

# Reviews

## Failed Superstate

**Noam Chomsky, *Failed States: The Abuse of Power and the Assault on Democracy*, Hamish Hamilton, 2006, 306 pages, hardback ISBN 9780241143230, £16.99**

Noam Chomsky's latest book deliberately refers to the United States as 'Failed States', the opprobrium which US governments apply to their enemies which they say lack the democracy the United States prides itself on supposedly possessing. This is not an anti-American book. On every one of the claims made by US governments for their policies, which Chomsky examines with meticulous attention to the appropriate references, he can show that the opinions of the American people are overwhelmingly opposed to their governments' policies.

On the main issues of US policy which Chomsky examines, the policies are shown not only to be contrary to the accepted laws of nations and to democratic principles, quite at odds with the grand rhetoric with which they are proclaimed, but also to be seriously destructive of the security and comfort of the American people themselves. The cases he cites begin with the so-called 'war on terror' in which US governments and their allies, and notably Blair's Britain, are revealed as the real terrorists. US governments have a long history of terrorising peoples – from the indigenous American Indians, to Latin America and across the world to Hiroshima, Vietnam and Iraq. The threat of first use of nuclear weapons is the ultimate terrorism encompassing the prospect of destroying all life on the planet.

The US governments' concept of outlaw states is Chomsky's second case. The outlaws are supposedly those like North Korea, Iraq or Iran which, under leaders not approved of by the United States, should not be allowed nuclear weapons. The real outlaw (out-law) is, of course, the United States which excludes itself from the rulings of the United Nations, the Non-Proliferation Treaty, the International Court of Justice, the Kyoto Protocols, and even the UN Convention against Torture, which the US Senate signed but with its own interpretation of 'torture', repeated by Secretary Rice in her justification of the abominable practice of 'rendition' of prisoners to countries where abuse is the norm. The extension to actual military aggression of this principle of US exclusion from international law provides Chomsky's third case. Thus, the bombing of Serbia including Belgrade without UN sanction could be called 'illegal but legitimate', as Chomsky revealed in his earlier books on the Balkan wars, *New Military Humanism* and *A New Generation Draws the Line*. Unfortunately, many on the political left decided on humanitarian grounds to condone this bombing although, as Chomsky demonstrates, the humanitarian disaster in Kosovo took place after and not before the bombs fell.

Promotion of democracy abroad is the boast of George W. Bush's military adventures. There is nothing new in this justification for military action outside

the United States, as Chomsky shows at some length in citing US intervention throughout Central and South America and in Vietnam, long before the current incursions into the Middle East, Afghanistan, the Balkans and western Asia. This was the theme of earlier US historians, William and Mary Beard, and more recently of Andrew Bacevich. Behind the democratic rhetoric Chomsky can easily show that today as ever the real rationale is control over raw materials and most particularly over oil and gas, the reserves, the production and transport. Chomsky reminds us that the British Empire with its civilising claims, most recently lauded by its latest apologist, Niall Ferguson, was not different in its treatment of native peoples. Chomsky quotes the astonishing orders of Churchill in May 1945 to draw up war plans for 'Operation Unthinkable' having no less an aim than 'the elimination of Russia'. Where democracy produces results unacceptable to US governments, as in the case of the victories of Sukarno in Indonesia, Mossadeq in Iran, Allende in Chile, Chavez in Venezuela, or Hamas in Palestine, there is no hesitation on the part of US governments to refuse recognition or seek forcefully to overthrow these democrats.

US policy in the Middle East, indeed, and most particularly the cases of Lebanon, Egypt and Palestine, supplies Chomsky with the strongest supporting evidence for his onslaught against the sincerity of US governments' claims to a Messianic mission abroad. The most recent Israeli invasion of Lebanon has taken place since Chomsky published his latest book, but he has no difficulty in showing that Israeli governments, fully supported by the United States, had no intention after 1973 of accepting a Palestinian state or reaching a peaceful settlement with the surrounding Arab states.

