

Britain's euthanasia movement declares war on Western culture

by Mark Burdman

"The sort of opposition we have to overcome, is from those who insist that human life is sacred. This is only a dogma."

The speaker is a leading figure in the United Kingdom's Voluntary Euthanasia Society (VES), the oldest such outfit in the world. It was created in 1935, under the name, Voluntary Euthanasia Legalization Society. The Society is now on an organizing offensive, to culturally, politically, and juridically legitimize euthanasia in the United Kingdom and the West as a whole.

On March 21, *EIR* has learned, a doctors' group inside the Society, will be meeting privately in London, to discuss formally launching a pro-euthanasia medical professionals' group within the VES. The existence of this group had been first publicized in November 1987, when British newspapers reported that the spread of AIDS had motivated a group of British doctors to demand the legalization of euthanasia. The organizer of the confidential March 21 event is Dr. Colin Brewer, who became notorious after his declaration to the Scottish branch of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, later re-published in the newsletter of the Hemlock Society in the United States, advising readers not to shy away from using plastic bags as a means to commit suicide. As Brewer put it in a recent private discussion, "The plastic bag is a jolly efficient method, people should not be put off with it, just because it is inelegant."

From April 7-10, a group from the Voluntary Euthanasia Society will be visiting San Francisco, to participate in the biannual summit of the World Federation of Societies for the Right to Die, the host-organization for which will be Derek Humphry's Hemlock Society.

Then, on May 21, the VES will be holding a joint conference at the Royal Society of Medicine together with Britain's Hospice Movement, presided over by Dr. Douglas Black, one of Britain's most prominent physicians. The theme will be: "Voluntary Euthanasia and the Hospice Movement: Can We Work Together?" This is the first time the two groups

have ever held a public meeting together, since, in the past, the Hospice Movement has shied away from public advocacy of euthanasia. Nonetheless, the Hospice Movement's director, Dame Cicely Saunders, has headed the St. Christopher's Hospice, which invented the notorious "Brompton Mix," for "easing" the patient's "death with dignity."

In praise of suicide

The British population is being psychologically softened up to accept euthanasia by a propaganda blitz in the media.

On Feb. 14, for example, the *Sunday Times* of London published an article by Mick Brown, extolling those prominent British couples who have made "suicide pacts." He highlighted the case of Prof. Arthur Ramsay, a retired zoologist and fellow of the Royal Society, who, while "rational and lucid," committed suicide with his wife on an overnight train to London. They were people, wrote Brown, who believed that "the quality of life" was the most important thing, and under conditions of aging (he 78, she 76), sickness, and decline of mental faculties, they decided to commit suicide together now, because "a sudden deterioration in their health" might have resulted in them being unable to carry out their plan cleanly. Their daughter was quoted by Brown: "It is a decision they took which is accepted sadly by the family. They were very brave people."

Author Brown reported that in the United States, "the rate of geriatric suicides has multiplied dramatically in recent years. The Hemlock Society—the American equivalent of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society—can find evidence of only six recorded double suicides involving elderly people between 1920 and 1980; but 92 documented cases between 1981 and 1987."

He also described the case of writer Arthur Koestler and his wife Cynthia, who killed themselves in March 1983, he because he was suffering from leukemia, Parkinson's Disease, and chronic depression; she because "she could not

bear life without her husband." Koestler described voluntary euthanasia as "a means of reconciling individuals with their destiny. He left a final letter, "To whom it may concern," expressing "timid hopes for a de-personalized afterlife beyond the confines of space, time, and matter, and beyond the limits of our comprehension."

The article coincidentally notes that Hemlock Society head Derek Humphry formerly worked for the *Sunday Times* of London. Not so coincidental, is the fact that Brown received the material for his article from Jean Davies, the chairman of the VES, who describes herself as the "resource center" of the Society. According to her own account, she was drafted into becoming a pro-euthanasia activist by the British-born Humphry, who recruited her out of the antinuclear movement, by telling her that the peace movement already had enough true-believer activists, while the euthanasia movement had far too few.

