

Many Mouths

This compelling study explores food programs initiated by the British government across two centuries, from the workhouses of the 1830s to the postwar Welfare State. Challenging the assumption that state ideologies and practices were progressive and based primarily on scientific advances in nutrition, Nadja Durbach examines the political, economic, social, and cultural circumstances that led the state to feed some of its subjects but not others. Durbach follows food policies from their conception to their implementation through case studies involving paupers, prisoners, famine victims, POWs, schoolchildren, wartime civilians, and pregnant women and toddlers. She explores what government food meant to those who devised, executed, used, and sometimes refused these social services. *Many Mouths* seeks to understand the social, economic, and political theories that influenced these feeding schemes, within their changing historical contexts. It thus offers fresh insights into how both the administrators and the intended recipients of government food programs realized, interpreted, and made meaning out of these exchanges, and the complex relationship between the body, the state, and the citizen.

Nadja Durbach is a historian of modern Britain at the University of Utah, where her work focuses on the history of the body, particularly in relationship to the modern state. Her research interests include anti-vaccinationism in the nineteenth century, the Victorian and Edwardian freak show, and the history of state-feeding. Nadja has received grants from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the American Philosophical Society. She is also the author of *Bodily Matters: The Anti-Vaccination Movement in England, 1853–1907* (2005) and *Spectacle of Deformity: Freak Shows and Modern British Culture* (2010).

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*The Politics of Food in Britain from
the Workhouse to the Welfare State*

Nadja Durbach

University of Utah

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To Miles and Finn

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I was raised in a family in which food was central. It was the way we communicated our joys and sorrows. There was little that couldn't be cured by a nice cup of tea, and no one returned home from a voyage without a *milchika* waiting for them. It is no wonder that my brother grew up to be a chef and that I should have finally got around to writing a book about food. Not only did I learn in the home that food was vital

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to culture, but growing up in the context of Canada's welfare state, I was also taught that the government provided nourishment for its youngest citizens. My parents explained to me that the Family Allowance check that arrived each month was meant for milk and bread, despite the fact that it became my pocket money to spend as I pleased (sometimes, I confess, on chips and chocolate). I would thus like to thank my parents, Errol and Oona, for preparing delicious food, for teaching me what it signifies, and for making clear not only their role but also the state's in providing for my well-being. My brother Andrey, who makes the best food I have ever eaten, has patiently offered up his wealth of food knowledge. My sister-in-law Sian has shared not only countless cups of tea but also her boundless good cheer with me. The fond memories of the food of my grandmothers, Ruth and Sarah, remain alive and well, even though both have long passed. When we joined our lives together, Benjamin Cohen welcomed me into a family with its own food traditions. Steve and Bobby and my brothers- and sisters-in-law – Ed, Caren, Jeff, Kim, Peter, Andrea, Tammy, Matt, Susie, and Brent – have taught me the joys of lasagna on Thanksgiving (though preferably the day after) and that sometimes it is okay just to order pizza. Ben has mulled over with me every topic explored in this book and many others that were abandoned along the way. His enthusiasm, interest, encouragement, patience, and support were crucial to this book's completion and are vital to everything that matters most. My most profound lessons about food and power have come from my children, Miles and Finn. This book is dedicated to them with love.

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