

# Book Reviews

---

*What is the 'new world order'? And what are its implications for the Third World? What legacies has 'Desert Storm' bequeathed to the Middle East in particular? These are some of the questions addressed by Harry Browne in the book review section which follows.*

## **Deterring Democracy**

Noam Chomsky, London, Verso, 1991, hardback; paperback, Vintage, London, 1992

## **The Gulf War and the New World Order**

Edited by Haim Bresheeth and Nira Yuval-Davis, London, Zed Books, 1991

## **Beyond the Gulf War: The Middle East and the New World Order**

Edited by John Gittings, London, Catholic Institute for International Relations, 1991

Hypocrisy may not be the most salient feature of the new world order, but it is sufficiently ubiquitous to provide grim sport for the jaded observer of geo-politics. Early 1992 yielded up at least two examples, rendered more horrible by their bland acceptance by the international media. On 17 January Northern Ireland's security minister, Brian Mawhinney, wondered aloud at the astonishing cruelty and degradation of men who could, from a comfortable distance, press a button and deliberately kill targeted people – and worse yet, of the men who

could give the orders for such an act. He was talking about the IRA murder of seven workers at Teebane Cross; but he was speaking, unconsciously and with no apparent sense of irony, one year to the day after his country's planes and missiles followed those of the United States to begin the deliberate, 'video-game' destruction of thousands of Iraqis.

Later in 1992, the same two countries were joined by France in demanding that pressure be put on Libya to force the extradition of two intelligence agents alleged to be involved in the Lockerbie bombing, seorning all Libyan suggestions that they could be tried in Tripoli. And who feared to speak of the *Rainbow Warrior*, and the French agents who were known to be guilty of its bombing but not extradited to New Zealand?

A cursory knowledge of history might suggest that there's nothing particularly new about such a world order. That is true in as much as the conventions of newspeak and doublethink which govern imperialist discourse are consistent across time. But there is more 'new' about the present state of affairs than simply the absence of the old USSR's – equally hypocritical – anti-imperialist dis-

course (though even devout anti-Stalinists must sometimes miss the days when a Kremlin press statement shed some light on situations which had been darkened by US rhetoric).

The terminology of the 'new world order' emerged three decades ago to describe the hopes of developing countries in the post-colonial era – but it has been hijacked by a concept which is at least as old as *pax romana*. As dramatised by the Gulf War, it means unquestioned American military domination in international affairs.

Moreover, it is characterised by a tough fiscal rationality, characteristic of those Noam Chomsky calls the 'global planners', advised by the likes of *Chicago Tribune* financial editor William Neikirk, who has said that the US must exploit its 'virtual monopoly in the security market...as a lever to gain funds and economic concessions' from its capitalist rivals in the new tri-polar order. Thus the greatest measure of success in the war against Iraq: the US turned a profit estimated at over \$7 billion for a few month's work.

*Deterring Democracy* sees Chomsky the world-class linguist again forced into his other role as one of America's most penetrating dissidents. It accurately reflects the world in 1992, though apart from an afterword in the paperback edition it went to press on the eve of the Gulf War. (In one of his pleasing moments of linguistic pedantry Chomsky insists that no aspect of the conflict, from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait through to the crushing of its internal rebellions, and including its destruction by the

'allies', actually merits the label 'war'.)

Readers who have followed Chomsky over two decades of dissecting US foreign policy – in southeast Asia, Central America and the Middle East particularly – will find little new in the details but much to savour in the conceptual framework of *Deterring Democracy*. Other readers may first have encountered Chomsky as the most articulate of US dissidents before and during the war against Iraq; when his voice turned up on Irish radio, an American Embassy spokesman was reduced to spluttering that the MIT professor was not a distinguished academic, and was certainly not taken seriously at home.