Also during February, a play opened at London's West End Whitehall theater, to much publicity in the press, which graphically depicts an act of euthanasia on-stage. Entitled "Curtains," the play, in the words of the *Daily Telegraph*, "touches a subject enjoying renewed topicality." Playwright Stephen Bill claims, "We need to look at the quality of death as well as the quality of life. . . . There are people who would rather be dead and who would be better off dead, and that is not a very satisfactory state of affairs. . . . I don't see it as my place to try to tell people what to think; rather it is to provoke the debate, get the blood pulsing, to get them thinking. . . . I see the theater as a forum for discussing things people find difficult to discuss privately. . . . Death is the last taboo, because we have distanced ourselves from it." The high point of the play comes when the daughter places a shopping bag over her mother's head, and then (in the *Telegraph's* description), "finishes the job with a cushion over the face."

Other elements of the propaganda barrage, include sensational revelations made last year, that King George V had been put to death in a "mercy killing" by the prominent British Dr. Lord Dawson of Penn. According to Jean Davies, this had a noticeable effect in shifting popular attitudes in Britain toward acceptance of euthanasia: "If it's good enough for the King, it's good enough for the subjects, is the kind of reaction it produces."

The British media also continues to draw attention to a poll taken during 1987, which purported to show that 70% of respondents supported the legalization of euthanasia.

AIDS, austerity, and euthanasia

Three factors are motivating the renewed euthanasia drive.

One, as indicated, is the spread of AIDS. In mid-November 1987, Dr. Colin "Plastic Bag" Brewer and Dr. Jonathon Miller wrote a letter to the *British Medical Journal*, announcing plans to form a medical section within the VES that would fight for legalization of euthanasia. They wrote that the need

for euthanasia legalization had increased since the founding of the VES in 1935, "because more people now survive to suffer the sort of physical and psychological distress which cannot be adequately relieved even by the best medical and hospice care. The acquired immune deficiency syndrome has added a new and rapidly growing group of often well-informed patients who may not want to risk the dementia which so often supervenes." Brewer told the *Times* of London Nov. 13: "The fact is that there have been some cases in which people with AIDS have committed suicide. . . . It seems

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very likely that some sufferers in whom the condition is far advanced will want to consider euthanasia."

He and his co-thinkers were sharply attacked by Britain's LIFE organization Nov. 12, which stated, "It is arrogance to assume that people want to be hastened out of this world just because at the moment they are looking at a disease that is incurable, but where one may be found."

The second factor is the budgetary-financial situation. As ex-"peacenik" Jean Davies puts it privately: "With the advances in medicine today, the amount one could spend on keeping people healthy is infinite. If we chose to keep alive every handicapped and every seriously ill person, we would have nothing left, and," she sneered, "we would have to cut, God forbid, our precious defense budget."

Third, and ultimately most significant, these creatures are using the current economic crises to destroy the notion of the sanctity of human life in Western Judeo-Christian culture.

From 'sanctity of life' to 'quality of life'

Aside from its being the oldest of euthanasia societies, what makes the British group special, is the philosophical, political, and cultural support it receives from influential figures within the gnostic-liberal faction of the British Establishment. These individuals are clever and learned enough, to understand that they are using the question of euthanasia as a weapon to undermine the basic values of Judeo-Christian civilization. They draw upon those philosophical traditions of radical liberalism within the past two centuries of British

philosophy, which have been the focus of evil in the world, including the utilitarian "hedonistic calculus" of Jeremy Bentham, the utilitarian writings of John Stuart Mill, the "pragmatic" philosophy of Bertrand Russell, to provide a justification for murder, and the liberal-gnostic philosophies of Arnold Toynbee.

Oxford-based VES chairman Jean Davis says that the "sanctity of life principle" of Judeo-Christian civilization, must be replaced with a new "quality of life principle." She lauds the work of Australian "moral philosopher" Helga Kuhse, who has written books attacking ideas like "keeping grossly handicapped alive," and advocating euthanasia as the positive alternative. "She contrasts the Judeo-Christian idea that life is sacred, and pulls it apart, since it only means *human* life."

The president is 81-year-old Lord Listowel, who served in the India-Burma theater under Lord Mountbatten.

