

## **GAINS AND SETBACKS – 2010/2012**

I have been honored to have served the World Federation over the past six years, and will continue to serve our movement, in any way possible, in the future. The individuals with whom I have served, have further honored me, and all of us, by dedicating their unfailing energy, professionalism, and unique abilities to this cause that I hold so dear. It has been our mission, over the years, to facilitate cooperation and information support to the various societies throughout the world.

In the past two years, since we last met in Melbourne, there has been significant progress made by leaders and activists in a number of countries. I feel that we are on the threshold of even greater gains in the future, as a continuing crescendo of initiatives and developments take place around the world.

- 1) Voters in the Zurich Canton defeated an initiative attempting to block foreign travelers to Dignitas by an overwhelming majority.
- 2) In Germany, an administrative court lifted the ban imposed by their Physician's organization, which ran contrary to existing German law.
- 3) There have been significant increases of cases reported in both assisted suicide in Switzerland, and euthanasia in the Netherlands and Belgium, demonstrating the effectiveness and wider demand under the laws.
- 4) The Parliament of the UK voted unanimously to back the Special Prosecutor's less restrictive policy on assisted suicide, providing a major crack in the draconian stone wall that has historically been Britain's bulwark against compassionate dying.
- 5) In Argentina, their Senate voted unanimously to give terminally ill patients the right to terminate further medical treatment. (A first step toward future gains.)
- 6) South Africa is launching an initiative to legalize assisted dying, in the wake of the Sean Davison case, where he was held under five-months of house arrest in New Zealand for assisting his elderly mother to die.
- 7) In Australia, the formation and strengthening of their regional coalition – Your Last Right – will provide a springboard for legislation, at both the state and federal level.
- 8) The Dutch have developed and implemented mobile euthanasia teams to ensure that all citizens will have access to their rights, under the law, if at all possible. This program has been so successful, that they have experienced a seven-fold increase in the number of these teams, in only three months.
- 9) In the US, Final Exit Network's program of active support of dying individuals has resulted in a positive change in the law in the State of Georgia, with other changes expected in the future.
- 10) And in France, both a new President, and what appears to be an emerging socialist/liberal majority, could herald the implementation of legislation giving French citizens the right to euthanasia. Their National

Assembly will obviously have a full agenda of economic issues to tackle, as their first priority. But, with effective lobbying, the option of aid-in-dying is legitimately on the table, for the first time. If France adopts right to die legislation, the impact on the rest of Europe, and other parts of the world, will be significant.

Further initiatives, yet to be resolved, continue to present themselves around the world.

- 1) In Canada, the intensified debate has been joined in both British Columbia and Quebec, where a court case is expected to be tried on the plea of an ALS (or motor neuron disease) sufferer to allow her physician to end her suffering, without criminal consequences.
- 2) In the Canton of Vaud, a vote will be held next week on the expansion of Swiss law to include citizens of Socio-Medical Establishments (SMEs i.e. nursing homes, long-term care facilities), giving greatly expanded opportunity for more citizens to utilize the law.

And surely more and more initiatives will be presented in various quarters, as time moves forward.

There have also been setbacks, of course. In South Australia, what seemed to be a narrow victory in enacting right to die legislation, suffered a narrow defeat, as a handful of lawmakers lost courage to support this issue. No doubt there have been others, of which, at this point, I am unaware.

But to my dismay, the most significant setback to our movement, I believe, has been self-inflicted.

While we are all ultimately responsible for the initiatives and activities within our own countries, the World Federation was formed to promote a sense of solidarity among all societies working toward one common goal – that of providing every individual (if mentally capable) with full control of their life, at end of life, and the alleviation of their own suffering, when unbearable. Our confederation is based on the premise that large societies help small societies, with resources, knowledge, inspiration. And small societies, in turn, contribute to the common cause to the best of their ability. The whole supports the individual, while the individual supports the whole.

Ours is ultimately a mission of compassion, requiring a generosity of spirit to provide aid those who suffer at life's end. And yet, some of us, as leaders of our various societies, are somehow unable to be generous with one another.

Over the last several years, the politics of divisiveness has been inserted into what should be a collegial synergy, particularly here in Europe. There seems to be a feeling among a few societies that strong regional commitment is mutually exclusive to the support of a strong World Federation, or support of anyone outside of their sphere of influence.

I wholeheartedly believe that we are more than individual societies, whose interests are merely local or regional. We are ultimately a World Community, who should share each others best interests – not the interest of self-interest. A victory, anywhere in the world, is a victory for us all.

My heroes in this movement are those individuals who have used selfless determination to achieve meaningful goals. These are the individuals that have used vision and courage, putting themselves at great personal risk to achieve the enactment of progressive legislation to further our mission, and, changing misguided laws, perhaps by breaking “bad laws”.

My heroes are Admiraal, Postma, Humphry, Irwin, Syme, Kevorkian, plus many other men and women who have embraced selfless dedication to our goals. These are my heroes.

The politicians of ego, dogmatic assuredness, envy, and parochialism will never grace the pantheon of the temple in which I pray.

Ours is a common goal, a common mission, requiring a common bond. We must focus on what brings us together – not the insignificant petty politics that can divide us. Are we to become Sunni and Shia? (Divided by orthodoxy, and geographical divides?) I certainly hope not!

I urge all of us, in this place and this time, to resolve to move forward with a renewed sense of solidarity. We will be electing several new WF Board members, and are retaining the energy, brains and commitment of key veterans who have agreed to serve in the interest of our future well-being.

We are surely poised to see greater gains emerge, on a world-wide basis, as the next few years go by. Let us use all of our talents and cooperation to move our cause forward.

Ted Goodwin, President  
World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies

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