Unfortunately, there's a great deal of truth to the second half of that splutter. Running through Chomsky's recent work, and perhaps its most important dimension, is the use of a 'propaganda model' to illuminate the drastic constraints which the American media place on policy debate, virtually eliminating voices like Chomsky's and distorting the truth where the facts don't suit the needs of powerful interests. The transatlantic potency of the resulting propaganda shouldn't be underestimated: Oliver North recently had RTE's Pat Kenny casually agreeing with him that Nicaragua's Sandinistas had never been democratically elected, the Irishman apparently forgetting the all-party Oireachtas delegation's contrary conclusions in 1984.

But it's not just propaganda to point out that American political and

military hegemony, in this post-Cold War world, is at its most complete in forty years. Chomsky's Chapter Seven, 'The Victors', powerfully assesses the international division of spoils after the 'triumph of the free market', comprehensively deconstructing the mythology of the New World Order.

Few of the Chapter's details will be new for those involved in development issues. But it should be required reading for others who are prone to make glib comparisons among such diverse regions as Latin America, east Asia and eastern Europe, in praise of 'unfettered capitalism'. The First and Third World countries on the Cold War's 'winning' side do have a couple of things in common, as Chomsky observes: distinctly unfree-market economies and small, rich, powerful elites.

As for newly liberated Europe: 'As in Latin America, some sectors of Eastern European society should come to share the economic and cultural standards of privileged classes in the rich industrial world.... Many others might look to the second Brazil [the poor majority there], and its counterparts elsewhere, for a glimpse of a different future, which may come to pass if matters proceed on their present course.' The grim but scientific tone of this last phrase is typical of Chomsky's sometimes chilling, Jacob Marley-type voice, matter-of-factly revealing the dark but mutable future.

Remarkably, Chomsky insists that the future *is* mutable, and not just for the worse. His libertarian faith in the human desire for freedom is the

touchstone of his optimism. But clearly the New World Order is the same old two and six, and in spite of all the talk about the UN and peaceful conflict resolution, Chomsky is clear about its vicious immorality.

This book's moral centre lies, perhaps, in the US-sponsored abattoir that was El Salvador in the 1980s, a fitting symbol of the tenets of American policy; among the book's few heroes is Fr Ignacio Martin Baro, one of the murdered Jesuits, who only months before he was killed delivered an astute lecture on the psychological consequences of state terrorism. Chomsky argues, quoting extensively from the policymakers' literature, that the US will only eschew such murderous tactics on pragmatic grounds - if softer methods prove more effective in preserving friendly elites and suppressing stirrings of national independence.

The other two books under consideration here provide ample evidence that, as far as the Middle East is concerned, intellectual independence is alive and well and living in exile all over Europe and North America. Essay after essay by Arab, Turkish, Israeli and Iranian writers shed considerable light on the regional crises which preceded and survive the Gulf War, bringing exciting, necessary and often competing perspectives into the debates around the Middle East.

The more interesting set of these, by a slim margin, is in the longer volume, edited by Bresheeth and Yuval-Davis. Its most provocative chapter, by Iraqi Sami Yousif, sets out

a 'conspiracy theory' for the origins of the US-Iraqi war, persuasively arguing that the US encouraged Saddam up to his invasion of Kuwait partly *because* it craved and planned for the opportunity to attack his country militarily.

Yousif characterises the Iraqi regime as fascist, an opinion shared by Fred Halliday in his essay justifying his support for the allied war effort. But the hard information in the chapters by Yousif and others effectively undermines Halliday's inflated, Second World War rhetoric. His claim that much of the Western left was soft on Saddam is half-truth at best; his assertion that the dictator's strongest critics were Arab and Iranian is borne out by many of the other chapters in the book – unfortunately for Halliday, since these well-informed Saddam-haters reach conclusions about the necessity and value of the war against Iraq which directly contradict his own. Finally, his defence of that war on the grounds that it was a crusade against a new Hitler flies in the face of geo-political reality, in which Iraq is a (sometimes fickle) client state of the East and/or West, not a major imperialist power. Events since the war have, if anything, further undermined his arguments, which hew closely – as it happens – to the vision of the world predicted at the left-liberal end of Chomsky's propaganda model.

