

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



APRIL
14
2008



By Si Frumkin

MAYBE BRIBING IS BETTER (AND FASTER)

From time to time I am asked to serve as an expert witness at hearings of immigrants who are desperately trying not to be deported from America. Most of them came here as visitors, tourists or on temporary visas and decided not to go back when their visas expired.

Most of them ask for political asylum, a chance to stay here because of a fear of persecution for racial, religious or political reasons. It is my job to explain to the court that anti-Semitism is rampant in Russia – and Ukraine, Belarus and all those other former Soviet republics. That being a Jew in Russia has never been easy and it isn't really easy now.

My most recent appearance was very short. The case was rescheduled for 14 months ahead – for April 9, 2009! The case began 12 years ago and has now been postponed 11 times. This is how long Igor and Natasha Medetsky, (not their real names), have been waiting. The end is still not in sight.

They came here from Kamchatka – a sparsely populated peninsula in Russia's Northern provinces. In the 1700s it was conquered and settled by Cossacks for the Czar. The Cossacks are farmers with a military heritage as Russia's shock troops. They think of themselves as Russia's shock troops, are organized in clans that answer to leaders who might elsewhere be called warlords and they do not trust strangers, especially Jews. They also want Russia to be pure Russian with no Jews, Chinese or swarthy people from the Caucasus. In 2004, in the Krasnodar region, the Cossacks expelled thousands of Meskhetian Turks who had lived there for thousands of years – 5000 of them were admitted to the U.S. as refugees and about 11,000 applications are still pending.

with most of his teeth broken, their dog was killed and left on the doorstep with a note – "If you don't leave, we will kill all of you dirty Jews like your dog". The police wasn't helpful – the Medetskys were told not to annoy the authorities with baseless accusations. And so, they moved out, managed to get a tourist visa and came to America. This was 12 years ago. They are both working – Igor is a mechanic, Natasha a beautician – and every 10 months or so they come to court and are told that the case will be heard in 10 months or a year. The reasons are varied: the file was lost, the government attorney did not prepare the documents correctly, the finger prints they submitted were taken by the wrong agency, this or that testimony had expired by now and had to be taken again. The latest postponement was because they had to take fingerprints again – this for the 4th time!

The Ussury host is one of the larger Cossack groups in Kamchatka with 12,000 Cossacks. They control the area where the Medetskys farm

was. It didn't take long for the Cossacks to discover that while Igor Medetsky was a pure Russian and could be tolerated, his wife Natasha had a Jewish father and a Russian mother – she was a half-Jew! To add insult to injury, their last name was the same as the name of the chief of staff of the Ussury host – Pavel Medetsky - who was not at all happy about having to share a name with a Jew!

Harassment began and didn't stop. There were beatings, the farm was set on fire, their son was kidnapped and sent back beaten

To be fair, the judge did apologize. "You have now seen again what American bureaucracy is like", he said. "But you will admit that the Russian bureaucracy is worse, right?"

Well, maybe. The judge did something that a Russian judge wouldn't: he asked if the new date was acceptable to the attorneys, the witnesses and me. "April 9, 2009, is Passover. Is there a problem with that? If so, I will postpone it".

No-body had a problem.

And there is another difference that may or may not be good. In Russia you could bribe any judge or prosecutor to expedite the case. In Russia it wouldn't have taken more than 12 years with no end in sight. Here the law takes its honest course but it is a very long road. ☹

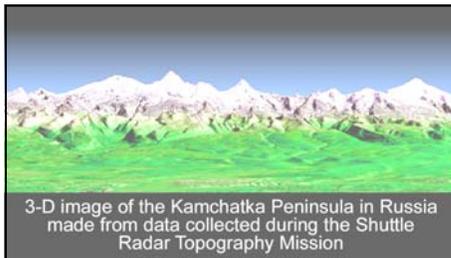


Cossacks in German army in W.W.II

I have to persuade the young government prosecutors that being a Jew in Eastern Europe is a matter of nationality – not

religion; there he is just a Jew who cannot be and never will be a Russian. That it is usually pointless – sometimes dangerous – to complain to the police that a Jew has been beaten or insulted for being a Jew. And over there they can't understand how it is that Russian Jews in America magically become "Russians" before they eventually, mysteriously become "Americans".

