

Earl Raab

May 22, 1978

BITE OUR NOSE TO SPITE OUR FACE?

The organized Jewish community of California does not have a "position" on Proposition 13 (Jarvis-Gann). After all, some say, if there is no strongly identifiable "Jewish" aspect to a given public issue, it would be more appropriate for Jewish citizens to express themselves on that issue through other than Jewish agencies.

On the other hand, it has been suggested that a number of Jewish welfare institutions could suffer if Jarvis-Gann were passed. For example, property-taxes are used for certain services to the aged. If Jewish institutions are adversely effected, does not that make the measure a "Jewish issue"? Well, yes; but there are sometimes conflicting Jewish interests.

The Jewish community increasingly asks for more funds from government for its own institutions. A special office of the Council of Jewish Federations and Welfare Funds has been set up in Washington with the primary purpose of helping Jewish agencies around the country obtain more government grants. After all, everyone else is doing it. Aren't we taxpayers too? The Jewish community is also typically in the posture of supporting costly new government programs to provide social services. After all, are we not for social justice?

But there is also this reality: continuing inflation and escalating taxes. The considerable middle class in America, working at least one hard day a week for the government, is feeling pinched. They might not mind that so much if they felt that their taxes were producing commensurate results, with only a reasonable level of waste. But they do not have reason to feel that way.

Earl Raab
Bite Our Nose to Spite Our Face?
page 2

The spectre that forms in more than one Jewish mind is that of an earlier Germany: inflation, disruption, a bitter and disaffected middle class which formed the backbone of the Nazi movement. Those concerned about a healthy America -- and we Jews have a special reason to be among them -- feel that something drastic has to be done to stop the upward spiral. And the most effective point of access to the spiral is the level of government spending.

But many who feel that way do not feel that Jarvis-Gann is the answer. Quite to the contrary. Proposition 13, they say, is designed to increase the pinch on the middle class. The large corporations are going to get more enduring property tax relief from Proposition 13 than are the homeowners.

And when some of the slack is picked up, as it must be, it will be felt most heavily by the middle class in increased personal taxes. Another long-range effect of Proposition 13 will be to concentrate more power in state and federal government, away from local control; and all our human history suggests that such a concentration will only increase waste, not reduce it. In the interim there will be severe disruption of many services, probably those which we can least afford to do without -- including the public schools, still the foundation of a democratic society (Proposition 13, it is pointed out, would abruptly lop off almost 7 billion dollars of revenue -- as distinct from Proposition 8, which would reverse the upward spiral by putting a cost-of-living brake on home property taxes).

Earl Raab
Bite Our Nose to Spite Our Face?
page 3

So, the California Manufacturing Association, and other groups intensely interested in lowering taxes, inflation and government spending, feel that Proposition 13 will not only fail to do the job -- but it will intensify the very problems we are trying to remedy. Even though it may provide emotional satisfaction, we are not well advised to bite our nose in order to spite our face.