End of Life Assistance (Scotland) Bill

John and Jean Raven

In terms of evidence of the need for a Bill of this sort, we can only cite the observations we have made, directly and via conversation, in connection with too many relatives and acquaintances who have not been able to obtain the assistance they desired because of worries, by them and possible assistants, about the likelihood of prosecution of assistants.

Those concerned have not merely been distressed by their own condition but also by observation of the distress which caring for them has inflicted on their families.

However, we do feel that the Bill as it stands, is too tightly drawn. Although we ourselves have no need for easy access to appropriate drugs or other means of ending our lives at this point in time, we would like to accumulate these things so that they are readily available when we feel the time has come.

Like vast amounts of modern legislation, the Bill is preoccupied with envisaging, and introducing unduly heavy-handed measures to forestall, what are likely to be rare happenings rather than with making arrangements to help vast numbers of people to get the assistance they desire. As such, the Bill offers yet another example of an apparently pervasive tendency on the part of those running society to seek to deprive individuals of the right to take their own decisions about matters which crucially affect them. This authoritarian tendency currently pervades legislation dealing with almost everything from choice of educational programme, through such things as smoking and "abuse" of drugs, to endless absurd "health and safety" regulations and screening programmes which inconvenience everyone while being unable to offer any guarantee that they will catch those who genuinely intend harm.

In our opinion, decisions about when to die and from whom and when to obtain what kind of assistance should be a matter for the individual. The role of the public service is to assist in offering a variety of provision and means of learning about the actual consequences of different options in different circumstance. Entirely different legislation is required to deter robbery, exploitation of vulnerability, and murder with malice aforethought ... and that legislation should apply to all age groups.

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