

The bogus row

The grotesque limits imposed in this country on discussion of Israel and Palestinian rights can be tested by looking at recent commentary by the conservative columnist William Safire and by the liberal *Nation* magazine.

Safire is the most strident journalistic exponent in the United States of the positions associated with Gen. Ariel Sharon. (His only rival in rabid utterance on these matters is another *New York Times* commentator, A. M. Rosenthal.) For Safire, any negotiation with the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) is anathema. Any indication by the U.S. government that Israel might be anything less than faultless is furiously denounced.

A typical Safire column appeared in the *Times* for March 26. In it the former Nixon speechwriter advanced the proposition that President Bush is the most anti-Israel president since the foundation of the state in 1948. "Mr. Bush," Safire fumed, "has long resisted America's special relationship with Israel. His secretary of state, James Baker, delights in sticking it to the Israeli right."

Now let us turn to *The Nation*, usually (though absurdly) taken as being stationed at the outer left-liberal limits of political discourse in this country.

In an editorial published in its March 26 issue and entitled "One Tiny Step," *The Nation* told its readers that the Bush administration deserved praise for having engineered a situation in which Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir's election plan might now be implemented.

On the face of it, Safire and *The Nation* seem miles apart, the former bellowing accusations of betrayal, the latter judiciously congratulating Bush and Baker for skilled diplomacy in seeking a just settlement in the region.

The trouble is that both Safire and *The Nation* hold in common a central error: they take seriously both the Shamir Plan and the notion that the Bush administration is pushing Israel towards what *The Nation* would call compromise and Safire denounce as self-destruction.

A second illusion shared by both parties is that the Israeli Labor Party is somehow likely to lead Israel toward recognition of Palestinian rights, a prospect viewed by Safire with horror and by *The Nation* with faint bleats of cautious encouragement.

First, what is the Shamir Plan? Its three "Basic Premises"—as the Israeli government's text of the plan calls them—are as follows. One, there can be no "additional Palestinian state in the Gaza district and in the area between Israel and Jordan." The word "additional" here refers to Shamir's position that there is already a Palestinian state in Jordan. Two, "Israel will not conduct negotiations with the PLO." Three, "there will be no change in the status of Judea, Samaria, and Gaza other than in accordance with the basic guidelines of the government."

Thus, in these sentences of exemplary clarity, the plan states that Israel envisages no change in present territorial arrangements and, by proposing elections within the territories and excluding East Jerusalem, seeks Palestinian ratification of Israel's occupation.

Next question: is Shamir's plan different from what either the Bush administration or the Israeli Labor Party are proposing? The answer is no. Despite Safire's claims

ASHES & DIAMONDS

By Alexander Cockburn



Israeli leader Yitzhak Shamir

that Secretary of State James Baker dreams of a Palestinian state, Baker has stated consistently that a Palestinian state is out of the question. As he told the *Times* last October, "Our goal all along has been to try to assist in the implementation of the Shamir initiative. There is no other proposal or initiative that we are working with."

The official Labor Party plan is epitomized in its notorious "four nos": no return to 1967 borders, no removal of a settlement, no negotiations with the PLO, no Palestinian state. Any difference between this and Shamir's Plan is cosmetic.

The illusions about the position of the Bush administration may be traced back to the success of the *intifada* in focusing the world on the plight of Palestinians. It was clear to both Israeli and U.S. policy makers that some "movement," however illusory, had to take place.

Reagan's secretary of state, George Shultz, duly announced that direct talks between the U.S. and the PLO could commence, since Yasser Arafat had moderated his stance. Shamir came forward with his plan.

Prominent Israelis readily admitted that the famous plan was designed purely to buy time to put down the *intifada* and take the pressure off Israel. Yitzhak Rabin, the Labor defense minister in Shamir's coalition, was quoted in February 1989, by the Hebrew-language newspaper *Yedioth Ahronot* as saying the U.S.-PLO dialogue would be "low level," that the Americans "do not seek any solution" and "will grant us at least a year" to crush the *intifada* and "in the end, they will be broken."

