999, we published, “Why is NATO at war with Yugoslavia? World power, oil and gold.” It contained a succinct definition of the imperialist character of that war. We wrote:

The US and the European powers that form the nucleus of NATO comprise the most advanced capitalist powers of the globe. Within each of these countries, state policies express the interests of finance capital, based on the major transnational corporations and financial institutions. The continued existence of the ruling class in these countries is bound up with the expansion of capitalism throughout the world...

Imperialism enjoys a predatory and parasitic relation to the less developed countries. Through its position of financial hegemony, using the vehicle of massive financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, imperialism is in a position to dictate policy to smaller states, which rely on their credit. Through their domination of the world market, the imperialist powers drive down prices for raw materials and keep the smaller states impoverished. The more these countries borrow, the more destitute and dependent they become.

Finally, hanging over the weaker states is the ever-present threat of military bombardment. Whether they are to be apotheosized as 'emerging democracies' or demonized as 'rogue states' depends, in the final analysis, on where they fit in the unfolding strategic plans of world imperialism.

The Serbian regime of Slobodan Milosevic clearly did not fit into the calculations of the imperialist powers—and for reasons that are directly related to the present bombardment of Afghanistan's Taliban regime.

We explained that the Western powers were positioning themselves to exploit Kosovo's abundant mineral reserves, but added, "this is merely the 'small change' of imperialist calculations. The immediate material gains that might be plundered from Kosovo are dwarfed by the far greater potential for enrichment that beckons in regions further to the east where the NATO powers have developed immense interests over the past five years..."

Just as the development of imperialism witnessed the efforts of the major powers to parcel out the world at the end of the last century, the dismantling of the USSR has created a power vacuum in Eastern Europe, Russia and Central Asia that makes a new division of the world inevitable. The principal significance of Yugoslavia, at this critical juncture, is that it lies on the Western periphery of a massive swathe of territory into which the major world powers aim to expand... Involved in the reintegration of the territory of the former USSR into world capitalism is the absorption, by massive Western transnational companies, of trillions of dollars in valuable raw materials that are vital to the imperialist powers. The greatest untapped oil reserves in the world are located in the former Soviet republics bordering the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan). These resources are now being divided among the major capitalist countries. This is the fuel that is feeding renewed militarism and must lead to new wars of conquest by the imperialist powers against local opponents, as well as ever-greater conflicts among the imperialists themselves.

To explain just how important control of the Caspian region is, let me cite some figures. The US Department of Energy estimates that 163 billion barrels of oil and up to 337 trillion cubic feet of natural gas are to be found there. If these estimates are borne out, the region will become a petroleum producer comparable in scope to Iran or Iraq. On top of this, Kazakhstan, with 10,000 tons, has the second largest reserves of gold in the world.

As well as the re-conquest of the territories of the former USSR and their assets, we also identified the geo-strategic importance of the Balkans and Central Asia from the standpoint of the necessity for the US to dominate what Zbigniew Brzezinski, the former National Security chief under President Carter, calls Eurasia—that is the entire European and Asian land-mass. The statement cites Brzezinski's comments in the journal *Foreign Affairs*:

"After the United States, the next six largest economies and military spenders are there, as are all but one of the world's overt nuclear powers, and all but one of the covert ones. Eurasia accounts for 75 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy resources. Collectively, Eurasia's potential power overshadows even America's.

Eurasia is the world's axial supercontinent. A power that dominated Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the world's three most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia. A glance at the map also suggests that a country dominant in Eurasia would almost automatically control the Middle East and Africa.

At the conclusion of the Kosovo war, we built on our analysis in the June 1999 statement by David North, "After the Slaughter: Political Lessons of the Balkan War". This emphasised, "There is an obvious and undeniable connection between the collapse of the Soviet Union and the arrogance and brutality with which the United States has pursued its international agenda throughout the 1990s. Substantial sections of the American ruling elite have convinced themselves that the absence of any substantial international opponent capable of resisting the United States offers an historically unprecedented opportunity to establish, through the use of military power, an unchallengeable position of global dominance. Unlike the earlier post-World War II dreams of an 'American Century,' which were frustrated by the constraints placed by the existence of the Soviet Union on the global ambitions of the United States, policy makers in Washington and academic think tanks all over the country are arguing that overwhelming military superiority will make the twenty-first century America's. Unchecked by either external restraints or substantial domestic opposition, the mission of the United States is to remove all barriers to the reorganization of the world economy on the basis of market principles, as interpreted and dominated by American transnational corporations."