Chomsky argues convincingly that the Camp David proposals, claimed by Clinton to be a fair settlement which Arafat walked away from, never had any chance of being accepted by any Palestinian leader including Bush's nominee, Mahmoud Abbas. Egypt won US favour by its support for the US actions in launching the first Gulf War, but the dictatorship of Hosni Mubarak can hardly be claimed as a democracy. Chomsky ends this chapter by quoting from a Pentagon advisory panel, the Defense Science Board, which concluded in December 2004 that 'Muslims do not "hate our freedom", but rather they hate our policies'. As Muslims see it, the Report continues, 'American occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq has not led to democracy there, but only more chaos and suffering'. George W. Bush, Chomsky concludes, has become bin Laden's best ally in resisting a true development of democracy in Saudi Arabia.

Chomsky's last chapter reviews the progress of 'Democracy Promotion at Home'. It is not difficult for him to assess the results of the last two Presidential elections as a travesty of democracy. More serious is the evidence he adduces not only for the growth of inequality in the United States in the last four decades, but also for the widening gap there between Government policies and public opinion as revealed in opinion polls. This applies not only to foreign policy, but also more especially to policies for education and provision for health and social security. Decline of economic growth is matched by even greater decline in educational and

health standards. The Bush administration can be seen as steadily chipping away at standards that had been slowly and painfully won over the years and particularly in the Roosevelt era.

Chomsky added an Afterword to the book before its publication in 2006. In this he underlines the absolute failure of US policies in Iraq and refers to the challenge to US policies presented by the new regimes appearing in Latin America. He gives the amusing story of the Venezuelan state oil company offering to provide low cost oil to low income residents of Boston and later elsewhere in the US, President Chavez hoping that ‘the deal would present a friendly challenge to US oil companies ... to use their windfall profits to help poor families survive the winter’. To end the Afterword, Chomsky offers a brief summary of ‘a few simple suggestions’ for the United States:

‘(1) accept the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court and the World Court; (2) sign and carry forward the Kyoto protocols; (3) let the UN take the lead in international crises; (4) rely on diplomatic and economic measures rather than military ones in confronting terror; (5) keep to the traditional interpretation of the UN Charter; (6) give up the Security Council veto and “have a decent respect for the opinion of mankind” as the Declaration of Independence advises, even if power centres disagree; (7) cut back sharply on military spending and sharply increase social spending.’

‘As always in the past’, Chomsky concludes, ‘the tasks require dedicated day by day engagement to create – in part re-create – the basis for a functioning democratic culture, in which the public plays some role in determining policies, not only in the political arena, from which it is largely excluded, but also in the crucial economic arena, from which it is excluded in principle.’

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## Lord of Mistrust

**Steven Kettel, *Dirty Politics? New Labour, British Democracy and the Invasion of Iraq*, Zed Books, 213 pages, hardback ISBN 1842777408 £55, paperback ISBN 1842777416 £14.99**

When Tony Blair finally leaves office as Prime Minister, whether by his own decision or by public and parliamentary pressure, he will depart with an unenviable reputation. Much of it will be due to his role in the war on Iraq. This book explains why he has lost support.

The Prime Minister is now mistrusted by a substantial section of the electorate. Until comparatively recently Labour’s lead in opinion polls reflected even greater disenchantment with the Tories than with New Labour. Today that appears to have changed.

Tony Blair is regarded as the political leader who took Britain into an aggressive war in support of the United States. The war has been costly both in lives and resources. It was based upon false information and was in defiance of the Charter of the United Nations. It is seen as the symbol of the servility of the

British Government towards the ambition of the ruling circles of the United States to exercise dominating influence in many areas of the world. The war has not brought peace to the Middle East. The killings continue.

In the eyes of the majority of the British public the war on Iraq and the refusal of Tony Blair to give support for an earlier cease-fire in the Lebanon have not diminished the threat of terrorism. On the contrary, the policies of the United States and Britain have contributed to the recruitment of a small minority group prepared to kill others and to kill themselves by terrorist acts.

For anyone wanting to trace the sequence of events leading to this outcome, there is unlikely to be a better or more concise guide than this book by Steven Kettel. The author is a lecturer in the Department of Politics and International Studies at the University of Warwick. He combines a scholarly style of writing with a strong commitment to speak the truth as he has found it. His narrative is thoroughly referenced and documented and, though he expresses his point of view with clarity and sharpness, he seeks also to explain the standpoint of the Government and its principal supporters.

