



## Eurozine Review

### Secular noise reduced to a whisper

*Index on Censorship* investigates what Bush–Cheney did to civil liberties; *Esprit* welcomes America's first Chicagoan president; *Arena* asks whether there will be a Left after capitalism; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Oslo) writes Bush's epitaph; *Samtiden* scrutinizes racism in Norway; *Dilema veche* calls for a debate on anti-Semitism in Romania; *Osteuropa* weighs up causes and effects of the Georgian war; *Le Monde diplomatique* (Berlin) reports on parallel realities in Israel; and *Magyar Lettre Internationale* prefers literary canons in the plural.

## Index on Censorship 4/2008



"One of the great tests for Barack Obama will be how far and how quickly he rolls back the Bush administration's expansion of executive power", writes *Index on Censorship* editor Jo Glanville in a new issue surveying the state of civil liberties in the US after eight years of Bush–Cheney.

In a compelling piece of investigative journalism, Patrick Radden Keefe [details](#) how the Bush–Cheney administration has overridden laws on domestic surveillance. In 2005, a report by journalists James Risen and Eric Lichtblau (who also writes in this issue) revealed that, following 9/11, George W. Bush authorized the National Security Agency to conduct warrantless domestic surveillance. Then, despite having won a Congress majority in 2006, the Democrats approved a Republican bill "euthanizing" the Foreign Surveillance Act of 1978. "The potential political benefits of adopting so abstract and complex a cause as privacy and individual liberty do not justify the potential political risks of being tarred as soft on national security", Radden Keefe concludes.

In the same section, Rick Piltz describes how the Bush government manipulated communications on climate change using a method pioneered by the tobacco industry decades earlier: "It wasn't necessary for the government to 'win' the debate about the reality of global warming, it was only necessary to create the appearance of a divided science community". And Lawrence Krauss details the PR game played by supporters of intelligent design, while Jameel Jaffer [writes](#) that the full story of human rights abuses during the War on Terror has yet to emerge.

**Twenty years fatwa:** [Kenan Malik claims](#) that Salman Rushdie's critics lost the battle but won the war. The argument at the heart of the anti–Rushdie case — that it is morally unacceptable to cause offence to other cultures — is now

widely accepted. "These days the radical, secular clamour, which found an echo in *The Satanic Verses*, has been reduced to a whisper."

**Continuing the focus:** Peter Mayer, director of Penguin Books, on the crisis following the publication of *The Satanic Verses*; [Bernard Henri-Lévy](#) on how the fatwa ushered in an era of retreat from the spirit of the Enlightenment; and [Salil Tripathi](#) on why succumbing to notions of religious offence stifles debate.

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## Esprit 12/2008



A Chicagoan has, for the first time, been elected president. Barack Obama, writes [Marc-Olivier Padis](#), is the perfect representative of what Norman Mailer called "the last great American city".

Avoiding the identity driven politics of black leaders such as Jesse Jackson, Obama has instead emphasized opportunity, civil rights and an inclusive sense of community. This owes much to the culture of Chicago, in the nineteenth century a common destination for freed slaves moving north to find work in the growing industries. Here, the political energy once devoted to the battle against slavery was redeployed to fight for workers' rights. Chicago is also home to the "community organizing" movement that brought Obama to Chicago as a young graduate, a form of political action based around "empowering" social groups.

What can Europe learn from Obama's victory? The most obvious lesson is that voter apathy is not inevitable; a sufficiently inspiring candidate can increase turnout. Also, writes Padis, this could mark the definitive end of 1960s radicalism as a political force, replaced by a limited and practical politics in theory more limited, but in practice more just and more effective.

**More on Obama and the US:** Sylvie Laurent considers Obama's rhetoric, which blends the tropes of church sermons with those of the civil rights movement; and Malika Zeghal writes of America's young Muslims, caught between their parents' heritage and the suspicion caused by the War on Terror.

**The financialization of charity:** Joël Roman considers the relationship of government to non-governmental organizations. He takes as starting point Cimade, a group whose ethos involves living alongside the immigrants they are helping. Previously recognized by the French government, they are now under threat from a rightwing administration uncomfortable about their work in defence of undocumented migrants. The case highlights the tension within organizations working with governments, caught between their ideals and a market driven world of neutrality and quantifiable results. The "financialization" of charitable groups has been accelerating since the 1980s: is there any way out?

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## Arena 6/2008



The new issue of Swedish *Arena* is entitled "After capitalism". However, the subtitle makes clear that this should not be interpreted as a bold proclamation of a historic fact, but rather as a sceptical inquiry into a possible but still uncertain future: "Is the financial crisis a chance for the Left?"

In his regular column, Nobel Prize laureate Paul Krugman hopes for a new New Deal: "Can Barack Obama really usher in a new era of progressive policies? Yes, he can. [...] It would be fair for the new administration to point out how conservative ideology, the belief that greed is always good, helped create this crisis. What F.D.R. said in his second inaugural address — 'We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now that it is bad economics' — has never rung truer."

Jonas Sjöstedt, former MEP for the Swedish Left Party, seems less confident. In interview he points to the "unparalleled" budgetary and trade deficits that will minimize the space for reforms in the US. In general, the Left has been caught unprepared by the financial crisis, says Sjöstedt. Whether it will be able to make use of the chance depends on its capacity to rethink: "The Social Democrats have already more or less given up on replacing capitalism with a different economic system [...] and the Left to the left of Social Democracy is still struggling with the afterquakes of the Russian revolution and the fall of the Wall."

**Blame it on postmodernism?** Historian Sara Edenheim, historian of ideas Anders Burman, and poet and architect Lars Mikael Raattamaa write on a related but slightly different issue: the problematic relation between postmodernism and the political Left. Right and Left alike accuse Postmodernism of having destroyed or undermined everything from art and feminism to education and "true values". But the Left needs postmodernism, writes Burman: "The fact that the Left has been unable to formulate concrete political alternatives to the neoliberal and neoconservative hegemony might lead to the conclusion that today there is radical theory but no radical politics. However, everything seems to indicate that theory with postmodern influences actually furthers the reappearance of a radical political practice."

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Published 2008-12-16  
Original in English  
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