For its part, the PLO was mouse-trapped. Arafat had in fact refused to include in his famous recognition statement, approved by Shultz, any promise of ending the *intifada* (i.e., surrendering the right of resistance to occupying powers) or of accepting U.N. Resolution 242 without the U.N. riders giving Palestinians the right to self-determination. But the U.S. government and the U.S. press simply said that he had and then promptly began the new "dialogue" by calling on Arafat to stop the *intifada*. Moving from one position of weakness to another, Arafat now praises Baker and Bush for being in the first U.S. government that "speaks of the end of the Israeli occupation."

But the U.S. government has done nothing of the sort and has been explicit on the matter. With full U.S. agreement, Soviet Jews—who now do most certainly have a justified fear of persecution in the Soviet Union from anti-Semitic nationalists—are denied the basic right of any refugee to choose a sanctuary and instead are transported to Israel. The U.S. still finances illegal settlements on the West Bank and, beyond this, underwrites the whole military occupation.

While William Safire and *The Nation* adopt their symbolic postures and engage in symbolic pillow fights, the real narrative unwinds in all its savagery in Israel and the territories. Terror against Palestinians continues undiminished, under the view expressed by Rabin that the *intifada* can be broken. Inside Israel itself, the rights of non-Jews are being narrowed.

The Knesset has reiterated its belief that the constitution of the state enshrines rights for Jews alone, and the high court has interpreted the law as banning any political party or legislation asserting equal rights for Arab citizens of Israel: "It is necessary to prevent a Jew or Arab who calls for equality of rights for Arabs from sitting in the Knesset or being elected to it." A high court justice was quoted to this effect, with three of the remaining four in essential agreement. (See Israeli press for December 15, 27.)

As recounted by Professor Israel Shahak, human-rights activist in Israel, in the March issue of *Z* magazine, Defense Minister Rabin in a rabbinic meeting "counted the percentages of Jews and of strangers—this was the very expression that he used—in the land of Israel. In the percentages of strangers he counted all Palestinians of the territories but also all Palestinians of Israel. Druses too. Everyone who is not a Jew is a stranger, a person to be suspected, hated, a person who—the ideal here is that he or she will not be here."

This is the reality beneath all the talk about plans or compromises. The only opposition to the intent of Rabin as revealed by his use of the word "strangers" is being carried forward by the Palestinians on the West Bank and in Gaza, in the third year of an *intifada* infinitely more courageous than the uprisings everyone in the U.S. has been

so busy praising in Eastern Europe or the Soviet Union.

Suppose there had been a "Honecker Plan" or a "Ceausescu Plan" for power-sharing or for political compromise? Everyone would have denounced them as shams, designed to buy time for repressive forces to regroup. Now listen again to Professor Shahak: "About the [majority] of the Israeli society [outside the 15 percent or so supporting individual, not national, rights for Palestinians] don't have any illusions. Whatever its division is, about Westernization or return to Judaism, it will only retreat when it is forced to. Forced. I include all the complex of compulsions—economic, political, military. But without such a compulsion, to suppose that the great majority of Israelis, at least 80 percent or more, will retreat an inch because of any formula Palestinians make, any concession, any agreement, any declaration—is to deceive yourself. As our satirists are saying, even if Arafat should convert to Orthodox Judaism and arrive in Jerusalem singing 'Hatikvah' [the Israeli national anthem]—nothing will follow."

Safire and the others who now charge Bush and Baker with being PLO lovers know perfectly well that nothing could be further from the truth. What they fear is something that is not yet properly on the mainstream agenda: a real response inside the U.S. to the *intifada*, a political movement, insisting on rights for Palestinians, that would shove the U.S. government into real confrontation with Israel on its obduracy. At the moment *The Nation's* talk of "Tiny Steps" of progress merely fulfills Shamir's and Rabin's time-wasting agenda and is as misleading as the ravings of Safire. ■

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Revolution at the Table: The Transformation of the American Diet

By Harvey Levenstein
Oxford University Press
275 pp., \$29.95

By Pete Karman

Eater's digest culinary class

FOOD

EARLY IN THIS CENTURY, FOR THE most obvious of reasons, the rich tended to be fat and the poor skinny. President William Howard Taft was twice the Republican (by weight) that President George Bush is. At nearly 200 pounds, actress Lillian Russell was the reigning model of pulchritude. Nowadays, by contrast, the wealthy guide their pursuits by the rule that one can never be too rich or too thin, while roly-poly Roseanne and her hefty husband are deemed characteristic of the working class.