Before dealing more directly with the aftermath of September 11 and the Afghan conflict, I would like to draw attention to an article by Barry Grey published in November 1998, which is perhaps less familiar even to our regular readers. This article predicted that Caspian oil interests would possibly re-ignite the US war-drive against Iraq. Gray wrote:

The Bush administration exploited Iraq's move against its southern neighbor to demonstrate US military supremacy and strengthen its position in a region rich in oil and strategically located at the crossroads of the Middle East, southeastern Europe, northern Africa and Central Asia. The gulf war was intended as a warning to American imperialism's major international rivals, above all Germany and Japan, both of which were heavily dependent on oil imports from the region. In the midst of the war Bush hinted as much in a speech to the New York Economic Club. In trade talks with Germany and Japan, he said, 'We will have some—I wouldn't say leverage on them—but persuasiveness.'

Grey noted that the major change since 1991 was the break-up of the Soviet Union. Together with the discovery of huge oil and gas reserves in the Caspian, this has “led to a certain evolution in US policy toward Iraq. As long as the issue of strategic concern was only the Persian Gulf, the focus of American concern was to Iraq’s south. Washington concluded that a military occupation of Iraq, and possible fracturing of the country posed, too great a risk of destabilizing the region. It decided at the end of the Gulf War to leave Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard intact and allow him to remain in power.

America’s intensified interest in the lands to Iraq’s north has altered US military and economic priorities. For a thrust into the Caspian, a more direct military and political presence in Iraq is necessary.

Iraq occupies a strategic position in the geography of the region in general, and the geo-politics of the pipeline dispute in particular. The nation that controlled the north of Iraq would be in a position, for example, to protect a pipeline through southern Turkey, or launch military strikes against a pipeline through Iran.

The US would like to turn northern Iraq into a new base for American military operations. This is politically unfeasible as long as the present Iraqi regime is in power.

## The US and Afghanistan

The brutal terrorist attack of September 11 has created the political environment in which America’s imperial aims of securing domination of Central Asia and its resources can be implemented.

US efforts to secure a foothold in Central Asia initially proceeded in the form of a barely concealed conflict with the USSR through a proxy force. That force was the Islamic fundamentalists and Afghan nationalists of the Mujaheddin, whose bastard offspring is the Taliban.

Amidst the official expressions of horror at the September 11 events, we have had repeated occasion to point out that US imperialism shoulders a major responsibility for the emergence of Islamic fundamentalism. For many decades, Islamist movements were used by the US as an instrument in the struggle against socialist influence in the working class. The Taliban regime itself would not exist without the massive support given to the Mujaheddin by the CIA because it was considered a critical element in the US campaign to destabilise the Soviet Union.

The Taliban emerged in war-ravaged Afghanistan as a type of clerical fascism. The movement reflected the despair and desperation of uprooted and declassed layers of the rural petty bourgeoisie—the sons of mullahs, petty officials, small farmers and traders—who could see no alternative to the social evils that abounded in Afghanistan other than through the imposition of a dictatorial Islamic regime. Following the dissolution of the USSR, Washington was initially prepared to turn a blind eye to the regressive social policies of the Taliban, which was backed and funded by two of its closest allies in the region—Saudi Arabia and Pakistan. The central consideration was an attempt to cultivate friendly relations with the regime in order to secure the construction of an oil pipeline through Afghanistan by the US company Unocal, and thereby challenge Russia’s control of the supply of Caspian oil and gas, while at the same time thwarting European efforts to bring the newly independent former Soviet republics into their orbit.

We now know that US hopes of using the Taliban regime proved ill founded and it has come to be considered as an obstacle to US ambitions in the region. The Bush administration has therefore decided to press

ahead with long-held designs on Central Asia over the corpses of the Taliban and to install an equally reactionary bunch of fundamentalists and ethnic warlords drawn from the rival Northern Alliance and possibly even so-called “moderate Taliban”, i.e., those prepared to toe Washington’s line.

