

Graffiti for intellectuals



Simon says

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By Si Frumkin

GOT MILK?

Once in a while, in the most unexpected places, I come across a familiar smell that brings back memories. A familiar perfume of a long ago girlfriend, a restaurant's open door that reminds me of a familiar dish I haven't tasted in ages, the smell of chocolate or coffee - always a pleasure.

And then there are memories of smells that are less pleasant. There is formaldehyde that lingered in my nostrils for hours after dissecting and examining this or that specimen in the comparative anatomy lab course at college. We began with large grasshoppers and advanced to catfish, frogs, lobsters and eventually cats. The lab was always on Friday afternoons. I often had a date that evening and so I scrubbed and scrubbed in the shower, splashed aftershave all over me, but still worried that the smell of formaldehyde and decay would linger.

Another smell I remember wasn't part of the official curriculum. It was methane - at least as unpleasant a smell as formaldehyde - produced in a ritual that probably was observed by teenage boys since the discovery of fire. It involved quickly lighting a match when someone felt the need to, how shall I say it, to break wind, to release an accumulation of intestinal gas. The subject would bend over and expel a quantity of methane fumes from his posterior - either silently or, preferably, with sound effects - so that the lit match could ignite it and, voila, a pretty blue flame lasting a few seconds accompanied by cheers and applause of all the guys. Girls didn't usually participate in this particular ritual; the few that happened to be there made disgusted faces or sounds.

At this point you are probably asking yourself what reason I could possibly have for recalling foolish episodes of my youth. Don't we all have more serious concerns, like, for example, the threat of Global Warming? Yes, we do and I consider it my duty to write about the most recent disclosure of its major cause. It is a clear and present danger that signals the end of humanity as we know it and, most

certainly, the end of methane gas combustibility experimentations by young male adults.

The deadly danger that faces all of us has been revealed: it is flatulence! It is, putting it

bluntly, farting by cows. So far, this authoritative study deals only with cattle but we can certainly assume that it pertains to all earthly creatures that digest food and eventually expel what cannot be digested as manure and, yes, methane, carbon dioxide and ammonia.

Here are the tragic facts. They are the main thesis of a United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization study entitled

"Livestock's Long Shadow". It is a serious and scholarly study; its conclusions are supported by the World Bank, the E.U. and various European and U.S. governmental bodies. The study exposes methane as

the most serious threat - the gas that so amused generations of boys. It is produced by cattle flatulence and manure and is 23 times as warming as the carbon dioxide that is produced by human activities. In addition to methane, cattle also produce 65% of the world's nitrous oxide, a greenhouse gas with a 296 times greater potential to cause global warming. Animals are also responsible for 65% of human activity related ammonia that is blamed for acid rain - think of that when you next see a doggie lifting his hind leg at a tree.

The cow menace is enormous. Earth is home to 1.4 billion cattle, each producing 500 liters of methane a day and accounting for 14% of all emissions of the gas. (In Scotland where agriculture is more concentrated than in most countries, cows produce 46% of all

methane emissions!) The report anticipates that by 2050 world's meat production will reach 465 million tons annually - more than double that of 1999/2001- and milk output will also double to 1043 million tons.

To sum up, cows produce more global warming pollution than all human transportation - all the cars, trains, ships, planes, snowmobiles and motorized rickshaws combined.

And the report doesn't take into account the methane and manure produced by humans - including teenage boys - as well as dogs, cats, elephants and all the rest of the living, breathing and stinking-up the atmosphere beings.

There is, however, some good news as well - also from the U.N. The U.N. Intergovernmental Climate Change Research organization has recently reduced its estimate of human effect on climate change by 25% and cut in half its estimate of maximum rise in sea levels caused by climate change - from 34" in 100 years to just 17". This will give us plenty of time to move away from the newly created seashores to new beaches a mile or so away.

So what is there to do? Should we eliminate all cows? Take immediate steps to produce giant corks and train cow cork insertion specialists? Require that all cows be equipped with catalytic converters in their exhausts and mandate bi-monthly compliance inspections? Outlaw and

severely punish farting? And what to do about Scotland? Is it really doomed?

