

## Government Go Home

A law requiring California Jews to be tested for Tay-Sachs is being considered by one state legislator from Southern California. He recently called the San Francisco JCRC to ask what the Jews would think about such a law.

Tay-Sachs is a rare and tragic disease which mainly afflicts Jews of East European origin. Those afflicted are born with tragically disabling brain damage for which there is no known cure.

One San Francisco doctor, specializing in pediatric hematology, reports that he has seen only one case in 20 years. However, the television



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series, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*, which has apparently replaced the *Reader's Digest* as the popular fount of medical knowledge, ran a program on Tay-Sachs Disease not long ago. The legislator from Southern California watched it, and thought that a law might be in order. Tay-Sachs is one of those few genetically ordained diseases. At least, if both parents don't have the Tay-Sachs disease, it cannot show up in their child. One parent with the gene is not enough. If both parents have the gene, there is a 50/50 chance that their child will be afflicted. There is a complicated blood test which Jews can take to determine whether they have the Tay-Sachs gene. The question is: should this test be required by law?

**A few months ago, the nationally syndicated columnist, Carl Rowan, expressed his outrage about a proposed law in Virginia requiring all black children to be tested for sickle cell anemia. This is a serious disease, which afflicts only the black population. Rowan felt that it was socially unhealthy to stigmatize black children by such a law. Indeed, he asked the readers to imagine how upset the Jews would be if a law required that they all be tested for Tay-Sachs disease. Perhaps he also watched that Marcus Welby show.**

It is interesting to examine the sense of repugnance which such a law evokes. There is a clammy feeling about too much blending of government and science. Human affairs are too important for the scientists. If dieticians would discover the "perfect" food design for everyone, the government should have nothing to do with it other than issuing a few information bulletins. Whether people do or do not want to eat in a way that will make them efficient, healthy, productive or long-lived—must remain their private choice. They may have other values in mind, and they may prefer to struggle unevenly with their impulses.

The principle is the same as that involved in eugenics. Scientists could easily figure out which people should be paired, or prevented from pairing, in order to produce the most intelligent, healthy or whatever species. They will someday be able to manipulate the genes to produce the same results. When government begins to implement such scientific findings by law, then the meaning of human life is, of course, desecrated.

Historical target-groups like the blacks and the Jews should be particularly sensitive to such scientized politics. Both have had experience with the dehumanizing thrust of eugenics.

**Is it silly to make a connection between political eugenics and a law to require examination for Tay-Sachs? Yes, if the connection is made too literally — if, for example, the two efforts are equated as both being genocidal in intent. On the other hand, it is not unreasonable for there to be some fluttering of concern whenever there is any attempt to mandatorily substitute a scientific, rationalistic design for the inchoate individual human will.**

For one thing, the scientific mind tends to get imperialistic once it gains political sway. In the name of efficiency and rationality, a law requiring examination for Tay-Sachs or Sickle Cell Anemia can become a law requiring treatment; and then it can become a law to weed out such weak sisters altogether.

Why not just make the tests available, spread the word, and let people do what they want about it?