All the essential events leading to the present state of public opinion in Britain concerning the Iraq war are covered in the book. There was the claim that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction and that these weapons were in a state of readiness, representing an imminent threat to British security. It proved to be false. There was the argument about the legality under international law of an attack on Iraq without a so-called 'second resolution' from the Security Council. Such a resolution was not carried. The Secretary-General of the United Nations made it clear that the subsequent assault on Iraq did not have UN authority.

There were rumblings of opposition both within the Parliamentary Labour Party and in the Cabinet. Robin Cook, and eventually Clare Short, resigned from the Cabinet. At one stage 139 Labour MPs voted in favour of a parliamentary amendment stating that the case for war had yet to be made. The anti-war movement in Britain succeeded in mobilising the biggest street protest demonstration in British history.

There was also the tragic death of Dr David Kelly, the security official who it was said had misgivings about the 'evidence' in the Government's case for war. Related to it were the circumstances surrounding the departure of Andrew Gilligan from the BBC and the resignations of Gavyn Davies from the Chairmanship of the BBC and Greg Dyke as Director-General. All three had been the subject of attack for their part in reporting or permitting broadcasts on the war which the Government regarded as too critical and one-sided. Alastair Campbell, the press spokesman for the Prime Minister, was deeply involved in the criticism of the BBC.

This book is not, however, only about the Iraq war. The author is concerned about the wider political implications of the clear divergence between the policy of the Government and the predominant critical mood of the public. To put it briefly: how is it possible for the Government to continue for so long with a policy that most of the electorate do not support? What does this tell us about the state of

democracy in Britain?

The conventional reply to this question is that the present Government has a substantial parliamentary majority and its mandate was re-affirmed in a General Election as recently as the year 2005. Moreover, the Government sought and secured Parliamentary approval for the war and the principal Opposition party supported the invasion of Iraq. The Prime Minister, it is argued, is therefore justified in giving strong leadership in support of a cause which he believes to be of world importance, even though it has brought for the time being some unpopularity.

The author of this book maintains that it is the centralised, hierarchical and élitist underpinnings of the British political system that have provided the possibility for the pursuit of the Iraq war policy. This underpinning of centralised, hierarchical and élitist control has been further developed and implemented by senior figures within the New Labour leadership. They have succeeded up to now because, in the words of the author of this book, '... it reveals not so much the failure of British democracy, as that it signifies the triumph of its essentially undemocratic underlying norms and values'.

The inner group of the New Labour leadership have not only taken full advantage and even developed certain undemocratic features of British constitutional arrangements, such as, for example, the power of patronage belonging to the Prime Minister and wide-ranging unilateral powers exercised in the name of the sovereign, but they have also brought about changes in the structure of the labour movement to consolidate their power.

New Labour has diminished the collective influence of the Cabinet, diminished the influence of the National Executive of the Party, changed the role of the Party conference, and has largely succeeded in curbing opposition from the unions. Even the chairmanship of the Party nationally has been transformed into an instrument of patronage.

The other side of this coin is that Party membership has slumped and Party activity at local level has declined steeply. The author points out that favourable election results are not as convincing as they might appear at first sight.

At the last General Election Labour was elected with a substantial majority of seats, even though only 21.6% of those entitled to vote cast their votes for Labour candidates. In England Labour won far more seats than the Conservatives even though the Conservatives polled more votes than Labour. At the next General Election there will be some redistribution of constituencies to take account of population changes.

In the final chapter of this book the author puts forward suggestions for a reform agenda. They affect both policy and the structure of representative democracy. He urges that 'the stultifying edifice of the Party system' should be tackled, and that the 'dominant notion of representation' should be dislodged and replaced with 'one based on a more delegatory conception'. He suggests also that reform measures might include secret voting in Parliament for MPs, more frequent general elections, staggered elections for a second chamber, the

resolution of specific issues by national referenda and the introduction of mechanisms for the public to recall and remove representatives from office between elections on grounds of poor performance.