## The Northern Alliance

In order to indicate the character of the Northern Alliance, whose military successes we are all supposed to welcome, one can cite an article in the fiercely pro-war *Sunday Times*. Jon Swain writes: “For those murdered in Kabul, the devastated Afghan capital, before the Taliban came to power in 1996, the moment of execution was unimaginably horrific.

In a macabre ritual known as ‘dead men dancing’, victims’ heads were chopped off. Petrol was then pumped into their necks and set alight as the blood spurted out and the bodies jerked about in their death throes.

In Afghanistan, rape, mutilation and torture have been rife over the past decade. The skinning alive of victims has been a particular favourite of warring groups, along with the roasting of prisoners in containers left in the desert sun.

The Afghan warlord whose perverted mind dreamt up the ‘dead man dancing’ routine was Abdul Ali Mazari, a leader of the Hazaras, Afghanistan’s Persian-speaking ethnic minority. Mazari headed a group called Hizb-i-Wahdat, which is now a key part of the Northern Alliance...

With regard to General Abdul Rashid Dostum, the Uzbek warlord said to be closest to the US, the *Times* writes that he has, “at one time or another, allied himself with everybody, including the Taliban, and then betrayed them...Dostum himself is remembered for once punishing a soldier in Mazar-e-Sharif for stealing by crushing his body under a tank.

In May 1997, Uzbek and Hazara soldiers belonging to the Alliance killed 2,000 Taliban prisoners of war at Mazar-e-Sharif. The killing was carried out by General Abdul Malik, who had been Dostum’s second-in-command until he turned on him and drove him from the city. Some of the prisoners were thrown down wells that were then blasted with grenades. At least 1,250 died in sealed containers.

Dostum’s forces are also remembered for raping women and girls in Kabul, cutting off their breasts and tying their toes behind their heads.

The catalogue of obscenities concludes, “The Americans should also be aware that the warlords who make up the Alliance are among the key players in the heroin trade. A UN survey showed that 83 percent of the opium produced over the past year in Afghanistan came from Badakhshan province, which is controlled by the Northern Alliance.”

The *Daily Mirror* cites the response of Britain’s Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon to such revelations as, “There have been some stories told about their behaviour in the past, which actually I have had checked out, and are not nearly as bad as people have been suggesting.” I hope you are

all reassured by Mr Hoon's statement.

One can see how clearly the *World Socialist Web Site* has outlined the essential framework of modern political affairs. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes in the USSR and Eastern Europe has freed the imperialist powers from the necessity to band together against a common perceived threat. The response of the US, the world's sole remaining super-power, is an attempt to press home its advantage militarily against its rivals and secure uncontested domination of the globe.

## War and the attack on democratic rights in the US

There is a further crucial element to the analysis of the present war presented by the International Committee of the Fourth International. As Marxists, we understand that imperialism is not a policy, but a definite stage in the development of capitalism. Imperialist wars of conquest are an integral product of a society based on class exploitation. It is in the efforts of the bourgeoisie to secure the best conditions for their exploitation of the world's resources and peoples that the driving force for war is to be found. Therefore it cannot be understood in isolation from the class struggle, nor combated by any other means than through the pursuit of the class struggle.

In this regard, we have opposed the oft-repeated claim that "everything changed on September 11". I have already outlined the continuity of foreign policy objectives across the past decade, but how does this continuity express itself in domestic policy? From this standpoint, the immediate origins of the present war can be traced back to the efforts of the Republican right to destabilise the Clinton presidency, impose their own man as president and thereby create the conditions for a political shift to increasingly authoritarian forms of rule and a series of military adventures.

When the Republicans set out to bring down Clinton using the transparent device of the Lewinsky sex scandal, we were denounced by the middle class radicals for not taking either a 'plague on both your houses' position or, worse still, for not supporting the efforts to engineer a political coup by the right. The collective wisdom of the radicals was a mixture of the blindingly obvious with staggering political ignorance: Clinton was an imperialist politician and hence no different to the Republicans. Therefore we should simply scoff at his humiliation, perhaps seek to make some political capital out of his misfortune and hope that in some obscure way the working class would be strengthened by the crisis of its enemy.

We insisted that it was up to the working class to deal with Clinton and the Democrats, not the far right. To conceal the class and political nature of the attack on Clinton was to disarm the working class in the face of a major offensive against democratic rights—an attempt to unseat an elected president by a fascistic cabal.