Some of the cases are fascinating. There was the case of a beautiful Georgian woman who refused the advances of an important politician who then had her husband murdered. She identified her husband's mutilated body in the morgue and her relatives smuggled her out to the United States. She was granted political asylum, married another immigrant who also got a green card but then, quite by accident, it turned out that her "new" husband was in fact her "old" husband, very much alive. The whole tragic story was invented to gain political asylum. They were both deported.



3-D image of the Kamchatka Peninsula in Russia made from data collected during the Shuttle Radar Topography Mission



Kamchatka Cossacks today

The more things change, the more they remain the same. Especially in the Middle East. I wrote this article 15 years ago, after I came back from 3 weeks of volunteer work at an Israeli army base. 15 years have passed and it might have been written last week. The children who were born that year will be going in the army in 3 years. They will be facing the same enemies, trying to solve the same problems, confronting the same hostile and unfair world. And what of their children? Will anything change for them?

I SPENT 3 WEEKS ON AN ARMY BASE **Part 4**

I discussed Israel's problems with many Israelis during the three weeks I spent there. It didn't really surprise me that most Israelis are just as disgusted and fed up as Americans are with what is happening in both countries: the corruption scandals that seem to be revealed daily, with governmental stupidity and indecisiveness, with the waste of money on unnecessary and ill-considered projects, and, of course, with the helplessness of the authorities to handle the increasing violence by criminals in the U.S., and by Gaza Arabs in Israel.

The Gaza Strip, in polite terms, is an abscess on the body of Israel. Not so politely, but probably more accurately, it is a pussy pimple on Israel's behind. A dirty, crowded, muddy in winter and dusty in summer, depressing, tiny piece of territory. It is inhabited by several hundred thousand frustrated Arabs without a future.



Israeli Hummer 1993 model

Prior to 1967 Gaza was occupied by Egypt who ruled it with an iron hand - there was a closely enforced curfew, Gazans were not allowed to freely emigrate to Egypt or any other Arab state, and all expressions of discontent or protest were swiftly and terribly punished by the Egyptian military governor whose exile to Gaza was, more than likely, was a punishment for having angered his superiors.

In 1967, during the 6-Day War, Gaza was occupied by Israel. The eventual Camp David peace accords returned every square inch of the Sinai desert to Egypt. Even the tiny strip of beach at Sharm El Sheikh where the Israelis had built a luxury hotel was demanded and eventually regained by the Egyptians, but somehow there was never a request for the return of Gaza. It was a fact recognized by all parties, albeit one never mentioned in public, that Egypt did not want the Gaza Strip and its problems. Unfortunately, Israel was not wise enough to adopt a similar attitude.

And so, Israel remained in Gaza, the town no Arab government would touch. During the subsequent 25 years of Israeli rule the standard of living of Gaza Arabs rose to be one of the highest in the Middle East.

Infant mortality declined. Life expectancy increased dramatically. Running water and electricity were supplied to the wretched shacks in the refugee camps, travel to Arab countries and elsewhere was easily done, and relatively well-paid jobs were made available in Israel.

Israel spent millions each year on maintaining and improving conditions in Gaza. It had even attempted to build new modern housing to replace the hovels in refugee camps; only the unexpected opposition of Arab governments in the U.N. and elsewhere prevented this major capital outlay of scarce dollars.

For the last several years, of course, Gaza has been in the forefront of the intifada: Israelis who venture into the area are routinely attacked and murdered, public order is non-existent, moderate Arabs are brutally killed by the more radical ones, and Gazans who go to work in Israel are apt to turn violent and attack the closest Israeli civilians.



The Volunteers— a couple Belgians, a Canadian, a Mexican Marrano from L.A., a Sabra, a Litvak (myself) and the rest native-born Americans

Several years ago, at a high level meeting with influential Israeli political figures I posed the question that is currently being raised more often and more loudly at the highest levels of the Israeli government, including quite recently one of the Cabinet ministers: why not give Gaza back to whoever may want it - Arab governments, the

PLO, the U.N. - and abandon it to its own devices?

