

Big Talkers

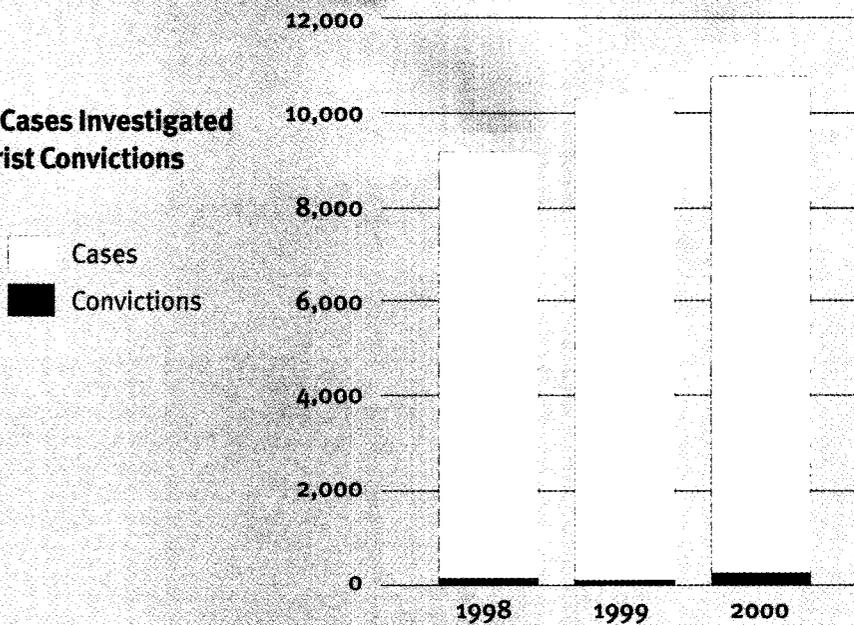
Michael W. Lynch

Post-September 11, it seems strange that terrorist threats once needed to be hyped. But that's exactly what the Department of Justice did to help justify its \$22 billion budget, according to a *Miami Herald* investigation. In its 2000 annual report, the DOJ not only cites the "FBI's efforts to thwart the terrorist efforts organized by Usama Bin Laden" as a success but also tallies up more than 10,000 terrorist investigations and 236 terrorist convictions.

The numbers seem impressive until one discovers that an angry man ringing a call

button for more booze on an international flight, a tenant impersonating an FBI officer in a rental dispute, and Chinese sailors seeking work in the U.S. were all investigated as "terrorists." "Cases labeled as terrorism include erratic behavior by people with mental illnesses...and convicts rioting to get better prison food," reports the *Herald* in its December exposé. "There was a Mexican who concocted a phony passport application, a former court employee who shoved a judge, the babbling man who walked into an FBI office and threatened to kill President Bill Clinton—though he didn't realize Clinton was no longer president."

Terrorist Cases Investigated vs. Terrorist Convictions



Source: Department of Justice 2000 Annual Report

which is shared by anabolic steroids and sedatives such as Valium, means police will no longer have the power to arrest pot smokers.

In theory, possession will still be punishable by up to two years in jail, but prosecutions will have to be authorized by a court. In practice, most people caught with small amounts of cannabis will get off with a warning.

The new policy brings Britain closer to other European countries that have eased up on drug users. The Netherlands has long

tolerated not only the use but the retail sale of cannabis. Spain does not punish drug use, and in Italy marijuana smokers receive warnings or administrative penalties. Last year Portugal eliminated jail time for drug users, Belgium and Luxembourg decriminalized possession and cultivation of marijuana for personal use, and Switzerland's Federal Council endorsed a plan similar to the Dutch model.

Blunkett, the British home secretary, said his proposal was intended to make the U.K.'s drug

laws more credible by concentrating on "hard" drugs such as cocaine and heroin. "It is time for an honest and common-sense approach focusing effectively on drugs that cause the most harm," he said.

Brian Paddick, a London police commander who experimented with a warning-only approach to marijuana users last year, estimated that each cannabis arrest took an officer off the street for five hours. Prosecutions, which usually resulted in a small fine, cost

an average of \$14,000.

"Very few people will now be prosecuted for cannabis possession," Paul Flynn, a Labour Party M.P., told *The Times* of London. "It's the equivalent of giving the police and the courts millions of pounds in extra resources." ☐

Indecency in Utah Skin Show

Michael W. Lynch

UTAH'S PORN CZARINA, Paula Houston, says her most important job is to educate. This legislative session she's teaching the legislature that its 12-year-old indecent public display law is unconstitutionally strict.

"I realized that you could not prohibit all nudity for anyone under 18," says Houston, who became the country's first porn czar, officially the "obscenity and pornography complaints ombudsman," last July. "Constitutionally, you had to have an



exception if it has any value in it for the child.” Houston is working to amend the law to exempt nude material that “when taken as a whole, has serious value for persons younger than 18 years of age.”