This summary should not be taken to suggest that these books offer only an historical rehearsal of the debates about Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm which flew around the

world in late 1990 and early 1991. A reader of *The Gulf War and the New World Order* will understand far more about the dynamics of international and internal affairs from Turkey to Iran, with intriguing discourses on the US, Britain and the former Soviet Union to boot. Among its twenty-two chapters are analyses of each of the major states involved in the Gulf crisis, as well as salient topics such as oil, Islam, patriarchy, nationalism, Zionism and the environment.

Haim Bresheeth's excellent chapter, 'The New World Order', sets out to 'map the tremors rippling through the world political system; those tremors did not originate in this war, but much earlier, but their direction has been clarified through this conflict.' Bresheeth correctly places America's military and 'diplomatic' hyperactivity firmly in the context of its economic lethargy; the best commodity which the US has for export, he suggests, is a protection racket, making it the world's *primo mafioso* rather than the tough but benevolent sheriff. But Bresheeth is doubtful about the prospects for success of Don Giorgio's *pax americana*, partly because the Washington godfather made too many promises to too many conflicting parties at the time of the Gulf crisis.

The slim paperback from the Catholic Institute for International Relations, *Beyond the Gulf War*, is more rooted in the specifics of the conflict, being based on the proceedings of a London conference held less than a fortnight after the slaughter on the road to Basra, and

while the Kurdish and Shia uprisings struggled on. Its sympathies lie most closely with ordinary Arabs, especially Palestinians – an important corrective to the Western world-view which ignored the post-war sentiments even of unpopular Arab governments, let alone of Arabs-in-the-street (shadowy figures who lurked dangerously in much of the pre-war media rhetoric, but who disappeared when it became clear that their rulers could safely ignore them while scooping up petrodollars from the Gulf states).

Even the most ardent anti-American will fail to be convinced by all the arguments in these three books, some of which are distinctly wobbly, while others are deadly dull. But taken together, they represent the considerable courage of those who are ready to speak the truth and shame the devil. Their interdisciplinary scope is remarkable, offering clear explanations of matters ranging from military strategy to macroeconomics, from cultural nationalism to religious fundamentalism. They offer Western

readers the sort of sympathetic, detailed exploration of the unfamiliar (indeed the 'Oriental') which our standard media practice generally forbids.

Even if 90 per cent of their contents were rubbish (and it isn't), these volumes would be important precisely because they defy the intellectually sloppy consensus that permits states to sponsor and carry out atrocious acts of terrorism with near-total impunity.

John Gittings, in the closing essay of *Beyond the Gulf War*, cites the question posed in a chapter by Richard Falk: 'whether the people, if informed and free, will restrain the militarism of the state'. Gittings continues: 'Perhaps the real problem is that it is unlikely that we will ever be fully informed and wholly free. Yet that must remain our purpose. There are still grounds for hope that some of the more glaring lessons of this war and its aftermath will have been registered in our collective memories.'

*Harry Browne*

## Some Other Trócaire Publications

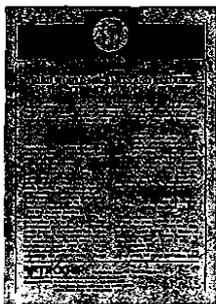
### **NORTH/SOUTH ISSUES**

North/South Issues are short, informative, up-to-date background papers on themes or events affecting relations between developing and developed countries.

They are addressed to politicians, civil servants, journalists, academics, third level students and others with an interest in international development issues.

*Topics covered to date include:*

- No. 1 Developing Country Bank Debt
- No. 2 UNCTAD VI: Background issues and prospects
- No. 3 Agricultural Protectionism and LDCs
- No. 4 Africa's Food Crisis
- No. 5 The World Bank Group: Funding and Role
- No. 6 Africa's Food Crisis – An Update