The right wing failed in its efforts to oust Clinton, not because of the spineless opposition of the Democrats, but because the broad mass of the US working class was deeply suspicious of their motives and in the main hostile to the very idea that a personal indiscretion legitimised impeachment. But the rightwing came back again and successfully stole the 2000 presidential election with the aid of their supporters in the US Supreme Court.

In January of this year, the International Committee held a meeting in Australia that set out to draw the political lessons of the stealing of the US presidency by Bush. In his lecture on the subject, regarding the international implications of this development, Barry Grey said the following:

The breakdown of bourgeois democracy in the US is not simply, or even primarily, an American question. It is the most advanced expression of the crisis of world capitalism. In the short term, ruling classes all over the world must contend with a government that will be inclined, even more than its predecessor, to pursue a course of unilateralism and militarism. Can any serious observer doubt that an unstable regime that has come to power on the basis of illegality and provocation will employ similar methods against its international rivals—friend and foe alike?

The Bush administration is committed to scrapping the anti-ballistic missile treaty and building a missile defense system—a course that will immediately destabilize international relations and fuel a new arms race. It is presently scouring the globe—from Colombia and Venezuela to Iraq—in search of a likely target for military attack.

Of course we could not directly predict that the initial focus of American military aggression would be Afghanistan, but any objective observer would be forced to admire the political prescience demonstrated once again by the International Committee. That is why from the very start, we were able to take a principled stand against Bush's war drive in the name of combating terrorism.

We insisted that the terrorist attacks of September 11 were reactionary in the fullest sense, in that they were diametrically opposed to the interests of the American and international working class. Not only did such terrorist acts play into the hands of the imperialists, but they were carried out by forces utterly hostile to the working class and indeed to social progress.

However, in contrast to broad layers of the liberal milieu around the world, we refused to accept the claims of Bush that US military forces had suddenly been transformed into a vehicle for combating clerical reaction. Our task is to arm the working class with an internationalist and socialist perspective.

## Inter-imperialist and class antagonisms

The rightwing of the Republicans may unintentionally echo Mao's belief that power comes from the barrel of a gun, but we know different. The US cannot overcome the contradictions of world imperialism through force of arms. Rather, the aggressive assertion of US hegemony is destabilising world politics—threatening the survival of many of the bourgeois regimes in the Middle East, while worsening tensions between the imperialist powers and, above all exacerbating class antagonisms.

None of the major powers are happy that the US has stolen such a march on them in Central Asia. They are all seeking to stake their claim to a piece of the action. Tensions between the imperialist powers are already growing, focusing particularly on the character of the post-Taliban regime and on efforts to prevent the US from moving on from Central Asia into the Middle East by declaring war on Iraq, as powerful sections of the Republican right are demanding.

With regard to the major regional powers, it was Pakistan that insisted on the involvement of so-called "moderate Taliban" in a broad-based pan-ethnic government, possibly under the leadership of Zahir Shah, the former king of Afghanistan. It is opposed to the Northern Alliance—traditionally supported by Pakistan's regional rivals, Russia, India and Iran—taking control of key Afghan cities. America supported this position and will be concerned by the Alliance's advance for the same reasons.

Russia's President Putin signed up to the anti-terrorism coalition and even allowed US troops to use former Soviet territory and airspace, but Russia has by no means abandoned its own ambitions in Central Asia. It is heavily dependent on oil, as exports of crude, gas and metals account for roughly three-quarters of its revenues. In Dushanbe Tajikistan, Putin pledged support for the Northern Alliance and declared its political chief, Burhanuddin Rabbani, the legitimate ruler of Afghanistan. He said he saw no role for members of the Taliban in a future Afghan government.

The issue is: if the Northern Alliance controls Afghanistan, then who controls the Northern Alliance? According to *Pravda*, there is already a potential military conflict within the Northern Alliance between rival pro-Russian and pro-US factions. The United States is said to have promised its support to General Rashid Dostum, who leads the ethnic Uzbek faction, while the ethnic Tajik wing is said to be backed by Russia. It is certainly the case that the Northern Alliance has been given tons of weapons by Russia.

Turkey plays the role of US go-between with the Northern Alliance, in return for the release of £9 billion in IMF loans to prop up their failing economy. *Pravda* cites reports it has seen describing US plans to use Turkish troops to occupy Kabul as the "acceptable face" of a US occupation.