Meanwhile when you see a cute calf or look with sympathy at a seemingly harmless cow - remember that they are the cunning enemy that harbors the seed of the inevitable destruction of our beloved planet. ☹



New Zealand proposes flatulence tax

Will Russia's Anti-Fascists Give in to Extremism?

By Nikolai Butkevich, Research Director of Union of Councils for Jews in Former Soviet Union

Russians are often accused of being politically apathetic. Confronted with the almost Brezhnevian political conformity and media self-censorship of the Putin era, most Russians have reacted with a shrug, seemingly content that at least the chaos and privations of the 1990s have been put firmly behind them.

The big exception to this rule is within segments of the country's youth culture, which are dominated by both left wing and nationalist extremists, ranging from the National Bolsheviks to neo-Nazi skinheads. Both extremes seem to be growing in membership and political clout, witness the unconscionable inclusion of the National Bolsheviks in the "Other Russia" coalition and the growing flirtation between certain State Duma deputies and neo-Nazi groups. But there is a healthier reaction afoot as well--Russia's small but growing anti-fascist movement, which draws most of its strength from its youth activists.

Unfortunately, the anti-fascist movement is increasingly under attack by neo-Nazis, who have escalated their campaign of mur-

ders and assaults this year in an organized effort to squash the only segment of Russian society that actively opposes their plans to create a "Russia for the ethnic Russians." Several recent reports illustrate the extent of the problem.

groups, the best known of which is the Slavic Union (or SS in Russian). Six youths stabbed Mr. Ryukhin and his friend, who managed to escape. The remaining suspects are on the wanted list and investigators have indicated that they at least may be charged with murder, if, that is, they are ever caught. A posting on the antifa.ru web site lists the name, photo, and last known address of one of the suspects, along with a phone number to call with tips about his whereabouts.

On December 1, 2006 the hro.org web site posted an interview with the mother of Timur Kacharava, a St. Petersburg anti-fascist musician and activist who was murdered in 2005. To the credit of local police, seven suspects have been detained in connection with the case. However, Irina Kacharava claims that the official version that her son was killed "as a result of hooliganistic actions" both defames her son by implying that he was a common street brawler who got what was coming to him, and plays down the planned nature of the killing. Mr. Kacharava--a vegetarian and a pacifist--was killed after distributing food to homeless people, activity that would hardly be of interest to a "typical hooligan." He had been attacked on the metro before, and later on the street by youths who asked him, "What do you think, is it good to be an anti-fascist?" as they beat him.

the Sova Information-Analytical Center. Screaming "Russia, forward!" the neo-Nazis sprung upon their targets from an ambush near an anti-war protest. On December 10, around two dozen skinheads screaming "Russia forward!" and "Anti anti-fa!" attacked seven more Petersburg anti-fascists shortly after they fed homeless people.

This problem is not confined to Moscow and St. Petersburg. Similar attacks have taken place this year in Lipetsk, Ryazan, Syktyvkar, Oryol, and Vladivostok. Disgracefully, the Russian government has largely ignored this issue. Several attacks remain unsolved and top officials seem reluctant to condemn them. This may have something to do with the fact that many anti-



Russian neo-nazi banner

On December 3 around 30 neo-Nazis attacked a dozen anti-fascists in St. Petersburg, according to a December 5, 2006 report by



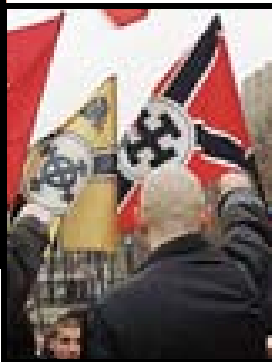
Russian nazi poster:
"The future belongs to us!!!"

fascists embrace a brand of far-left politics that are extremely critical of the Kremlin. In addition, elements within the movement are explicitly violent, justifying fighting back by arguing that the government is not doing enough to repress neo-Nazi violence.