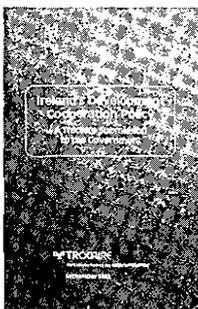


- No. 7 International Labour Code – Protection or Protectionism?
- No. 8 The U.S. and International Financial Reform
- No. 9 The New GATT Round: Background Issues and Prospects
- No. 10 Third World Debt
- No. 11 UNCTAD VII: Problems and Perspectives
- No. 12 Commodity Prices: Investing in Decline?
- No. 13 Debt and Development in the Third World
- No. 14 The Developing Countries and 1992
- No. 15 The Impact of the Gulf Crisis on Developing Countries
- No. 16 Manufactured Exports from the Third World: Trends and Issues
- No. 17 The Earth Summit: What's at stake for Developing Countries?
- No. 18 Third World Migrants and Refugees in the "Common European Home"

ISSN 0790-9799

### **IRELAND'S DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION POLICY: A TRÓCAIRE SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT**

Calls on the Irish Government to raise



overseas aid, improve contact with NGOs, create an Oireachtas Foreign Affairs Committee and set up an independent body of development experts to advise the government and stimulate informed discussion on

development cooperation.

1992, 1 870072 47 2

Trócaire World Topics: A new series on aspects of Third World affairs for the general reader – factual, accurate and up to date.

## 1. BREAD AND FREEDOM: BASIC HUMAN NEEDS AND HUMAN RIGHTS



John Grindle

Basic needs -- food, shelter, water, health, education, a living income and security are the minimum human entitlement. *Bread and Freedom* outlines an approach to development which could provide these basic needs for all.

Political freedom and basic needs are inseparable. While great advances have been made in the Third World more progress is possible at little cost. All that is lacking is political will.

John Grindle has worked as an economic consultant in several developing countries and for the Irish government.

"Some valuable ideas" *Sunday Tribune*  
*Trócaire and Gill and Macmillan, 1992,*  
£4.99, 0 7171 1967 X

## 2. IRELAND AND LATIN AMERICA: LINKS AND LESSONS



Peadar Kirby

Our links with Latin America have always been strong through Irish missionaries, traders and soldiers. Part One of this book is a concise history of the region from pre-Columbus days to independence, military rule and democracy.

Part Two tells the story of leading Irish migrants to Latin America and Church and solidarity links. The author suggests Ireland and Latin America have much in common: both need to overcome a colonial legacy and find the right development model. Each can learn much from the other.

Peadar Kirby, a journalist and author, has written widely on Third World development.

"a valuable insight... a fine read" *Sunday Tribune*

"a compact account" *Sunday Independent*

"fascinating and very readable" *Irish Catholic*

*Trócaire and Gill and Macmillan, 1993,*  
£4.99, 0 7171 1969 6

## Forthcoming

### 3. IRISH FOREIGN POLICY AND THE THIRD WORLD

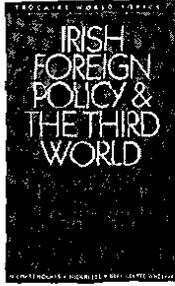
Michael Holmes,  
Nicholas Rees,  
Bernadette Whelan

Does Ireland have an overall foreign policy towards the Third World and, if so, who decides it? How great is EC influence on that policy? Do Irish decision-makers really care about the Third World? These are some of the questions this book tackles.

The authors argue for wider consultation on policy making. They also urge Ireland to adopt a more planned approach rather than reacting to events as they happen.

Michael Holmes lectures in the Department of Politics, UCD; Nicholas Rees lectures in European Studies and International Relations at the University of Limerick. Bernadette Whelan lectures in Modern History at the University of Limerick.

*Trócaire and Gill and Macmillan, 1993,  
£4.99, 0 7171 1970 X*



### 4. THIRD WORLD DEBT: TOWARDS AN EQUITABLE SOLUTION

Mary McCarthy and  
Tom McCarthy

Third World debt payments cripple many developing countries. They reduce health and education spending, causing child poverty and malnutrition.

This book suggests the rich industrial countries are as responsible for the problem as debtor countries. The authors analyse responses to the crisis so far and propose an attractive and more equitable solution.

Mary McCarthy works with the EC in Brussels. Tom McCarthy lectures in Economics at St Patrick's College, Maynooth.

*Trócaire and Gill and Macmillan, 1993,  
£4.99, 0 7171 1968 8*