Among the author's other suggestions for reform are that there should be a codified constitution, a Bill of Rights, greater powers for Parliament, more checks and balances on executive power, a more rigorous relationship between the political and the intelligence spheres of the British state, a strengthening of the committee system, dilution of prerogative powers, more formalised relations between ministers, civil servants and special advisors and some form of proportional representation.

The adoption of some of these suggestions would be helpful. Not all, however, would find support in the labour movement.

The key surely lies within the labour movement itself. And within the labour movement the most important contributor for change should be the unions. It is they, with their day-to-day contact with the problems facing working people, that should be the long-term guarantee that the Labour Party will not depart from – and, indeed will defend and further — the interests of working people, their dependants, pensioners, the disabled, and the self-employed.

It is within the potential influence of the unions to change the course of the Labour Party from so-called New Labour to the traditional aims and values of the labour movement. To do this, however, they must be prepared to 'punch their weight' within the Party. This is necessary at all levels, including the Party conference, the National Executive, the local constituencies, and within the selection procedure for candidates. Their initiative would be welcomed by many constituency activists.

This is a good book, particularly on the Iraq war. It is likely to serve as a very helpful source of reference. Its exposure of some of the deficiencies of the British political system is thoughtful and stimulating, but its suggestions for change, in the view of this reviewer, are not always on target.

*J.E. Mortimer*

## Unsustainable War

**Westmorland General Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, (Quakers), *Preparing for Peace*, 267 pages, paperback ISBN 095505270X £6-99 from PfP, 4 Beetham House, Milnthorpe, Cumbria LA7 &AP, England**

In 2005, Westmorland General Meeting of the Quakers published the book *Preparing for Peace* having asked several international experts, civil and military, to analyse war. They included Dame Margaret Anstee, former UN Under-Secretary General, General Sir Hugh Beach, former Master General of the Ordnance, Judge Richard Goldstone, former Chief Prosecutor, UN International Tribunals, the late Sir Joseph Rotblat, Nobel Peace Prize 1995, Sir Crispin Tickell,

former UK Ambassador to the UN, and Brian Walker, former Director General of Oxfam

The project which led to the book began in 2002 when the United States and Britain were already bombing Iraq and, as we now know, preparing to invade. None of the experts consulted found it easy to envisage that all the conditions for a 'just war' could be satisfied, particularly since bombardment, the preferred option, made civilian casualties inevitable. Most of the experts concurred that war as a future tool of foreign policy was also likely to be unsustainable, unsuccessful and damaging – putting at risk even life on earth with a revived proliferation of nuclear weapons.

The invasion of one country by another has been described, I think by John Pilger, as the abuse of human rights that subsumes all other abuses. For an invader to kill and injure people, destroy infrastructures such as those for water supply, sanitation and power supplies, seize assets and privatise them at will, torture and imprison indefinitely without trial those who resist, and devise laws to 'legitimise' all that is imposed without consent, leaves no human right unviolated. That the number of consequent deaths, perhaps over 200,000 people, mainly civilians, is an *estimate* is the final indictment. The invaders of Iraq, the coalition partners of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*, chose not to count the victims.

The book was timely in its anticipation of the Iraq invasion. Its conclusions are strongly vindicated by subsequent events. The authors' recommendations include the strengthening of international law, the removal of immunity, support for the United Nations, an education programme, regulation of the arms trade, and reduced spending on weapons – changes that will allow greater commitment to trade justice and the development of deprived countries.

Few people now doubt that the war was illegal. Two million people in the United Kingdom took to the streets to object at the time. Now we know that the Cabinet and Parliament were misled, that there were two 'dodgy dossiers', that service chiefs demanded assurances from the Attorney General whose advice, not yet fully disclosed, lacks conviction, and that an attempt to secure the authority of the UN for the invasion was not even attempted because there was no prospect of its success. The list of those who insist that the war is illegal include members of both Houses of Parliament, US Senators and Congressmen, the Secretary General of the UN, the Archbishop of Canterbury and General Sir Michael Rose, former head of Nato operations in Bosnia, who demanded the impeachment of Tony Blair in January this year.

A motion for the impeachment of the Prime Minister was drafted some time ago by Adam Price, Plaid Cymru MP for Carmarthen East, and remains with the Speaker of the House of Commons. It may not succeed to impeachment but it should at least lead to debate and inquiry.