The reaction has been mixed. “Some citizens would like to prohibit all nudity for children,” says Houston, who reports getting far more complaints about *Cosmopolitan* and *In Style* magazines than *Playboy*, *Penthouse*, or *Hustler*, since the fashion mags line supermarket checkout aisles. “Others realize that this provision makes sense. A postcard of the statue of David for sale in a store violates the current law.”

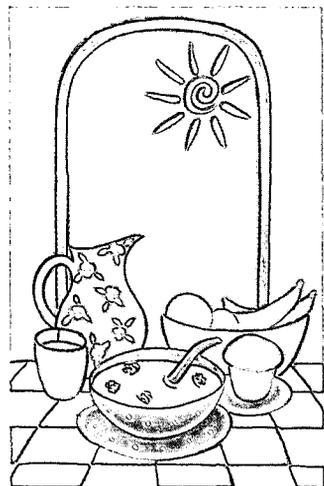
Houston adds, “Simple nudity is not, according to the U.S. Supreme Court, harmful to children. You can’t protect children from everything.” ☐

Laissez-forget it

Stale Granola

Sara Rimensnyder

CORPORATIONS DON'T get much more civic street cred than the Whole Foods grocery chain. Even ultra-hip, ultra-socially aware rocker Ani DiFranco has



been spotted wandering its aisles.

The company, founded two decades ago in Austin, Texas, now feeds punk rock gourmands and health-conscious yuppies nationwide. Whole Foods has helped to grow a mass market for organic food while making a

Dissent via Satellite

Jesse Walker



Zia Atabay

Before the revolution of 1979, Zia Atabay was a successful pop singer in Iran. Now 60, he presides over National Iranian Television (NITV), a two-year-old, Los Angeles-based satellite TV station that broadcasts cultural and political programming to Iranian expatriates around the world—and to his native land. The channel is banned in Iran, but that doesn't keep viewers from paying off officials or hiding their dishes in their gardens.

“When I started the station,” says Atabay, “I told them they weren't allowed to play my music on it. I want to be serious, and my music is happy. I will play it again when Iran is free.”

Associate Editor Jesse Walker interviewed Atabay at his L.A. office in January.

Q: Satellite dishes are illegal in Iran.

A: Yes. But everybody in that government wants money for themselves.

They take a satellite dish down, and after two days, it'll be sold to someone else. So it goes in a circle.

bushel of money (\$62.9 million in pro-forma income in 2001). Its management ethic also wins kudos: Executive salaries are capped, stores donate to local charities, and employees receive a decent wage (the bottom rate at one Los Angeles store is \$9 an hour) and flexible benefits that, at least at some locations, can be extended to their partners, gay or straight.

Despite that track record, plans for a new Whole Foods store in San Francisco's South of Market neighborhood recently

fell through—apparently because the city was trying to prevent the exploitation of local workers. Just before the deal was to be finalized in December, the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency announced that the company would be subject to new wage and benefit mandates governing the area of the development. Whole Foods bailed. Although it met the requirements, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reported, the company didn't want to deal with bureaucratic oversight and onerous reporting

duties. “Whole Foods is very proud of its employment policies,” Matt Holmes, a leasing agent for the company, told the *Chronicle*.

Contacted in January, all parties declined to comment. One employee at the redevelopment agency explained why: “Armax [the project's developer] has now sued the agency.” It appears that, at least for awhile, South of Market shoppers will have to continue buying their kava kava and organic amaranth flakes somewhere else. ☐

Q: Is NITV turning a profit?

A: No. The station's losing money, I'm losing money. That's why we're changing to pay TV. People are going to have to buy cards to watch us, even in Iran. We're going to smuggle the cards in—and they'll buy them.

The American government wants to open another station. My experience is that when a government opens a station, nobody trusts it. Viewers believe me because they know I am *not* a politician, and I am not going back to be vice president or something like that.

Q: A lot of press reports claim that Iran is freer than it was 15 or 20 years ago. Do you think that's true?

A: That's bullshit. Before Khatami came to power, the people for freedom and change were underground. Khatami pretended that it was a new era, and they came up and started to say what they wanted. Then the government killed them or put them in jail.

Last week we put a tape of a torture room on the air. It was the wife of someone they had killed, someone from the Iranian intelligence service. They were beating her, trying to get her to say she was working for Israel. Even in Parliament, they started to think, “They could do this to me.”

Q: Reza Pahlavi, the son of the Shah, has been on your station. Do you support his vision for Iran, or are you just giving a forum to dissidents of different political views?

A: I'm anti-communist, but I have communists on my shows. It's a free press. You have to have everybody on.

The son of the shah says that he is not his father. He says he doesn't care if a free Iran has a king or a president—that the day it's free, his duty is finished. But if he changes, I'll be the same. I'll talk against him.