

Graffiti for intellectuals



Simon says



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By Si Frumkin

MEATLOAF AND LEMON COFFEE

The eating season is upon us - Thanksgiving, New Year, Christmas and all those seasonal parties. Why? Why do we celebrate by eating - and drinking - more than we should to observe a holiday that has little to do with food? I don't know. Probably it has to do with the times when food was scarce and only the rich and the powerful were proudly fat - just look at the paintings of the aristocrats a few centuries back. What would be considered a good figure for today's females was a sign of tuberculosis or pining away for love or some other dramatic reason - and the goddesses and other examples of pulchritude were always at least size 20s.

But all of this philosophy aside I want to acknowledge the eating season by dedicating this article to, what else: Food!

First a confession. Many of you will despise me, especially those who were born in America and had a chance to absorb some of the local prejudices.

egg baked inside it - just like my mom used to make. My lovely wife who wasn't born here, can make a wonderful meatloaf but she has been infected by the American Bacillus Antimeatloafus - she promises to make it but keeps putting it off until I make it myself. The meatloaf situation puzzles me: why is it

that a country that is crazy about hamburgers and consumes them by the millions in every possible permutation despises the giant hamburger - meatloaf?

Then there is Spam. It comes in cans and is some kind of compressed meat. To be honest, it isn't the greatest delicacy but I like it for personal reasons. The Americans who liberated my concentration camp 60 years ago, threw food at us as their trucks drove by the crowds of survivors at the roadside. Most of what they threw was crackers, cigarettes, candy and small metal cans of food from their emergency C-rations. Most of the cans contained Spam, which the soldiers didn't like. They were happy to get rid of it and do a good deed at the same time. The starving survivors weren't picky - we happily ate the Spam and, ever since, I eat Spam and like it. I should add that I am the only one in my household to do so.

I also like hardboiled eggs in salt water - but I only get to eat them at the Passover Seder. I keep asking for them, Ella keeps promising, and I keep forgetting to make them - what's to make? - for myself until the next

Passover. Bagels, lox and chopped liver have been



accepted as American and are no longer eaten by Jews only. There is another Jewish food, however, that hasn't caught on. In fact, it can be used to determine who is Jewish and who isn't. It's gefilte fish and it isn't so much the actual fish patty but the jelly in which it is kept in the

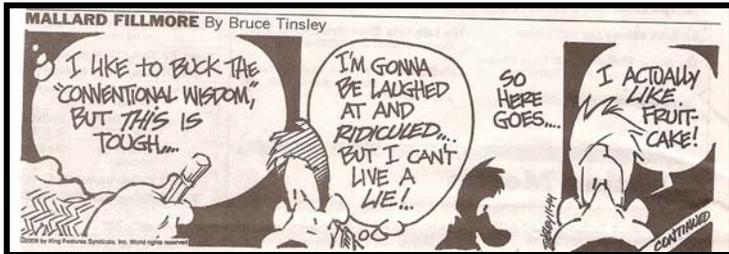
glass jar. A gentile is disgusted by it - a Jew will eat, enjoy and ask for more, especially with good hot horseradish that also serves to give you a Yiddish accent when you say its name: "Khrreinn" with the "rrrr" coming from the back of your throat.

In my college days, I took my gentile girlfriend to a deli. She looked in horror at the gefilte fish I ordered. "It's snot!" she said. "How can you eat snot?" We broke up soon after.

On the other hand I too have my prejudices. I don't like sushi - why should I eat raw fish? So how come I like lox? And I don't like fish in general but I love sardines, adore sprats and enjoy (some) herring. I don't know why.

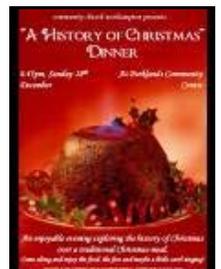
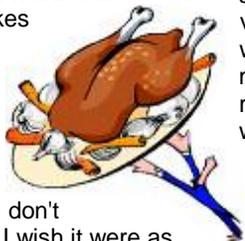
And why do I think it so strange that my wife drinks coffee with lemon? She says that this is common in Russia but I don't know about that. Maybe coffee with lemon is the Russian equivalent of fruitcake?

Anyway, have a happy eating season and a pleasant diet after it is over.



I like some of the foods that America looks down on. I suspect that there are many like myself, secret admirers of the despised delicacies, but they are probably too timid to come out of the culinary closet.

I have decided to come clean. And so here it is: I like fruitcake. I know that there are jokes of fruitcakes given as gifts that travel around the world, hand to hand, being gifted to people who give it to others, and after a year they come back to the original recipients. Well, I don't care - I like fruitcake and I wish it were as available in the summer as it is during the Christmas season. Yes, there is bad fruitcake, and yes, it is fattening and full of all those different cholesterol, carboshmidrates and calories, but when it's good, it's very, very good. Mmm...



