

THE WAR ON TREYF

By H. G. Levine

Testifying before a committee of the U.S. House of Representatives, Ira Glasser said:

"Criminal prohibition is profoundly wrong in principle, generally ineffective in practice, and has created problems that the drugs themselves were powerless to create....

The state has no legitimate power to send me to prison for eating too much red meat or fat-laden ice cream...even if an excess of red meat and ice cream demonstrably leads to premature heart attacks and strokes.... Obesity and compulsive eating disorders...are not a justification to put people in jail, to search them for possession of forbidden foods, or to seize their property when they are caught with such foods. Even more certainly, the self-abuse of compulsive overeating by some cannot possibly justify punishing others for eating the same foods, but in moderation and without apparent ill effects..... Similarly, excessive and compulsive consumption of alcohol or tobacco does not justify imprisonment, police searches or seizures of property....

Why we do it with other substances, like for example marijuana...is the key question this nation needs to begin openly and fairly debating."

– *Testimony before the Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human Resources Subcommittee, U.S. House of Representatives, June 16, 1999.**

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Imagine, if you will, ultra-orthodox Jews running New York City as a police state, enforcing harsh food prohibition laws. A tough law-and-order commandant with a huge beard – he looks like a twin of the famed Lubovitch leader, Rabbi Schneerson – serves as Treyf Tsar. Billboards and shopping bags are plastered with the slogan “*Treyf Ain’t Safe.*”

One night cops surround a house on a quiet street in Brooklyn – Chasid cops with long beards, paes, black fedora hats, and black, ill-fitting SWAT suits. The captain shouts into the bull horn: “*Mr. Plotnik, vee haf your houz zurrounded. Vee know you haff lobsters in dere, and ve’re comink in.*”

Officers wearing black hats and long black coats storm the house and drag Sam Plotnik and his family to the police wagon. The forbidden foods are carted away in an enormous black “*Vestinghouz*” refrigerator by the heavily-armed “*Treyf Evidence Squad.*”

On the day of Plotnik's trial the prosecutors suddenly announce that a smoked Virginia ham, four large lobsters, and a pound of prawns have mysteriously vanished from the police department's deep freeze. All that remains of Sam Plotnik's forbidden dinner is three baked potatoes, two shrimps and a packet of Birds-Eye frozen peas.

A judge with impeccable credentials – his family has long been important in the smoked fish business – scolds the district attorney for going after small-time Treyf users when he can't even stop cops from stealing the shellfish.

The police snap into action. They arrest Lieutenant Bernard Moskowitz, head of security at the police department deep freeze. For days the TV news plays a video tape of Moskowitz confessing that he is a Treyf addict.

"I started with some occasional bacon at breakfast," says Moskowitz, "it seemed harmless enough. But then I craved more. I moved on to ham sandwiches and spare ribs. Soon I was into crabs, shrimp, and big red lobsters – you know, hard Treyf. I even turned my lovely wife Ester and my sweet children onto Treyf eating.

First I just stole from the police deep freeze for myself and family, but then I got greedy and started dealing, specializing in crustaceans. Sam Plotnik got all his Treyf from me, and at good prices!"

The press and politicians are horrified. Lieutenant Moskowitz is charged with aggravated Treyf distribution and faces twenty years hard labor removing bones from belly lox. At the last minute, the Treyf Court judge offers Bernie a reduced sentence – if he undergoes treatment at Shmuck's, a Catskill hotel converted into a treatment facility specializing in addiction to hard Treyf.

Six months later, Moskowitz is apprehended trying to escape from Shmuck's. Front page stories report that Bernie dies in a police lockup, choking to death on a lobster claw he had hidden in a hollowed out copy of the Torah.

"The War on Treyf" is dedicated to Peter Cohen, Professor Extraordinaire at the University of Amsterdam, who understands well the enormous limits of the idea of addiction.

Writings of Professor Cohen can be found at: <http://www.hereinstead.com/sys-tmpl/peterspage/>

**Ira Glasser's Testimony is available at: <http://www.drugtext.org/library/articles/glasser01.htm>*

The author would like to apologize to Woody Allen; he'll know why.