Will the United States continue to train 2,500 nuclear warheads on city and other targets none of which is an enemy or a plausible threat? Some of those bases are in the United Kingdom. Will our government go on to spend £25 billion on an updated Trident weapons system? Gordon Brown has spoken in favour of that



ahead of any debate. As yet we have no assurance that Parliament will be allowed to decide.

*Christopher Gifford*

## **The Nuclear Non-Option**

**Christopher Gifford, *Nuclear Reactors: Do we need more?* Spokesman for Socialist Renewal, 32 pages, ISBN 0851247261, £2**

To the legacy of ruin which Blair's New Labour government has bequeathed to the British people, in an unwinnable war, destruction of the Health Service, the dividing up of comprehensive education, privatisation of all public services, the last touch is now being added in the dangerously wasteful folly of nuclear arms for a new fleet of Trident submarines and the proliferation of nuclear power stations. Christopher Gifford, who had a long and distinguished career as a Health and Safety Inspector of mines and was involved with the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate on human factors in high risk industries following the Chernobyl disaster, has now written a timely pamphlet to warn us of the dangers of installing more nuclear reactors.

Gifford writes in response to the conversion of the one-time green environmentalist, Sir James Lovelock, author of the Gaia hypothesis (that the planet has evolved as a self-regulating system), to support for the nuclear option as the only way to meet the world's needs for power, without increasing global warming from carbon dioxide emissions to a catastrophic level. Gifford takes on the case of the nuclear lobby step by step. Lovelock's claim that the Sellafield nuclear waste disposal installation was 'clean and tidy' was denied in the reports of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate. The idea of 'Atoms for Peace' has been rubbished by the evidence of the Central Electricity Generating Board's own chairmen, Lords Hilton and Marshall, to the effect that plutonium from the CEGB's reactors did go into the defence stockpile. And there is the continued underestimate of the true results of the Chernobyl disaster – when the assumption of at least 300,000 deaths and nine million people affected is accepted by Kofi Annan for the United Nations

The assumption that there was no risk from terrorist attack has been ridiculed by the events of 9/11, but the government has taken no steps as required by European Directives to make plans and prepare information for all households in the United Kingdom in the event of a nuclear disaster. The idea that nuclear power is economic depends on whether owners and managers of capital can be convinced that there is a likely profitable return in the near future from their investment. This can only be sustained if the actual costs of decommissioning reactors, estimated by the Department of Trade and Industry at £55bn., are omitted, or promised by government to be covered by subsidies. As for the disposal of nuclear waste, some 10,000 tonnes of this are stored in the United



Kingdom awaiting decision on its long-term future, which the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate regards as unlikely to be safely effected by 2015, especially if the business is privatised. Depleted uranium as a product of the reprocessing of spent fuel from nuclear reactors is now used for increasing the penetrating power of shells – 2000 tonnes of it in the 2003 attack on Iraq, a small part of the million tonnes held world-wide – has undoubted toxic effects on human beings and on the wider environment. These effects can last for thousands of years with many generations affected.

So what are the alternatives? Gifford argues that renewable energy – tidal, hydro, solar, wind, geo-thermal and bio-mass are not only available to fill the gap left by oil and gas, but could be introduced sooner than nuclear, and, he might have added, are more likely to find willing investors. Gifford ends his argument by urging that all plans for new nuclear reactors should be subject to the most rigorous open public inquiries, and no fast tracking for licensing to private contractors with government guarantees.

*Michael Barratt Brown*

## The Essential Saladin

**Sir Hamilton Gibb, *The Life of Saladin*, Saqi Essentials, 94 pages, paperback ISBN: 0863569285 £9.99**

Saqi Essentials have republished Sir Hamilton Gibb's *The Life of Saladin* in an attractive new edition, recently printed in the Lebanon. The book is prefaced by a short essay from Robert Irwin, which sets out in summary the life of Gibb, and stresses the influence upon him of Ibn Khaldun, the fourteenth century sociologist and historian, whose *Muqaddima* has also recently been republished in an accessible format in English. He points up the debt that Gibb owes to Ibn Khaldun in this work, which is directly based on the works of Baha'ad-Din ibn Shaddad and Imad ad-Din al-Isfahani. Their combined portrait of Saladin is summarised:

