

Euthanasia lobby leader: 'AIDS will help us, I'm sure'

This interview was made available to *EIR* by an investigative journalist who spoke to Paula Caucanas, the general-secretary of the World Federation of Euthanasia Societies. She is based in Paris. Every two years, the federation holds an international conference, to bring together representatives of 32 pro-euthanasia societies which claim to have 500,000 members worldwide. The last conference was in Bombay, India, in November 1986, and the next will be in San Francisco, U.S.A., April 7-10, 1988. The organizer of the San Francisco event is Britain's Derek Humphreys, founder and head of the U.S.-based Hemlock Society, which, as its name implies, advocates legalization of suicide and murder.

Q: What is your thinking of the acceptance of euthanasia, or support for euthanasia, in view of the spread of AIDS? Dr. [Pieter] Admiraal of Holland has made that connection.

Caucanas: Many of us, we want that people who have AIDS, have the right to choose life or death. Especially in the last year of the disease, when we cannot imagine a cure will be found, and it is so horrible. Even if we discovered a new medicine tomorrow, the terminal cases cannot be cured. All of us think, they must have the right to choose. In France, they have *not* the right to choose. In the country of Admiraal, Holland, they have the right *in fact*, even if not legally. In France, therefore, people try suicide in secret, and fail. This is the shame of our society. If we cannot cure, they should have the choice. . . .

Q: Do you have support in the French political spectrum?

Caucanas: Confidentially, the Socialists are for us, but don't say so, because they are concerned with the political consequences. [Jacques] Attali [adviser at the presidential office at Elysée Palace], for example, he supports it personally, if not officially.

Q: What kind of organizational structure do you have in France?

Caucanas: I am the secretary-general of the Association pour la Droit de Mourir avec Dignité (Association for the Right to Die with Dignity). We have 17,000 members nationally. . . . Internationally, the World Federation has 32

societies, with 500,000 members, half of them in the United States, mostly centered in two organizations, Society for the Right to Die, and Concern for Dying.

Q: How do you see attitudes evolving on euthanasia?

Caucanas: Take our country, France. In France, we are very reactionary. We are old-mannered, Middle Ages, Catholics. Even when people are not Catholic, for example, Communist, they are Catholic, in education as a child, and *stay* Catholic.

Q: And what is your view of the current Pope?

A: This Pope is against everything! Except for the excision of women in the Islamic world, that he is not against. But he is against abortion, he is against contraception, he is against euthanasia.

Q: Obviously, certain things are happening on the euthanasia front across Europe. This Dr. Julius Hackethal of Germany is fighting to make euthanasia a practice. . . .

Caucanas: Hackethal! I *love* this man. I invited him to our World Federation conference in Nice, in 1984, but he couldn't come. For years, I have loved this man. There are three great men today: Admiraal of Holland, Hackethal in Germany, and Humphreys in the U.S. But what Humphreys has done, is more limited, to one person. What Admiraal and Hackethal are doing, is much more, they have done their duty for those poor people they don't even know, who will need what they are doing in the future.

Q: How do you see AIDS affecting attitudes and practices concerning euthanasia?

Caucanas: My view is, we are on the brink of winning. We are exactly, as the case was for the abortion question, two years before victory. I feel the people are with us. If you took a poll, you would find that 72% of the French people support us, despite the prevailing attitudes of the Catholic country. With AIDS, we have people who have an incurable disease, who suffer intolerably, and people feel they have the right to euthanasia.

AIDS will help us very much, I'm sure.

First, because it forces doctors to tell the truth. Even when people will die soon, doctors in France lie. Because of AIDS, the fear that one person will give AIDS to another, this will force doctors to say the truth. The truth will come out, and the choice of voluntary euthanasia will be supported.

Q: What plans do you have to push your perspective in the next weeks?

Caucanas: Our great event is Nov. 20, when we invite Dr. Admiraal to France, to talk to 25 doctors of medicine, to give them advice on the best practices for euthanasia. On Oct. 24, before that, we are having the General Assembly for France, of our French National Society. . . .