At the time my suggestion was perceived as outlandish, even though the most logical argument that could be mustered against it was that the abandonment of Gaza would send a signal to the Arabs in the West Bank that Israel could be forced to withdraw by protests and civil disobedience, and that this would result in serious problems in those territories.



First morning—cold, confused and a little apprehensive

I believe that under today's conditions this is a price that Israel should be willing to pay in order to rid itself of an infection that saps Israel's strength. It is quite certain that Israel's withdrawal would result in civil strife, inter-Arab slaughter, economic dislocation and all the other ills that plague Arab governments throughout the Middle East, but, frankly, is the continued welfare of Gaza's Arab really Israel's problem? I think not.

Israel's concern should be confined to the security of the Jewish state and its citizens. Gaza Strip should not be allowed to become a base for attacks on Israel and its people, and an unequivocal and straight forward statement of immediate Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and a warning to whomsoever would end up in control in this forsaken hell-hole should be made through the United Nations or some other appropriate forum: any effort to create an armed force, to bring in weapons, to engage in hostile actions of any kind would bring about an Israeli reaction, in overwhelming force.

In the meantime, Israel should be quite willing to stay on the sidelines and watch the PLO, Hamas, Hezbollah, Egypt, Jordan, Iran, Iraq and all the rest fight one another, kill one another, and in general behave the way the Middle Eastern population has been behaving for the last century or so. ☆

MY GUN DIDN'T DO IT—I DID! By Si Frumkin

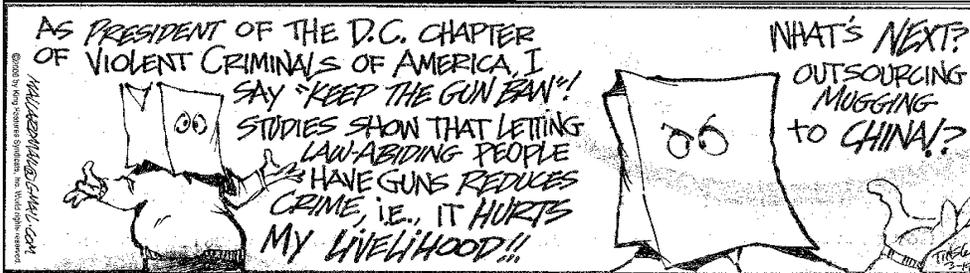
By the time you read this the Supreme Court may have already reached a decision on ownership of guns by Americans. I think that this article is an appropriate addition to the debate on the utility—or danger - of guns by private individuals.

A few days ago I horrified a good friend who is a proud and enlightened liberal. I admitted that I owned a gun. He looked at me as if to say, "Here I thought you were one of the good guys and it turns out you are a prospective serial killer..." I think that we are still friends. Only time will tell whether he will be able to forgive me. These days owning a gun types you as a savage bloodthirsty Neanderthal, a clandestine nazi racist, or one of the other words that the proud and enlightened liberals call NRA members.

It's a good thing that I don't smoke. If I were a smoker my friend would have disowned me for sure. Smoking is even more reprehensible than owning a

gun. My business was in the Skid Row area of Los Angeles. Crime was rampant there. I kept a gun in my office and carried it with me when I went out.

MALLARD FILLMORE By Bruce Tinsley



As I left the building one evening I saw a group of men beating a guy who was already down and unconscious. They were kicking and punching him as his girl friend stood by crying and screaming. "Stop it," I yelled. "That's enough!" They stopped, turned and looked at me. "What m... f... business is it of yours, m... f...," said one and started walking towards me. I pulled out my gun and fired in the air. "Keep on coming," I growled in my best movie tough guy mode, my heart in my throat. "The next one is for you!" He stopped. "I'll get you next time, m... f..." he said. "Let's go, guys." They left. The girl friend helped the victim get up and together they hobbled away.

gun. A gun owner who smokes is beyond forgiveness and quite unfit for human company.

