

PUBLIC HEALTH

Need Better Epilepsy Laws

The tragedy of the epileptic is a social not a medical one, because of misunderstanding regarding the disease and discrimination against the afflicted persons—By Faye Marley

► ATTORNEY MELVIN BELLI claims he used epilepsy in his defense of Jack Ruby to save his client's life, not as an attack on epilepsy or epileptics.

"I was talking about one man," Mr. Belli told a meeting of the Epilepsy Foundation in Washington, D. C., in answer to charges that epileptics as a group had been harmed by tactics used in the defense of Ruby, who was later convicted of killing Lee Harvey Oswald, the accused assassin of President Kennedy.

Mr. Belli said he had not meant to have it suggested that all or most of the more than two million persons with epilepsy are even remotely capable of committing murder.

Ruby was suffering from the rarest of all forms of epilepsy, Mr. Belli said, denying that he ever implied that the affliction was shared by more than a "tiny percentage of an infinitesimal fraction of the total of persons with epilepsy."

Mr. Belli said that although he is and had been a member of the national board of trustees of the Epilepsy Foundation months before the assassination of President Kennedy, and knew that the "overwhelming majority" of persons with epilepsy could lead productive lives, this could not weigh against his sworn obligation to defend Jack Ruby with all the facts at his command.

He quoted George Washington to support his stand: "If men are to be precluded from offering their sentiments on matters which may involve the most serious and alarming consequences, reason is no use to us: the freedom of speech may be taken

away, and dumb and silent we may be led, like sheep to the slaughter."

"I am not here to apologize for trying to save a man's life," Mr. Belli added. "I am here to join with you in trying to make two million lives worth living."

The daily tragedy of the average person with epilepsy is not a medical tragedy at all, Mr. Belli said. It is a social tragedy, as serious in its own way as that faced by the 20 million Negroes in this country because of discriminatory laws.

He called attention to the fact that in ten states no adjudged epileptic can drive a car, even if he can certify that he has for many years been entirely free of seizures. He said that although epilepsy can be controlled as easily as diabetes, some states forbid the marriage of epileptics.

The bulk of persons with epilepsy cannot go to work because of costs of workmen's compensation, in spite of the fact that the work-safety record of this group compares favorably with that of any other group.

President Johnson sent a telegram that was read at the meeting, which was held to initiate a month-long education campaign to counter widespread misinformation about epilepsy.

The President's telegram said "unfair barriers of discrimination and misunderstanding still too often create legal, social and economic problems for many persons affected by this neurological disorder."

Rep. Robert A. Taft Jr. (R-Ohio) spoke on the need for improved laws for persons with epilepsy.

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BLOWING GLASS FOR SPACE—Glassblowers, Don Moody (right) and Dan Dempsey produce special equipment for use in studies associated with the search for extraterrestrial life at Ames Research Center, Moffett Field, Calif.

PUBLIC HEALTH

Typhoid From Canned Meat Unlikely in U.S.

► AMERICAN CONSUMERS of South American canned meat need not worry about getting typhoid regardless of whether a suspected 1951 can of corned beef caused the Aberdeen, Scotland, outbreak.

Dr. E. A. Murphy of the U. S. Department of Agriculture's meat inspection division said that although authorities here are doubtful that Argentina corned beef was the cause as has been claimed, they have cabled Robert N. Anderson, American Attache in the Foreign Agriculture Service in London, for a final report.

"If the canned beef was to blame," Dr. Murphy said, "we will get the name of the establishment producing it and stop importing the brand." He said the Department of Agriculture is not closing its eyes to the remote possibility that the beef was to blame, although latest reports seem to point to a human typhoid carrier.

Dr. Gail M. Dack, director of the Food Research Institute, University of Chicago, said that England has some precedent for linking typhoid with South American canned meat, although he doubts that the present outbreak was caused by it. In any case, the fact that the can was old has nothing to do with the presence of typhoid germs. The original canning determines the product's safety.

"About ten years ago," Dr. Dack said, "31 persons in England got typhoid that was traced to canned ox tongue in South American cans that had been cooled in raw river water."

Dr. Murphy said that all cooling of the cooked beef inspected by the Department of Agriculture from approved establishments in South America must be done in water pure enough to drink.

"There is a point during cooling," Dr. Murphy explained, "at which the cans could possibly absorb germs from unsafe water."

The U. S. Public Health Service recommends typhoid inoculation for all persons traveling to Aberdeen, Scotland.

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New Way for Disposal Of Radioactive Wastes

► THE SERIOUS PROBLEM of what to do with radioactive wastes may find an answer underground.

Borrowing techniques from the petroleum industry, the Halliburton Company in Duncan, Okla., mixes wastes with a watery cement and pumps the mixture down a 1,000-foot hole. At the bottom of the hole, a horizontal crack is created, and the mixture is forced into the crack by pressure from above, where it hardens.

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It is believed about 172,000 cubic miles of ground water lies within a half-mile beneath the earth in North America, enough to cover the continent with a sheet of water 100 feet thick.