AIMS For a better birth...

In Memoriam: Mireille Jospin Dandieu

AIMS Journal Vol 14 No 4

- Midwife and energetic campaigner
- Born 1910
- Married 1930 Robert Jospin (died 1990; two sons, two daughters)
- Died La Celle-St-Cloud, France, 6 December 2002

Mireille Jospin-Dandieu's extraordinary life received little attention outside of her native France, apart from mention of the death of the mother of the former Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. She was a patron of the euthanasia campaign The Association for the Right to Die with Dignity, and chose the timing of her death for herself. Her family announced that she had "decided in serenity to leave life behind".

She was born Mireille Dandieu, a metalworker's daughter, and lost her own mother in her early teens. After training as a midwife in Paris in the late 1920s, she was still active in her profession more than 60 years later, having made the welfare of women foremost among the array of causes to which she dedicated her life. She was a keen supporter of Simone Veil's campaign to end back-street abortions and also fought against traditional female genital mutilation.

Pacifism was a principle she shared with her schoolteacher husband Robert Jospin, whom she married in 1930. Her pacifist convictions dated from her adolescent years, when the Versailles settlement did not take long to produce evidently nefarious effects in vanquished Germany. Amnesty International and Greenpeace gained from her formidable energy, as did the child-centred solidarity movement ATD Quart Monde.

As recently as March 2001, Mireille Jospin-Dandieu was a candidate on a left- wing list in the municipal elections, and took to the streets with her colleagues, demanding statutory recognition of midwifery as a profession under French law, not just a sideline in nursing. On the outbreak of the Gulf War in 1991, she went on peace demonstrations against the policies of the Paris government in which her elder son was already a cabinet minister.

Five years earlier, aged 86, Jospin-Dandieu travelled to the village of Nyema in Mali to spend a month training midwives, having first secured the signatures of her children that they agreed not to waste money bringing her body home should she happen to die in the effort. She was still driving her own car in her ninth decade and, apart from her more public works, retained among her lifelong enthusiasms music, Bible reading and rugby.