

## Laws Of Jewish Interest

Representatives of the seven large Jewish communities of California met in Sacramento this week—as the Jewish Public Affairs Committee of California (JPAC) to talk with state legislators and review bills which might be of “Jewish community interest.”

But what are the boundaries of “Jewish community interest?”



Raab

Take this edict, imposed in Rome at about the time of the American Revolution: “Jews and Christians are forbidden to play, eat, drink, hold intercourse, or exchange confidences of ever so trifling a nature with one another. Such shall not be allowed in palaces, houses or vineyards, in the streets, in taverns, in neither shops nor any other place. The Jews who offend in this matter shall incur the penalties of fine and imprisonment.

Christians, a similar fine and corporal punishment.”

Of Jewish interest? Of course. But suppose that law had said, instead, that *Moslems* and Christians were forbidden to speak to each other. Would that still be of Jewish community interest? Presumably because any society promoting those kinds of values would surely have ended by destroying the Jews. We've learned that much, haven't we?

**Does that mean that everything which is good or bad for society is therefore of special interest to the Jewish community? Obviously not. For example, Jewish Californians are affected by pollution, but no more so than other Californians. Therefore, Californians who happen to be Jewish can join as individuals with other Californians in fighting pollution. There is no special reason for a Jewish organization to do that.**

On the other hand, Jews have a special history and stake in the fight against bigotry, and against the kinds of society which feed bigotry. The Jewish community therefore has a special sensitivity to public policy which seriously affects the state of democratic life and intergroup relations in our society. Therefore we would have a special interest in opposing a law which would prevent Moslems and Christians from speaking to each other. Or impose discrimination on any group. Or fan intergroup conflict of any kind. Or impede minority opinion or minority religious belief of any kind.

The boundary line is not always easy to define. JPAC starts from the core and works outward. At the core is public policy which most directly impinges on the status of Jews, e.g.: bills which would outlaw kosher butchering in California, or require Christian observances, or otherwise interfere with the principles of religious liberty. And there are those bills which would directly affect Jewish welfare institutions.

**But, there are more difficult judgements. Take, as an example, three bills which were just introduced by a San Francisco legislator who happens to be Jewish. Senate Bill 700 would require the state to replace a number of summer youth jobs which are going to be lost this year as a result of federal cut-backs. Senate 701 would have the state provide for a number of the public employment jobs for unemployed adults, which are also going to be lost this year. Senate Bill 433 would have the state provide help for students who could benefit from a college education, but who need special help in order to do so.**

There are some pretty basic human values involved in all these bills which were introduced by Senator Milton Marks—and which will heavily affect disadvantaged racial groups. However, they hopefully involve universal human values in which people of all religious tendencies will equally participate—whatever credit the Jews may wish to take for originally launching such values in the Western world. But are they not, in addition, matters of public policy which will seriously affect the state of democratic life and intergroup relations in California during the coming year? And, therefore, matters of *self-interest* for the Jewish community?