

## **6. The media scandal associated with Contergan**

With publication of the article in *Welt am Sonntag* on November 26, 1961, the Contergan story finally became an official public scandal that drew strong media attention, but one that passed through several phases of varying intensity. As media logic had now begun to dominate the Contergan debate, the case took on a momentum of its own that has lasted to the present and has been repeatedly rekindled under the influence of a wide range of interests and interventions. The first reports were largely objective and reflected an effort to placate the public. Although the issue receded from the public eye temporarily, it returned to the headlines in the spring of 1962 when the victims became a major focus of public attention. The full extent of the damage caused by the drug gradually became clear. That prompted numerous families, many of which had initially viewed their cases as isolated strokes of fate, to recognize their common interests and demand help and explanations, which in turn fueled the public debate on Contergan. For many reasons, Contergan remained a dominant issue in the media. And because its victims were children, its impact was particularly shattering in an emotional sense. Furthermore, the matter impacted on a number of social taboos, as it addressed the sensitive issue of abortion and evoked memories of the dark chapter known as the “Children’s Euthanasia Program.” Propelled by interest in the biographies of the victims, concern with the issue eventually spread through many different areas of life, from initial medical care and treatment to kindergardens to matters of schooling and the social integration of people with disabilities. As a result, Contergan continued to occupy the public consciousness like virtually no other topic in the 1960s (and still does so today).