'Neither warrior nor governor by training or inclination, he it was who inspired and gathered round himself all the elements and forces making for the unity of Islam against the invaders. And this he did, not so much by the example of his personal courage and resolution – which were undeniable – as by his unselfishness, his humility and generosity, his moral vindication of Islam against both its enemies and its professed adherents. He was no simpleton, but for all that an utterly simple and transparently honest man. He baffled his enemies, internal and external, because they expected to find him animated by the same motives as they were, and playing the political game as they played it. Guileless himself, he never expected and seldom understood guile in others – a weakness of which his own family and others took advantage, but only (as a general rule) to come up at the end against his single-minded devotion, which nobody and nothing could bend, to the service of his ideals.'

Irwin's foreword offers much more detail about the sources of this little book, as Gibb says:

'The life and achievements of Saladin constitute one of the great moments in the history of the Crusades. In literature he appears most frequently as a conquering hero, who fought his enemies victoriously and in the end beat them to a standstill. But closer examination of his actual life reveals him not only as a conqueror, but as a man who struggled with enemies of his own side ...'

Modern wars will revive interest in Saladin the warrior, whose exploits are certainly recorded here. But Gibb is also at pains to explain why it was that Saladin inspired one of those who knew him to say: 'This was the only instance of a King's death that was truly mourned by the people'.

*Jim Thomas*

## A Voice of Ireland

**Robert W. White , *Ruairi Ó Brádaigh: The Life and Politics of an Irish Revolutionary*, Indiana University Press, 412 pages, ISBN 0253347084, £18.99**

This year is the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Rising. Ken Loach's film, *The Wind That Shakes The Barley*, which covers the Irish War of Independence against British imperialism, wins the Palme d'Or, and it is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hunger Strike. It's a good year to read this book.

Ruairi Ó Brádaigh has played a central role in Irish Republicanism from the 1950s, and for those who seek to understand the nature of that tradition it is in the 'must read' category.

In 1918, Republicans contested the British general election and won a democratic majority in favour of an Irish Republic, as a consequence of 1916 and their opposition to the Imperialist War of 1914-18. They abstained from the Westminster Parliament. In January 1919, they formed an all-Ireland Assembly, Dáil Éireann, and its army went to war with the British army of occupation. In the early 1920s, Dáil Éireann agreed to a treaty with Britain, which left six counties of Ireland under the control of the British Empire. Those that led the case for accepting a treaty which fell far short of the Republic did so because they believed it provided a stepping stone towards it. Those that did not, extended the idea of abstention from Westminster to the newly established Stormont Assembly in the six counties, and the now 26 county Dáil Éireann. Since the 1920s, wave after wave of Irish Republicans, Fianna Fáil, Clan na Poblachta, Official Sinn Féin and Sinn Féin decided to abandon abstentionism and enter the assemblies established in Ireland.

Ruairi Ó Brádaigh, however, stayed absolutely committed to abstaining, even if elected to the Dáil as he was in 1957 as a candidate for Sinn Féin. As far as Ó Brádaigh was concerned, the Republic, having been established, cannot be disestablished. The elected members of the Dáil that did not take their seats were

the real government and the IRA that agreed was the only legitimate army. By the 1950s, the IRA had rebuilt its organisation and felt strong enough to launch a war against the British Empire. They had a level of popular support. In 1955, in the six counties 152,000 people voted for Sinn Féin, electing two MPs and, in 1957, Sinn Féin got 65,640 votes, electing four members of the 26 county Dáil. It was not enough, and even that level of support fell to 36,393 votes in 1961, and Ó Brádaigh and the others lost their seats in the Dáil. In comparison, Fianna Fáil got 512,00 votes in the 1961 election.