THE REALLY COLD WAR

Thomas L. Friedman, New York Times, October 25, 2006

The Berlin Wall fell almost 17 years ago. At the time, the future seemed clear: The fall of the wall would unleash an unstoppable tide of free markets and free

people -- and for about 15 years it did just that. Today, though, when you stand where the Berlin Wall once stood and look east, you see a countertide coming your way. It is a black tide of petro-authoritarianism emanating from Russia, and it is blunting the Berlin Wall tide of free markets and free people.



Why? Russia is a classic example of what I like to call "the First

"Ten years ago we thought Russia was out of it," Mr. Joffe said. "We knew it was going to come back. But suddenly, out of the

way Russia could dominate the industry from its oilfields all the way to the gas meters of Berlin and Brussels.



Putin with Belgian P.M.

Right now, the two sides are in a standoff.

"We cannot allow energy to divide Europe as communism once did," José Manuel Barroso, the European Commission president, told The Financial Times. But it is.



Law of Petropolitics," which posits that the price of oil and the pace of freedom operate in an inverse relationship in petrolist states -- states with weak institutions and a high dependence on oil for their G.D.P. As the price of oil goes down, the pace of freedom goes up. The day the Soviet Union collapsed the price of oil was near \$16 a barrel. And as the price of oil goes up the pace of freedom goes

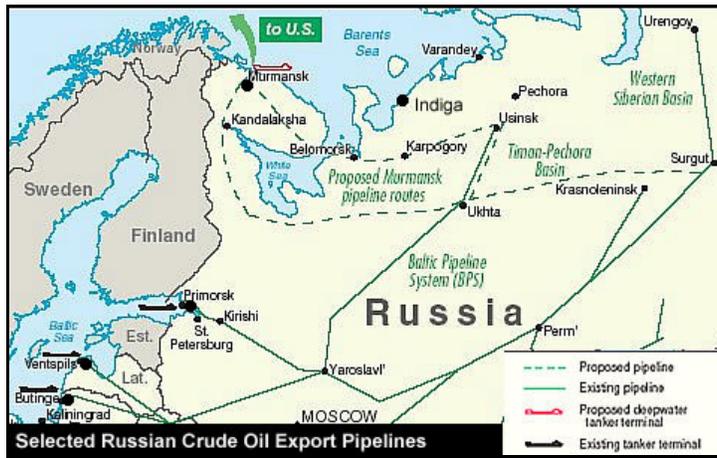
down. Today, Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, flush with surging oil and gas profits, is crushing domestic opponents, renationalizing major energy companies, throwing out Western human rights groups and generally making himself the big man on campus in Europe.

When Europeans tell you that they fear a new "cold war," this time they really are talking about the temperature -- and the fear that Russia, if it wanted to turn off the gas, could make Europeans very cold. About 40 percent of Europe's natural gas imports come from Russia, and that is expected to grow to 70 percent by 2030.



The Molikpaq oil platform off Sakhalin island in eastern Russia.

With prices high, Russia has gone from the sick man of Europe to the boss man. Russia is having a much bigger impact on Western Europe "with gas pipelines than it ever had with SS-20" long-range nuclear missiles, remarked the German foreign-policy expert Josef Joffe, author of the smart book "Überpower: The Imperial Temptation of America."



blue, with the rise in oil prices, it is back on stage, and this time it's much more skillful. The image we have of Russia is [the port of] Murmansk, where the Russian fleet is rotting - but power comes in many forms." And the most popular form today is oil and gas.

Goodbye NATO, hello Citgo.

The other day, the BBC quoted a senior "E.U. insider" as saying of European Union leaders: "You know what happens when they get in the same room with Putin?" They all prostrate themselves "and say, 'I love you, Vladimir.'" The BBC was reporting about a tense summit meeting last Friday in the Finnish town of Lahti. E.U. leaders reportedly beseeched Mr. Putin to honor contracts with Western oil companies, as well as to ease his crackdown on press freedoms, on human rights groups in Russia and on Georgia, and to investigate the murder of a crusading Russian journalist.

What the E.U. wants, a senior German official explained, is to be able to invest in more Russian oil and gas drilling projects and pipelines upstream, so that Russian and E.U. energy interests will be so intertwined Russia will never consider turning off the gas. Mr. Putin wants Gazprom, the giant Russian gas company, to be able to buy into more downstream consumer operations in Europe. That

In fairness to Mr. Putin, turn-about is fair play. After the Soviet Union collapsed and Russia was enfeebled, the U.S. and the E.U. crammed NATO expansion down his throat. He's now using petro-power to push back. "Russia is very different from Venezuela or Saudi Arabia," remarked Clemens Wergin, an editorial writer at the German daily Der Tagesspiegel. Russia has nukes and oil, he noted, and therefore has the potential to play a much more dominating geopolitical role in Europe.