The European powers, for their part, have had great difficulty so far in formulating a clear response to the US drive for Central Asian dominance. But they are all over the region like a rash. Germany is presently debating the sending of 4,000 troops with a mandate to take part in combat for the first time since World War Two.

The problem for the Europeans is that Europe is a collection of nation states with competing interests. In the *Financial Times* of October 15, Judy Dempsey wrote perceptively that following September 11, "The heads of state of the EU's leading members have seized the opportunity to further their own agendas. As a result, the common voice on EU foreign policy that was beginning to be heard seems to have broken down into a cacophony of individual pronouncements." How long this will continue is anyone's guess. The European powers may yet be forced to reconcile their conflicting ambitions in an alliance against the US, or like Britain they may seek a place in the sun as America's junior partners in crime.

The fact that the British bourgeoisie is led by a man whose wisdom extends no further than blind support for the US is testament to its decline as a world power and the depth of its political crisis. The ruling elite has been forced to rely on a party whose sole principle is to have none. Its major recommendation is what it isn't, rather than what it is—firstly that it is not the Tory party and secondly, that is not the old Labour Party. It does precisely what it is told to do, but that does not make for very good government. For Blair listens only to whomsoever he sees as having most power, whether that be the major corporations, the Murdoch press or George W. In consequence, there is mounting criticism of Blair for having abandoned any notion of independent British interests.

In the November 4 *Observer*, for example, Nick Cohen speaks of the "corpse of British foreign policy" having been buried when Blair made "British and American interests one". Citing the praise for Britain by the US Christian fundamentalist Jesse Helms as delineating "Blair's capitulation to America", Cohen states, "The Prime Minister's management of the war has been weak to the point of frailty... Until 11 September, all right-thinking people denounced America's anarchic sabotage of global security. Britain opposed her when we had a foreign policy."

This type of sentiment offers no alternative to Blair's stance. It can only resolve itself into support for a nationalist or a more consistent pan-European response to US unilateralism. We do not support any bourgeois power, and least of all Britain, as offering an alternative to American militarism. We base our perspective for opposing war on the independent political mobilisation of the working class, a possibility every other supposedly left tendency rejects as utopian. The middle class radicals are prostrate before the seeming power of imperialism and believe the best that can be accomplished is to appeal to its more moderate representatives—such as the handful of Labour MPs and aid agencies who have called for a suspension of the bombing—or to the United Nations.

The key issue that must be understood is that the return to classical imperialism must mean the resurgence of class struggle, also in its more classical, i.e. revolutionary form. We are well aware of the dangers of political reaction, but we also know that through its unbridled militarism and attacks on social gains and democratic rights, the ruling class is preparing the way for class struggles, the likes of which have not been seen for many decades. Our task is to clarify the axis on which the working class must fight.

The initial manifestations of anti-war sentiment are, as one would expect, politically confused, including as they do pacifist sentiment, the political prejudices of the anti-globalisation milieu and illusions in Islamism. Nevertheless, within the present opposition to the US bombing of Afghanistan are the seeds of an anti-imperialist movement in which we will be able to win support.

No one should indulge in wishful thinking and glorify the existing level of understanding amongst those opposed to the present war, but it would be politically myopic to believe that a rump of Labourites, radicals and pacifist groups in the West and nationalists and clerics in the Muslim countries can maintain political control over the anti-war movement for long. It is entirely possible for the workers and oppressed masses in the under developed countries to be united in a common anti-imperialist movement with the working class in the advanced countries, including the powerful US working class. The prerequisite for such a development—the only way in which the drive to imperialist war and renewed colonial domination can be opposed—is the building of an international party of the working class. And the conditions are extremely favourable for the construction of such a party. Unlike in the past, those opposed to war do not look to the leadership of the Labour Party. They oppose it as the chief warmonger. And Labour's lurch to the right has caught up most of the former pacifist and liberal intelligentsia in its wake.

Those looking for a clear basis for opposing militarism can find it only on the *World Socialist Web Site*.

The *World Socialist Web Site* is more than just a source of political analysis and reliable objective news upon which many have come to rely. Its essential aim is to create the basis for the construction of a world socialist party, the Fourth International, by unifying the advanced workers and youth behind a common understanding of events and the internationalist and socialist programme that meets up to the challenges posed by the modern imperialist epoch.



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## A socialist response