A new leadership took over Sinn Féin and, in the late 1960s, it decided to end abstentionism. Sinn Féin's leaders advocated support for a civil rights campaign and a reformed Stormont. They did not believe Ireland was on the verge of a revolution or that the British intended to withdraw. Ó Brádaigh disagreed, led the establishment of Provisional Sinn Féin, and supported the Provisional IRA in its war to obtain a declaration of intent to withdraw. He played a leading role in the negotiations with the British in the 1970s, and developed the concept of a decentralised four Province Ireland, *Eire Nua*, in an effort to allay the concerns of the Unionists after withdrawal. By the 1980s, a new leadership dominated by people from the six counties gained control of Sinn Féin and rejected the *Eire Nua* policy and, in 1986, abstentionism. Ó Brádaigh left and formed Republican Sinn Féin that maintained the policy of abstentionism.

There can be no doubt that Ó Brádaigh is part of a deeply rooted Republican tradition. Every effort to break that tradition, through special courts, internment, torture, and collusion with loyalist terrorists, failed. Republicans are not criminals, and as we mark the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hunger Strike we should remember the strength of will of those Republicans that died seeking political status.

However, the key issue for Ó Brádaigh is that, by participation in the existing structures, Republicans eventually become corrupted, while other Republicans believe armed struggle without popular support will fail. There is evidence for Ó Brádaigh. Fianna Fáil now supports an imperialist war for oil, and Fine Gael are totally opposed to Irish Neutrality. Yet power derives from the people, and a Republic established without their support would have no legitimacy. A Republic has not been established with a ballot box in one hand and an armalite in the other. The decisive majority of Republicans now advocate building the Republic, as initially advocated by Desmond Greaves, by way of a reformed Stormont as part of reconciliation with the Unionists.

However, for the first time since the 1914-18 War, the political élite throughout Ireland is supporting an imperialist war, and the involvement of Irish soldiers in the European Union Battle Groups. If the latest wave of Republicans, led by Adams, go into coalition with Fianna Fáil and support the war and a militarised European Union, then the Republican beliefs of Ó Brádaigh, as happened so many times in Irish history, will be reborn. It is no accident that the phoenix is the symbol of Irish Republicanism, the unyielding enemy of British imperialism.

*Roger Cole*

*Chair, Peace & Neutrality Alliance, [www.pana.ie](http://www.pana.ie)*

## A Measure of Wheat for a Penny

**Kate Thompson, *The Fourth Horseman*, The Bodley Head, 250 pages, hardback, ISBN 9780370328904, £10.99**

Kate Thompson has done it again. Her twelfth book for children provides another thrilling read: of good versus evil, of teenagers saving adults from themselves, of children saving the world.

Parents sometimes let themselves down a bit in Kate's books. The children's father in *The Fourth Horseman* is particularly prone. Dr James McAllister, 'a well-respected expert on viruses', is engaged by the secret state to identify a virus that is lethal to grey squirrels but no problem for red ones. As his research progresses in the Worcestershire countryside, first one, then a second horseman, appear. The first sports a white robe and silver crown – 'his horse stood four square, motionless and calm'. By contrast, the second horse was 'skinny and rangy'. Its rider carried a crude sword dripping with blood.

Laurie, Dr McAllister's mid-teens daughter, sees these visions in the company of her father, at the laboratory where he conducts his research. This he does in virtual solitude, apart from the mysterious 'Mr Davenport' who phones to offer large sums of money for quick results, and Laurie herself who helps to look after the squirrels. What do the appearances of the horsemen mean?

Enter Alex, Laurie's younger brother, and his friend Javed, whose family are from Shasakstan (which sounds to be very much like Pakistan). There has been a coup in Shasakstan, and the new Islamic rulers are holding hostage the thousands of US military stationed in the country, pending complete US withdrawal from the Middle East. They also have their fingers on the nuclear button, should there be any US backsliding.

Javed and Alex, together with Laurie and Dr McAllister, witness the next appearance of the three horsemen. The new one offers

'A measure of wheat for a penny and three measures of barley for a penny, and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.'

Javed searches for the quote on the internet and discovers the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. The fourth rider, as yet unseen, is Death, and 'Hell followed with him'. Where might Dr McAllister's hellish research ultimately lead?

Kate Thompson has written a post 7/7 story for children (and their parents) which doesn't shy from confronting some difficult issues. It is told with great pace and fine humour. How long will it be before her work is translated to the big screen?

*Tony Simpson*