German officials don't really think Russia is about to turn off the gas if it doesn't get its way on some issue.

After all, it never did that during the old cold war, and Russia today is much more dependent on Western markets. But still, centuries of uneasy relations between Europe and Russia make German officials queasy about how dependent they've grown on the Kremlin to heat their homes and offices. Queasy or not, one thing they know for sure: Russia is back. The gas man cometh. \$

THE UNRAVELING BEGINS?

THOMAS B. EDSALL, *New York Times*, November 18, 2006

Toward the end of Thomas D'Alesandro Jr.'s third term as mayor of Baltimore in the late 1950's, when his daughter Nancy (to become Nancy Pelosi) was a teenager, *The Baltimore Sun* got a tip. The mayor was spending \$25,000 in taxpayer money, enough to buy three row houses, to renovate his office. The *Sun* editor ordered a reporter, Frank Somerville, to City Hall to demand an explanation.

"Mr. Mayor," Somerville said, "my desk wants me to ask you why you are spending so much money on your office." D'Alesandro leaned over and put his ear to his desk. "My desk," the mayor responded, "tells your desk to [expletive]!" The story became part of the D'Alesandro legend. The mayor had once again thumbed his nose at the Baltimore establishment, much to the delight of the city's voters.

Since D'Alesandro's day, the Democratic Party has become increasingly fractious. In the North, the center-left coalition is no longer an alliance of the ascendant — of unions



U.S. Representative Nancy Pelosi, (D. CA)

reaching membership peaks, of white ethnic voters pushing into the middle class, of Catholic, Jewish and black entrepreneurs wresting control of construc-

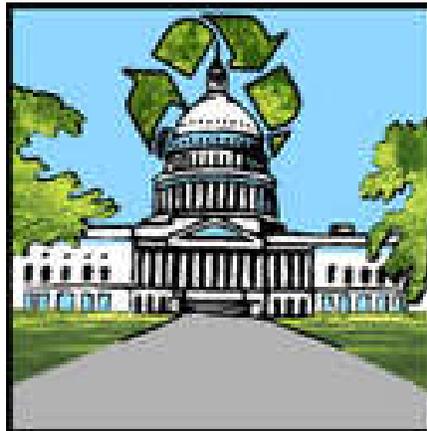
tion companies, banks and brokerages from an Anglo-Saxon Protestant elite.

In 2006, Nancy D'Alesandro Pelosi's Democratic Party is bifurcated, dominated by an educated, secular, socially liberal elite. This wing, between 35 and 40 percent of the Democratic electorate, has placed its top priority on cultural issues, especially abortion rights and sexual privacy. These upscale voters are joined in a fragile alliance with the majority (60 to 65 percent) of Democratic voters who are disproportionately poor, African-American or Hispanic, and in grave need of material assistance. This uneasy alliance — of those who have made it and those who have not — must compete with Republicans for such overlapping constituencies as exurbanites; newly affluent Asian-Americans and Hispanics; and patriotic, socially centrist, mostly white voters.

As speaker, Pelosi, 66, has the obligation to produce results from a caucus that embod-

ies the Democratic Party's racial, regional and ideological conflicts — conflicts that for three decades have brought the party to a legislative standstill. Strikingly liberal African-Americans have used seniority to win control of at least four committee chairs and one top leadership post, after an election in which Democratic victory was crucially dependent on a surge of moderate voters, particularly white men, defecting from the G.O.P. Having pledged both fiscal austerity and new spending on middle-class benefits, including broadened access to health care, Democrats face irreconcilable demands in a zero-sum game.

House Democrats won with the backing of wary constituencies opposed to the war and disgusted with Republican corruption and hy-



pocrisy on sex (e.g. Mark Foley). These voters have not developed a newfound faith in the Democratic Party.

Operating in a hotly contested environment, Pelosi forgot a cardinal rule of politics, true now as in her father's day: If you are going to challenge a competitor, whether it is the local newspaper or a major player in the House hierarchy, you'd better win. Pelosi tried to shove aside her second in command, Steny Hoyer of Maryland, and elevate Jack Murtha of Pennsylvania, a high-profile critic of the Iraq war, to majority leader. Murtha, who dismissed the pending Democratic ethics package as "total crap," is a politician far more in the mold of Pelosi's father than the prissy Hoyer. In an environment shaped by the Republican ethics quagmire, Pelosi got rolled, 149 to 86. The broader danger for Democrats who have barely emerged from the abyss: defeat breeds enemies and weakens

alliances.