The hysterical hostility towards gun ownership mystifies me. Do the gun control advocates really believe that making gun ownership more difficult will eliminate violence? There already are hundreds of laws on the books that would keep the guns out of the hands of criminals. The problem is that criminals do not observe the laws - after all, that's what makes them criminals, right? This is why we have a serious drug problem in spite of the very stringent laws against drugs.

I am not a fanatic on the subject. I believe that just as we need a license to drive a car - an implement that kills a hundred times more innocents than guns do - a license should be required and a test taken to use a gun. I do not believe that if guns are licensed my government will break down my door at night and confiscate my gun. But I also do not believe that if somehow, magically, America could be made gun free, crime and murder would stop. Just look at Rwanda and Burundi where over a million were massacred in one year with hardly any guns - just machetes and clubs.

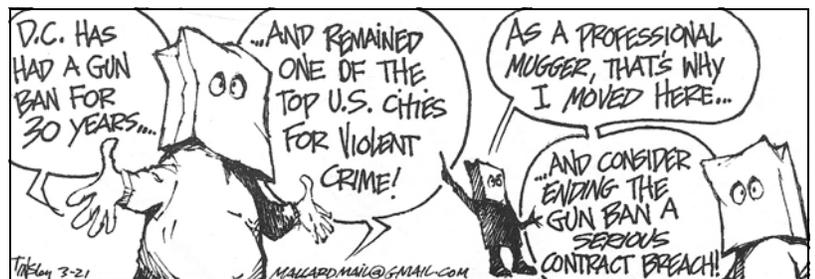
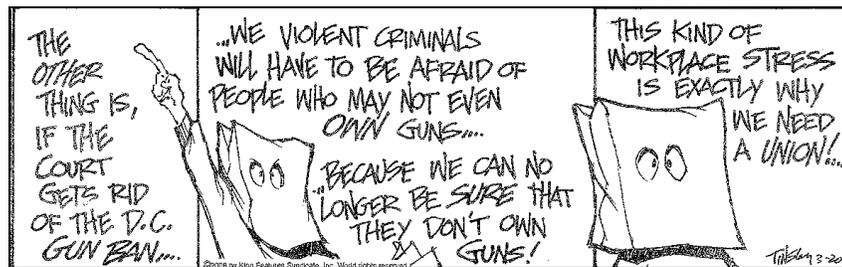
Guns do not create crime. Israel and Switzerland are just two nations where almost every adult is in the military reserve and keeps his weapon at home. There is an assault weapon in virtually every closet and the murder rates are insignificant, so isn't it obvious that the abundance of guns doesn't lead to murder?

There was snide editorial in one of the newspapers a few weeks ago. It questioned the assertion by the pro-gun advocates that guns actually save lives. "We are tired of hearing this mantra," the writer said. "Where is the proof? Where are the statistics?"

This upset me. I personally was involved in three incidents where my gun saved a life or serious injury. I am not unique. And it isn't coincidental that after Florida allowed its citizens to carry concealed weapons there was a rash of attacks on tourists: *they were the only ones who were sure not to have a weapon on them.*

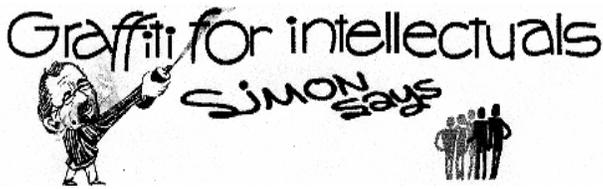
The other incident was when one of the secretaries yelled that our shipping clerk who had gone out to get a cup of coffee was being beaten by two guys. I ran out, yelled, and again fired my gun in the air. They turned and ran. My employee's was virtually undamaged: a torn shirt, a black eye and a spilled cup of coffee.

There was also the time when a pimp and a prostitute decided that



the best way to handle a dissatisfied client was to beat him up on our loading dock. They were hitting him with two by fours from a nearby construction site and were obviously winning. Once again I fired in the air and all three ran off. This time, however, the pimp sent a messenger next day with an apology to me. Apparently the word had spread that there was a crazy Jew with a gun in the building and that it didn't pay to mess with him.

