

Belgium euthanasia experience teaches bitter lessons

by Tom Mortier

ROTSELAAR, BELGIUM — I believe that before the Canadian province of Quebec passes its own legislation to legalise euthanasia, it needs to take a good look at Belgium, which recently took legal steps to extend euthanasia to children. After all, my country has more than 10 years of experience.

In 2002, when euthanasia was legalised, it was said that it would only be performed in very rare circumstances. We were supposed to have had all the safeguards. Two doctors were to agree, and if the patient was not terminally ill, a third doctor would be consulted, a psychiatrist. A month was to pass between the written request for euthanasia and the lethal injection.

However, 10 years and 8,000 deaths later, these rules are being ignored and euthanasia is out of control. On November 27, a parliamentary committee voted to remove age restrictions on euthanasia, and so the proposal to extend it to children with incurable diseases is now headed for a vote in the full Parliament.

The leading euthanasia doctor in Belgium, oncologist Wim Distelmans, received international media attention last December when 45-year-old deaf identical twins under his “medical guidance”, who were gradually going blind, were killed. The twins thought that they had nothing to live for, and had asked for euthanasia.

Then Distelmans killed 44-year-old Nathan Verhelst, a transgender person who was born as Nancy. On Belgian radio, Distelmans said that his patient met “all” conditions of the euthanasia law. But physically, Nathan was not terminally ill, or even ill at all, but was suffering mentally.

Distelmans acknowledged that it is not exceptional for mentally-ill patients to be euthanised. He ought to know: He is the chairman of the Belgian Euthanasia Control and Evaluation Commission (Belgian Commission).



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The University Hospital in Brussels phoned my wife the day after.

It was the first we had heard of it.

My mother died without her closest family at her bedside.

The business of “consultation” is a sham. Yes, on the one hand, another doctor has to be asked for advice. But no, the euthanising doctor does not have to heed the advice.

All you need to do is find yourself a euthanasia doctor who is willing to kill you.

Distelmans constantly propagates

his ideology in the Belgian media. He has even started his own ideological association, Leif, to train other doctors. Furthermore, his organisation recently gave a retired Belgian Senator and pro-euthanasia activist, Jacinta De Roeck, a “lifetime achievement award”.

Whether or not a person approves of the concept of euthanasia, most would insist that if it is legal, it must be carefully controlled. If this isn't possible, it must not be legalised in the first place. It is too dangerous. Innocent people will die.

Belgium's experience clearly demonstrates that controls and safeguards are not possible.

Despite all the assurances they gave to the public, the government appointed Distelmans, the leading propagandist for euthanasia in Belgium, to chair the commissions that decide whether euthanasia cases have been carried out in accordance with the law.

He has been in that position for all the time that the law has been in effect. And so everything we know about Belgian euthanasia flows through the hands of its leading practitioner.

Can a man who is judge, jury and executioner be expected to tell the world about the defects in his euthanasia empire?

If we have learned anything in Belgium, it is that euthanasia is an open bar that gives an illusion of safeguards and controls. It promises autonomy and self-determination. In fact, euthanasia gives all the power to the doctors. Patients are at the receiving end of the lethal injection.

A bill to introduce “assisted death” in Quebec is currently before the parliamentary assembly in Quebec City. Although the bill has received approval in principle, it still hasn't been officially passed into law. Quebecers should demand that the bill be abandoned.

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