This is not, I'm afraid, a specious argument. If law enforcement officials continue to play down reports of neo-Nazi violence while the government caters to nationalists by banning foreigners from trading in markets or launching hysterical PR campaigns and police sweeps against ethnic Georgians, the counter-reaction from anti-fascists and many other victims of nationalist violence will only grow fiercer. Russia can ill afford to lose these politically active and mostly well-intentioned youths to the temptations of extremism. ¥



Russian nazis demonstrate in Moscow



A November 30, 2006 posting on the Russian human rights web site hro.org revealed that three suspects in the April 16, 2006 killing of Moscow anti-fascist activist Aleksandr Ryukhin were being charged solely with "hooliganism" rather than murder or extremist activity. The latter charge seems particularly germane to the case, since a search of the suspects' apartments reportedly uncovered nationalist literature and leaflets as well as video recordings of attacks on other victims. The suspects are reportedly linked to neo-Nazi

MIDEAST RULES TO LIVE BY

Thomas L. Friedman, New York Times, December 19, 2006

For a long time, I let my hopes for a decent outcome in Iraq triumph over what I had learned reporting from Lebanon during its civil war. Those hopes vanished last summer. So, I'd like to offer President Bush my updated rules of Middle East reporting, which also apply to diplomacy, in hopes they'll help him figure out what to do next in Iraq.

Rule 1: What people tell you in private in the Middle East is irrelevant. All that matters is what they will defend in public in their own language. Anything said to you in English, in private, doesn't count. In Washington, officials lie in public and tell the truth off the record. In the Mideast, officials say what they really believe in public and tell you what you want to hear in private.

Rule 2: Any reporter or U.S. Army officer wanting to serve in Iraq should have to take a test, consisting of one question: "Do you think the shortest distance between two points is a straight line?" If you answer yes, you can't go to Iraq. You can serve in Japan, Korea or Germany — not Iraq.

Rule 3: If you can't explain something to Middle Easterners with a conspiracy theory, then don't try to explain it at all — they won't believe it.



I could paper my walls.

Rule 4: In the Middle East, never take a concession, except out of the mouth of the person doing the conceding. If I had a dollar for every time someone agreed to recognize Israel on behalf of Yasir Arafat,

Rule 5: Never lead your story out of Lebanon, Gaza or Iraq with a cease-fire; it will always be over before the next morning's paper.

Rule 6: In the Middle East, the extremists go all the way, and the moderates tend to just go away.

Rule 7: The most oft-used expression by moderate Arab pols is: "We were just about to stand up to the bad guys when you stupid Americans did that stupid thing. Had you stu-



pid Americans not done that stupid thing, we would have stood up, but now it's too late. It's all your fault for being so stupid."

Rule 8: Civil wars in the Arab world are rarely about ideas — like liberalism vs. communism. They are about which tribe gets to rule. So, yes, Iraq is having a civil war as we once did. But there is no Abe Lincoln in this war. It's the South vs. the South.

Rule 9: In Middle East tribal politics there is rarely a happy medium. When one side is weak, it will tell you, "I'm weak, how can I compromise?" And when it's strong, it will tell you, "I'm strong, why should I compromise?"

Rule 10: Mideast civil wars end in one of three ways: a) like the U.S. civil war, with one side vanquishing the other; b) like the Cyprus civil war, with a hard partition and a wall dividing the parties; or c) like the Lebanon civil war, with a soft partition under an iron fist (Syria) that keeps everyone in line. Saddam used to be the iron fist in Iraq. Now it is us. If we don't want to play that role, Iraq's civil war will end with A or B.



Rule 11: The most underestimated emotion in Arab politics is humiliation. The Israeli-Arab conflict, for instance, is not just about borders. Israel's mere existence is a daily humiliation to Muslims, who can't understand how, if they have the superior religion, Israel can be so powerful. Al Jazeera's editor, Ahmed Sheikh, said it best when he recently told

the Swiss weekly Die Weltwoche: "It gnaws at the people in the Middle East that such a small country as Israel, with only about seven million inhabitants, can defeat the Arab nation with its 350 million. That hurts our collective



ego. The Palestinian problem is in the genes of every Arab. The West's problem is that it does not understand this."

Rule 12: Thus, the Israelis will always win, and the Palestinians will always make sure they never enjoy it. Everything else is just commentary.

