

Australia Dossier by Robert Barwick and Allen Douglas

Parliament overturns euthanasia law

The Australian death lobby has been handed a setback, but it is redoubling its efforts.

The world's first law permitting doctors to help kill their patients was nullified on March 24, when Australia's federal senators passed the "Andrews Bill" by a vote of 38-33, which revokes the Northern Territory's (N.T.) "Rights of the Terminally Ill Act." Named for its sponsor, Liberal MP Kevin Andrews, the bill makes it illegal for Australia's three territories (over which the federal government has constitutional authority) to pass such legislation. Four people had killed themselves in the two years since the N.T. act was passed. Dr. Philip Nitschke, the physician who had personally overseen all four deaths, burnt a copy of the Andrews Bill on the steps of Parliament.

The N.T. law has been thrown out, but a "death lobby" of MPs, academics, and sections of the news media, most notably Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper, is trying to breathe new life into the subject. The press generally has condemned the Andrews Bill, and its polls claim that 70% of the population supports euthanasia. *The Age*, in particular, has claimed that euthanasia is a widespread practice among doctors and the medical fraternity, despite the fact that the Australian Medical Association and nursing profession oppose the law.

In fact, *The Age* helped create the atmosphere to pass the N.T. act in the first place. In 1995, the paper brought in a Briton to Melbourne, Nick Davies, who contacted seven doctors in the surrounding state of Victoria who admitted to killing AIDS patients. Davies then wrote a story about it, which kicked off a nationwide debate. Davies did not report, however, that at least

one of the doctors was already a member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

Two other prominent members of the death lobby are Dr. Helga Kuhse and Prof. Peter Singer of Monash University's Center for Human Bioethics. Marshall Perron, the former N.T. chief minister who pushed through the "Rights of the Terminally Ill Act," said, when he received the Saba Award from the World Federation of Right to Die Societies in October 1996, that his actions were inspired by Kuhse.

In the Feb. 17 *Medical Journal of Australia*, Kuhse and Singer claimed that in 30% of all deaths in Australia, "a medical end-of-life decision was made with the explicit intention of ending the patient's life, of which 4% were in response to a direct request from the patient."

The survey methods used by Kuhse and Singer have been widely condemned, and 36 prominent academics and senior medical officers signed a letter which branded their study "misleading."

Singer has also been condemned by Melbourne Catholic Archbishop George Pell as "King Herod's propaganda chief in Australia," for creating a "culture of death." Singer says, in his book *Rethinking Life and Death*, that children under one month old are not human, and the killing of such a child wouldn't be murder. Singer reserves his compassion for animals; he founded the animal rights movement with his 1975 book, *Animal Liberation*.

The death lobby's next move will be an attempt to pass a euthanasia law through one of Australia's six states,

which, according to Australia's Constitution, have ultimate jurisdiction over health matters. Already last November, state MP Ann Levy introduced a bill based on the N.T. legislation into the parliament of South Australia. Levy told *EIR*, "There is no way those people in [the federal capital] Canberra are going to make laws for South Australia."

Outside of the *New Citizen*, the newspaper of Lyndon LaRouche's co-thinkers in the Citizens Electoral Council, the first person to call the practice of euthanasia what it is—a Nazi crime—was Sen. John Herron, when he spoke on the Andrews Bill in Parliament on March 17. Herron said, "Last year was the 50th anniversary of the Nuremberg war crimes tribunal, where 23 physicians and scientists were accused . . . of euthanasia. In every profession there are some who are incompetent and inevitably a few who are venal and dangerous. It is in this category that I would put those who believe that killing can be justified by higher motives, just as those physicians and scientists did during the Second World War. Those 23 physicians were accused . . . of euthanasia of undesirable racial groups. Sixteen were found guilty and seven were sentenced to death by hanging. *It is chilling to know that the main Australian proponent today is a doctor who pleads similar higher motives.*"

Nitschke hysterically threatened to sue, ranting, "He's linking me to doctors of the Third Reich."

But "Nazi Nitschke" has co-thinkers in high places. In 1995, the Queen's representative in Australia, Gov. Gen. Bill Hayden, spoke to the Royal Australian College of Physicians about the "diminished usefulness" to society of elderly people. "There is a point where succeeding generations deserve to be disencumbered . . . of some unproductive burdens," he said.