Pelosi's first failure comes at a critical juncture. To line up votes for Murtha, she made promises, many of which will not be kept because Hoyer will demand his share of the spoils. Pelosi revealed that she is not in control of her own caucus, much less the full House. She knows this, as her agonizingly forced smile demonstrated when she went before television cameras on Thursday. Republicans also know this. After his election yesterday as Republican whip, Roy Blunt of Missouri declared: "One hundred forty-nine Democrats demonstrated yesterday that they are willing to buck Nancy Pelosi. We'll work each day to give those Democrats a viable alternative."

Pelosi is resilient. She quotes her father: "Throw a punch, take a punch." But back in 1993, after President Bill Clinton suffered the first of many defeats at the hands of Republicans, Representative George Miller of California — who would later act as Pelosi's top lieutenant in her bid to make Murtha majority leader — was prophetic about the conse-



U.S. Representative John Murtha, (D. PA)

quences of an early loss. "Historically, once things start to unravel around this place, it's very difficult," he said. "There's very real potential for damage here."

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LAST MONTH I MET A VERY WISE MAN

I had never met him before and it is likely that we will never meet again. I doubt that he would remember me – over a hundred people came to meet him – but I will remember him for a long time.

The invitation came by email – unpretentious, simple, business-like. “Invitation to a meeting with the Sephardic Chief Rabbi of Israel”, it read, “RSVP required, conservative business attire suggested” and, seeing this in Los Angeles, “There are several parking lots nearby and some street parking”. It was addressed to “Key Christian pastors and leaders” from the hosts of the meeting, Israeli Consul General, Ehud Danoch and my good friend and mentor, General Shimon Erem, who is heading up the very successful campaign to make Christian support of Israel even more strong and effective than it is.

I don’t know what I expected – I had never met a Chief Rabbi before – but I thought that there wouldn’t be all that many people present – the Israeli Consulate where the meeting was held isn’t large and I didn’t think that all that many “Key Christian pastors and leaders” would show up, on a weekday, to meet with him. I thought that it would be interesting to see and hear rabbi Amar. I also saw a chance to distribute some of my newsletters and maybe make some new Christian friends.

So I RSVP’d, put on conservative business attire and went. I took 10 or 12 newsletters with me - more than enough, I thought, for the handful of people that will show up. I thought wrong. Once again I had underestimated the Christian friends of Israel.

After everyone sat down I surreptitiously counted the house. There were 87 pastors and 14 Jews, including myself. Some of the pastors had come from as far as Sacramento, Bakersfield and San Diego to meet the rabbi.

They came to listen, to share, to learn. They came to express their support and, yes, their love, for Israel and for the Jews. And much more than just love was involved – an evangelical conference in Dallas had just a week ago raised \$ 7 million for Israel!

Rabbi Shlomo Amar wore a long black robe embroidered in an intricate white pattern. On his head, a black round hat resembling a small turban or a larger version of what bellhops used to wear. The round top of the hat was dark velvet. Luxurious grey beard, glasses that didn’t hide the twinkle in his eyes and a kindest, sweetest smile – it rivaled the smile of my angelic one-year old granddaughter.



He spoke in Hebrew, pausing for the English translation and listening intently to the English – I think he understood every word.

He spoke for about a half hour. I took notes as best I could and here is what I managed to decipher from my scribbles. It is far from an exact transcript, just a small part of what he said.

“Thank you for coming”, he said. “You are all pursuing the truth of the Bible. The words of the prophets are relevant today – they speak to all of us. Prophet Ezekiel saw the dry bones and God asked the prophet whether the bones would gather and live again. This is the message – the bones are the symbol of dead beliefs of long ago. It is up to you to bring the dead back to life.

“There is much that happens in our lives that we do not understand. Some of what we don’t understand is history and its lessons and its message. Not everyone can hear it or see it, or have the wisdom to understand. We all have wisdom but not all of us use it – the worst laziness is that of the brain.

“It is a wonderful and rare opportunity for me to speak before smart people. Tremendous things are happening at present but we can’t recognize them – we are within the structure. But soon we will be able to see the beautiful structure that is being built.

“Today’s Torah portion is Noah – a direct connection with our lives. The Lord had decided to destroy and rebuild the world – we all are children of Noah – all humans and animals. Now here is a question: If God is almighty, why did He need an ark? Why didn’t He just save Noah and his family? Just try to envision Noah being asked by people, ‘What are you doing?’ Noah built and explained for years that a flood was coming - our sages suggest that it took 120 years. After just 20 years the people were convinced that Noah was just nuts or maybe drunk. And then, after 120 years, there was the flood.

“Words of prophets will come true for us as well. May God give us wisdom to see and understand when evil is being done. May love increase in the world. And may God give us the patience to wait for the fulfillment of His promise.”

Later, there were many questions. I kept looking at the rabbi as he handled them all, with wit, patience and wisdom.

I knew that I had met a very wise man that day. ☆