Rule 13: Our first priority is democracy, but the Arabs' first priority is "justice." The oft-warring Arab tribes are all wounded souls, who really have been hurt by colonial powers, by Jewish settlements on Palestinian land, by Arab kings and dictators, and, most of all, by each other in endless tribal wars. For Iraq's long-abused Shiite majority, democracy is first and foremost a vehicle to get justice. Ditto the Kurds. For the minority Sunnis, democracy in Iraq is a vehicle of injustice. For us, democracy is all about protecting minority rights. For them, democracy is first about consolidating majority rights and getting justice.

Rule 14: The Lebanese historian Kamal Salibi had it right: "Great powers should never get involved in the politics of small tribes."

Rule 15: Whether it is Arab-Israeli peace or democracy in Iraq, you can't want it more than they do. Ω





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THE MIDDLE CLASS IS NOT VANISHING—IT IS JUST GETTING WEALTHIER

by Rick Lowry, Nat'l Review, 12/08/06

If you don't believe in a *de facto* caste system, just wait until the new Democratic economic populists take over Congress. They will rely on the usual myths to portray the American economy as an engine of inequity and dispossession, benefiting only the very rich.

In advance of this onslaught, Cato Institute scholar Alan Reynolds has written a new book, "Income and Wealth," that explodes



much of the down-beat economic conventional wisdom. The key difference between the richest and poorest households, Mr. Reynolds finds, is simply work:

"Most income in the top fifth of households is from two or more people working full time. Most income in the bottom fifth is from government transfer payments." According to the Census Bureau, there are almost 6 times as many full-time workers in the top households as in the bottom, and 56.4 percent of the bottom households didn't have anyone working at all in 2004.

For Mr. Reynolds, the small number of workers in poor households casts doubt on the category of the "working poor." A member of the working poor is commonly defined as someone earning an hourly wage too small to support a family of four. But Mr. Reynolds points out that most of these low-wage workers "are not supporting more than one person—' He notes the poverty rate among married couples was just 5.4 percent in 2003, and a mere 2.6 percent among full-time, year-round workers more than 16 years of age.

"The vanishing middle class" is another concept Mr. Reynolds doesn't buy. If the middle class is perpetually defined as those earn-

ing between \$35,000 and \$50,000, it will constantly vanish as people get richer. In this vein, one liberal study complained that 31.3 percent of families earned more than \$75,000 in 2002, whereas only 11.1 percent earned that much in 1969. "By this measure," it concluded, "America's broad middle class has been shrinking." No, members of the middle class were getting richer.

This isn't supposed to happen, according to the oft-cited datum that the wages of American workers have been stagnant since 1973. This isn't true.

"Average real wages and benefits have risen by nearly 40 percent since 1973, after adjusting for inflation," Mr. Reynolds writes. U.S. consumers spent \$25,816 per person in 2004, almost double the 1973 amount. Who is doing all the consuming if U.

S. workers are exactly where they were 30 years ago?

Someone is always straining to find the bad news in America's greater wealth. The New York Times reported in 2005 that the number of households with assets worth more than \$10 million grew 400 percent since 1980. The Times called this a sign of increasing concentration of wealth. Mr. Reynolds counters, "Having 4 times as many wealthy households in 2001 as in 1980 suggests wider ownership of stocks, bonds and larger homes - -



less concentration of wealth, rather than more."

The economy is not a zero-sum game, frozen in place. A Business Week article in 2004 reported the top 50 percent of families own 95 percent of the country's assets meaning "the gains from rising wealth have effectively left out half the population." Mr. Reynolds explains that the wealthy tend to be older and more established. They will be replaced by younger workers as they age in turn: "The top 10-50 percent as measured by net worth will typically spend most of their wealth on retirement, then die and be replaced by an entirely different group of top wealth holders."

What's most important to wealth creation in the long run is human capital, and that has become more widely dispersed. According to Mr. Reynolds, "fewer than 8 percent of those above the age the age of 25 had a college degree in 1960, but that fraction doubled to more than 16 percent in 1980, and nearly doubled again to almost 28 percent in 2004."



It is America - not just the rich - that is getting richer, even if Washington's newly empowered populists don't want

to hear it.

Rich Lowry is a nationally syndicated columnist and author of, most recently, "The Legacy of the Clinton Years".