The slimming of the rich and the fattening of the poor is one of the most visible aspects of the radical transformation of the American diet that took place between 1880 and 1930. In this well-prepared and filling stewpot of solid research and pungent comment, Harvey Levenstein, a historian at McMaster University in Ontario, ranges the social landscape to make some sense of that transformation.

Right from the start, he takes note of the perennial observation by foreigners that we Americans too often tend to be both gluttonous and indifferent at the table. We eat a lot without taking much pleasure in either food itself or in dining as a social

act. For this, says Levenstein, we must blame the British, whose bland vittles laid the basis of our national diet; and democracy, which led us to disdain the elitism of haute cuisine; as well as the abundance afforded by our vast fertile country.

Whether they were seeking freedom or gold, immigrants to America found grub and plenty of it. Unlike much of the world, Americans have

known, at worst, hunger rather than starvation. Maldistribution and unhealthy ways of eating rather than shortage have been our sore points. What amazed early immigrants was the ubiquity of meat, a food they rarely saw in 19th-century Europe and Asia.

Forbidden spices: Until the latter years of that century, meat and sweet were mainstays of the American palate. The greasiness of highly salted roasts and fatback was cut by sugary desserts. Spices weren't much used because it was thought they stimulated the yen for alcohol and sex. Fresh vegetables and fruits were only seasonally available. Women were enslaved first by the hearth and later by iron stoves that required endless refueling and cleaning.

Railroads and industrialization triumphed over distance and climate by putting Iowa beef and California peaches on tables from coast to coast.



"GIVE ME WHAT AMERICA IS EATING TODAY - A HAMBURGER."

The general-store cracker barrel gave way to packages of Uneeda biscuits. Urbanization created a vast market for restaurants and prepared foods. And then there was sci-

Americans eat a lot without taking much pleasure in food.

ence—in particular, the beginnings of research into nutrition.

America's early nutritionists, working within a triumphant business culture, came up with a notion that seemed both sensible and useful to employers. The poor and working classes, they said, should use their food dollars more efficiently by buying cheaper cuts of meat and otherwise preparing their meals more economically. Of course, that way

they wouldn't need higher wages. A movement to teach the new nutrition to the poor was attempted by scientists such as Wilbur Atwater, who organized the first Department of Agriculture nutritional labs, and some of the more philanthropically minded among the wealthy. Experimental community kitchens were established, mostly in the Northeast. But these eventually foundered when the poor, especially recent immigrants, stuck resolutely to their own food preferences.

The lesson to the new nutritionists was to spread their gospel to the better educated and more prosperous classes with the hope that their example would encourage their lessers. Here the results were somewhat better, and the basis was laid for the ongoing American middle and upper classes' preoccupation with eating for good health.

Prohibition, Levenstein tells us, was hell for the wine-centered French cuisine that had cachet among the rich, but heaven for the restaurant trade in general. Before the constitutional ban on alcohol, public eateries tended to be male bastions where the bar was usually busier than the kitchen and paintings of naked women were a popular item of decor.

Unable to sell highly profitable booze, restaurants remodeled and invited the family in. But whether they styled themselves Italian or Asian, whether they used Chianti bottles for lamps or draped the walls to resemble exotic locales, they generally served the standard American meat-and-potatoes dishes. Meanwhile, cafeterias, luncheonettes and similar fast-food establishments began to take hold.

But these are just appetizers from Levenstein's well-laden table. Eating, he shows us, is not just a matter of fuel or fancy but a key social nexus. In this fascinating book he gracefully manages to trace the lines of class, habit, culture, urbanization, mass-market economics and science that meet in odd and endlessly changing combinations whenever we put food to our mouths. Read it and reap. ■

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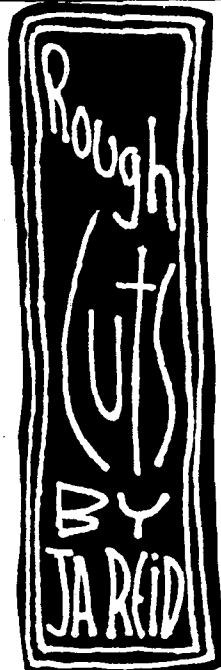
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