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UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED AGAINST SEGREGATION

INFORMATION PACK
FOR MEMBERS

UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED AGAINST SEGREGATION

EDITORIAL

Great Expectations

During the late 1960's and early '70s there was a significant upsurge in the level of agitated discussion and activity amongst physically impaired people. It was a period of change and growing awareness. The creation by advanced technology of an obvious potential for a fuller life, the exciting developments in integrated living arrangements abroad, and a rising militancy among some groups - here and overseas - all contributed to this climate of agitation and high expectations.

It was a period when more and more of us were openly identifying ourselves as disabled people and demanding change. Left behind over the post-war years of growing propperity, many physically impaired people and our families were living in relative poverty and unnecessary hardship. In a spontaneous reaction, the Disablement Income Group (DIG) was formed to demand much greater financial help from the State. DIG had massive support amongst physically impaired people and our friends. With its formation agitation was increased and hopes were raised high.

It was a time of changing social attitudes towards disabled people, and this was given limited expression in the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (CSDPA) of 1970. With this legislation, expectations were raised to yet higher levels.

Greater Expectations

Even as the momentum of agitated expectations gathered strength, it was becoming apparent that hopes had been raised which could not be met by the struggles in hand. DIG had become established, but its spontaneous appeals for State help bore little fruit. The CSDPA won greater advances for professional and specialist services than for physically impaired people themselves. The truth was that the collective will of disabled people lacked cohesion and clear direction: we were unable to win in practice even those few, limited rights which had been achieved on paper.

These frustrated expectations raised increasing doubts about the nature of our struggles. Criticisms were being made about the way our organisations were being run - for whose benefit our energies were being expended. It started to become clear, as some of us had warned at the time, that "charters" such as the CSDPA did not herald a new age for disabled people. Rather did it mark the end of an era in which physically impaired people could naively continue to believe that able-bodied people would solve our problems for us.

In the early 1970s, the frustrations openly broke out within DIG. Members demanded to know whose interests were being served by the various national "disability income" proposals put forward by DIG's "leadership", and why the grassroots membership was not involved in the preparations of such proposals. Critics claimed that members at large were being used purely for fund raising purposes. Dissenting views were forcefully expressed about why little headway had been made towards the goal of a national disability income.

Opposing Tendencies

After the storm broke, two distinct and opposing tendencies emerged. On the one hand there were people who clung to the elitist, expert, administrative approach of solving our problems for us. On the other, there were those who advocated a collective, organised struggle by physically impaired people for full social participation.

Within DIG, the first tendency maintained that the main reason why a national disability income had been pushed aside by successive Governments was because the proposals which had been presented lacked detail and economic viability, and therefore begged greater expertise. Those who took this position, who were "united in fury" at our plight (on our behalf) sought our formal backing and the authority to speak for us. Given this, it was held that they could work out a better proposal, and educate, pressure and negotiate with the Government in our name. The "experts" holding to this tendency went on from DIG to form the Disability Alliance.

The second tendency was represented in a letter published in the Guardian on 20th September, 1972, in which Paul Hunt spoke with the voice of those disabled people who were dissatisfied with our exclusion from serious participation in our own organised struggles for a better life. Paul called for a "consumers" organisation, and for the coming together of all physically impaired people in a united struggle on all the issues that we faced. He was fundamentally opposed to the creation of an organisation around any single issue. A considerable number of disabled people wrote to Paul. He replied to each of these people, and what started as a personal correspondence became a confidential Circular amongst a group of physically impaired people, several of whom went on to form UPIAS.

The "Expert" Administrative Option

The differences between the two tendencies are profound. This has been made crystal clear in the record of the Union's struggle against the Disability Alliance. In the Union's analysis ('Fundamental Principles of Disability', published by UPIAS, 1976) the Disability Alliance, by promoting a narrow, "incomes" solution to our problems, has done little more than promote the interests of its "expert" leadership. This elite inevitably becomes more and more "expert" in economics - leaving the members more and more isolated, and in increasing ignorance of the issues being fought on their behalf.

This approach can be characterised as essentially an "administrative" one, and the Disability Alliance is a particularly clear example of this. Highly qualified and professional, the leadership use the Disability Alliance to carve out for themselves a permanent future on our backs. The organisational "umbrella" structure of the Alliance gives them a supposed "authority", but spares those with most to gain the burden of direct participation with their disabled membership.

Their efforts to gain credibility, however, drive them to make progressive sounding, plausible statements: but, in the final analysis, they really only see the problem of disability as one of mere individual bad luck. It is little more than an unfortunate quirk of our society that an individual physically impaired person is impoverished. The solution is essentially simple - more money to be administered by specially qualified personnel on behalf of the State. The utter bankruptcy of the "expert" view that principal ingredient for successfully pushing the narrow incomes solution is starkly revealed in their own recent publication. Since the Disability Alliance was created, "Disabled people have been singled out for particularly savage cutbacks in public expenditure" (The Guardian, 12th May, 1980, on 'A Very High Priority' from the Disability Alliance). This conclusively shows that, despite all their acquired "authority", these "experts" are treated with even greater contempt by the Government than was DIG. So much for the "administrative" option.