I didn't report any of this to the police. What would be the point? I do know that I would have been helpless if I didn't have a gun and that three people would have been badly hurt. Any instrument can be used for good as well as for evil. The choice is the user's, not the instrument's. ★



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Fax: 818-766-4321
Phone: 818-769-8862
Esfrumkin@roadrunner.com

www.sifrumkin.com

Welcome to the right, Mr. Mamet

By Andrew Klavan, March 19, 2008

David Mamet's public coming-out as a political conservative -- done in a 2500-word essay in the Village Voice this week-- is wonderful news for the culture, far better, I fear, than many conservatives will appreciate. The left has monopolized the arts for so long that some on the right have lost the knack of them. We love to denounce Hollywood and indulge in paroxysms of rage about the latest artistic insults to patriotism and God. But when it comes actually to producing mature and complex works of art -- or supporting the people who produce them -- a good conservative can be very hard to find.

Mamet, on the other hand, is a pillar of the arts. I don't know if he's America's greatest living playwright, but I'm hard-pressed to think of a better one. Many people know him for his movie work: "The Untouchables," "The Edge," "House of Games," etc. But it's plays such as "American Buffalo," "Glengarry Glen Ross" and "Speed-the-Plow" that represent his best writing by far, each searching for remnants of heroism in the rubble of modernity through a hilarious and poetic tough-guy vernacular.

The journey 60-year-old Mamet has made from being what he calls a "brain-dead liberal" to acknowledging the genius of philosophers such as Thomas Sowell and Milton Friedman is a difficult one for an artist. We in the creative world swim in liberalism like fish in water. It's hard for us even to imagine that one might evolve and walk on dry land.

"Yes," we might say to ourselves, "it certainly does seem that history has vindicated those warmongering right-wingers who opposed the Soviet Union. And really, in secret, one must admit that women and men are pretty fundamentally different. It does seem true, as well, that government programs manifestly worsen the problems they're designed to solve, whereas freedom in markets and ideas always seems strangely to improve things. ... But that doesn't mean I'm a conservative! Conservatives are mean, racist, sexist, greedy

-- and they hate gay people, who are an artist's colleagues and friends! I'm nothing like that."

But creators at Mamet's level of talent are consigned to truth-telling by their deepest nature. The arts-world imperative to mouth allegiance to a creed at conflict with their new political awareness creates in them a simmering dyspepsia. You could see that already in an angry play such as 1992's "Oleanna," in which a pompous but basically decent professor is ruined by the denunciation of a student who's been body-snatched by the academic and feminist left.



David Mamet

So now Mamet has grasped the nettle. He will come to find out just how small-minded, exclusionary and intellectually corrupt many on the left can be. Colleagues may abandon him; theater critics will contrive to ignore and attack him; his dependable audience may turn away.

But he will also discover a right wing he never knew. He will discover thinkers who seek historical and moral truth as if it really mattered, and writers who defend liberty as if it were what in fact it is: the prerequisite of full

humanity. Rather than the low and tiresome obsession of the left with the color of people's skins, he will find people who embrace a philosophical colorblindness. He will meet women of intelligence and competence who -- *mirabile dictu* -- don't despise men and manliness but openly admire them. Yes, he will find that a gathering of right-wingers is less welcoming to gay people than the left is, but he will also watch something astounding unfold. Unlike liberals, rightists, after a period of open discussion and thought, will actually admit when they're wrong and *change their minds*. This anti-gay prejudice will fall -- it's falling now.

The big question is whether the good men and women of the right will realize what a gift they have been given in Mamet. Will they turn out for his plays and embrace their excellence? His is a hard language of four-letter words and scorching insights. Will rightists, despite their commitment to good behavior and values, remember that art is an examination of the world as it is, not as we would have it be?

The right has gained an artist. We should celebrate that. The arts are the soul of a people. It will not profit conservatives to gain even the whole world if they lose the culture.

Andrew Klavan's new novel, "Empire of Lies," is due out in July.