A leading member of the Society's executive committee is retired Oxford professor of "moral philosophy" Patrick Noel-Smith, who this year will be named president of the World Federation of Societies for the Right to Die. Noel-Smith said that his approach to euthanasia comes from a combination of the "pragmatism of Russell" and the "utilitarian approach, the rights approach. People have a *right* to die. . . . Bertrand Russell believed in having no legal obstacles to what people *want* to do, so that there could be maximum freedom."

He added: "The sort of opposition we have to overcome, is the notion that human life is sacred. The traditional idea is that we ought not to commit murder. Very few people, in the past, wanted to die. It's only in the last 20 years that there has been a pressing problem of people who want out. Anyway, the notion that human life is sacred, is only really a dogma."

He advised that Holland is "the place to go," to see how the pro-euthanasia policy is being best implemented, but added that important developments on the euthanasia front are also developing in France and Switzerland.

'Becoming a post-Christian society

One of the prime movers of the Society is vice-president Sir Alfred Jules (A.J.) Ayer, well-known to university students worldwide who have had to pore through his horrifying texts on logical positivism, empiricism, and pragmatism, in introductory philosophy courses. Ayer is in the philosophical tradition of Bertrand Russell, and backs Russell's argument that the world is overpopulated by "nonwhite" races. Cut-offs of bank lending to the Third World, and the imposition of authoritarian regimes in Africa and the Indian Subcontinent, are among the "cures" he demands to "redress the racial imbalance" in the world.

He is also one of the seminal figures in the British Humanist Association, which was known as the Ethical Union from the point of its founding in 1896, until it was renamed the BHA in 1963. Its work was supported by Russell until his

death. In 1963, Ayer and Sir Julian Huxley, and founder of the UNESCO organization, launched the BHA in the British Parliament. On May 14 of this year, they are commemorating its 25th anniversary, in an event hosted in the British House of Commons by Michael Foot, a top figure in the Fabian wing of the British Labour Party. The work of the BHA is also supported by Austrian-born philosopher Sir Karl Popper.

In an early-March discussion, a BHA official said that the organization supported euthanasia because, "We support a lot of social causes that we think are better formulated in rational rather than religious terms. The religious attitude to the absolute sanctity of human life outweighs caring for the incurably ill. . . . In fact, the idea of the absolute sanctity of life is not accepted by most people. . . . The question is, how can we adapt to becoming a post-Christian society."

The leading pro-euthanasia doctor in Europe, Holland's "Dr. Death," Pieter Admiraal, told a Swedish daily Jan. 24 that he felt no compunctions about committing euthanasia, since he was not a "Christian," but a "humanist." By humanist, these creatures, of course, mean "bestialist."

"Post-Christian society" is, indeed, the clarion call of the euthanasia movement. Arnold Toynbee was for decades the head of the research department of the Royal Institute for International Affairs and one of the co-founders of the World Council of Churches in the late 1930s. In 1976, Toynbee stated during a discussion with a leading Japanese philosopher: "My Hellenic education has prevailed over my Christian education. Consequently, I feel that suicide and euthanasia are fundamental and indispensable human rights. I feel that a human being's human dignity is violated by other people when he is kept alive by them against his will. . . . I also hold that a human being is violating his own dignity if he fails to commit suicide in certain circumstances."

Toynbee defended euthanasia and the "right to suicide" from a so-called "pre-Christian" Greco-Roman standpoint, and cited, favorably, examples of some of his own friends who had committed suicide. He complained: "There is, in Britain, a historical reason why suicide is discountenanced and is made humiliatingly and cruelly difficult. According to Christian doctrine, a human being who commits suicide is committing an offense against God. He is trespassing on God's prerogative. God alone has the right to decree the moment at which a human being is to die."

One of the other executive committee members of the VES, Dr. Jonathon Miller, is identified in the 1985 book, *The Cambridge Apostles*, as the leading contemporary member of that Cambridge secret society. Leading lights of the "Apostles" earlier in this century included Bertrand Russell and John Maynard Keynes.

Other VES executive-committee members include writer and newscaster Ludovic Kennedy, who has helped Davies produce pro-euthanasia shows on British Broadcasting Corporation; Life Peer Baroness Barbara Wootton; and Lord Reverend Donald Oliver Sopeer, one of the leading figures in the British and world Methodist church.