The Collective, Organised Option

The Union on the other hand, though reacting to the same circumstances as the Disability Alliance, had no vested interest in diverting attention behind a mask of "fury" from the real issues facing disabled people and from the real, social struggle that we must undertake together if we are to achieve lasting changes. At this crucial time it was left to the Union to build a different approach - not one based on a spontaneous unconsidered activity. We recognised our struggle had to be based on a clear analysis of the situation we were in. Unlike the Disability Alliance, with its leadership of of social scientists bent on acquiring the authority to "educate" the Government and public about disability whilst studiously avoiding any serious analysis of our problems, we recognised the need to take on this pressing task in the emerging Union of the Physically Impaired.

It was a long and difficult struggle. Some people in the early stages wished to involve the new group in immediate spontaneous actions. Nevertheless, it came to be generally agreed that physically impaired people had ample opportunity to continue our various activities, while at the same time we engaged in the struggle to understand our situation more accurately. At an early stage, an Interim Committee was created to produce internal, confidential Circulars and to draft Aims, Policies and a Constitution for the organisation. A conference was held in October, 1974, and following a postal vote of participants not able to attend, the Union was inaugurated on the basis of these finally agreed documents on 3rd December, 1974. Slightly amended on 9th August, 1976, when able-bodied Associate Members were allowed greater participation, these papers are reproduced in full as an Appendix to this publication.

These documents are the result of the Union's efforts to define our problems our way, out of our own collective experience of disability. They recognise that, in the end, there is no real choice for us but to lead the struggle ourselves as a collective, social force. There is no security in any narrow approach for State Charity handouts. Such approaches merely serve to make us even more dependent on able-bodied people, teaching us with a vengeance the lesson that what able-bodied people can give they can just as easily take away. The latest cutbacks in public expenditure serve an educational purpose unequalled by all the Disability Alliance's pamphlets put together - and show that a collective, organised struggle is the only real option.

Defining the Problem

In our collective struggle to understand the truth underlying our impoverished social situation we were led - through the pooling of experience and through discussion from it - to recognise two clear features. First, we are members of a distinct group with our own particular physical characteristics (physical impairment) and second, that society singles this out for a special form of discrimination (disability). This perspective differs radically from the "expert" medical or social scientific view, that disability arises out of the individual and his or her physical impairment. Our analysis leads us to declare that it is the way our society is organised that disables us.

The Union's definitions, then, are:

> "Impairment: lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and
>
> Disability: the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression".
>
> (Fundamental Principles of Disability, p.14)

This clear and principled recognition of the social origins of disability enables us to see through and resist the many false explanations and tendencies which can and do divert our struggle. For instance, it follows from this view that poverty does not arise because of our physical inability to work and earn a living - but because we are prevented from working by the way work is organised in this society. It is not because of our bodies that we are immobile - but because of the way that the means of mobility is organised that we cannot move. It is not because of our bodies that we live in unsuitable housing - but it is because of the way that our society organises its housing provision that we get stuck in badly designed dwellings. It is not because of our bodies that we get carted off into segregated residential institutions - but because of the way help is organised. It is not because of our bodies that we segregated into special schools - but because of the way education is organised. It is not because we are physically impaired that we are rejected by society - but because of the way social relationships are organised that we are placed beyond friendships, marriages and public life. Disability is not something we possess, but something our societypossesses.

The Union's unambiguous position forms the basis of all our policies and activities, and similarly the basis of our challenge to those involved in disability struggle. The clear explanation of our situation not only enables us to identify the true source of our sufferings, but also helps us to draw together our diverse struggles for a better life by facing directly and consciously the challenge of an oppressive society which singles our particular groups of people for particular forms of discrimination. Because the discrimination levelled at our particular group (disability) is one of many forms of social oppression, it follows that the first lesson that we (physically impaired people and our supporters) must learn - if we seriously intend to oppose oppression - is that ours is essentially a social and not an individual struggle. This struggle of necessity requires the active and leading participation of the oppressed group. Others speaking on our behalf, typically the so-called "expert" or charity spokesperson, can only perpetuate the oppressive social relationship that is disability.

Avoiding Diversions

Although it is just about impossible today to meet anyone in any organisation who would not agree that our social organisation has something to do with the restrictions we face, it is equally true that the clear-cut relationship between physical impairment and disability is usually confused in one way or another. One specious diversion is the idea that "We are all disabled in some way", or that disability is the result of "labelling" and the way people talk about us. Both confusions imply that disability is something possessed by the individual, thus diverting us from seeing the concrete ways in which society disables us and from distinguishing the oppressors from the oppressed. The cause of our problems is seen as lying within the psychology of the individual, thus making the oppressive society safe from criticism.

There are those who hold the view that they do possess disabilities - but only as an incidental appendage to their real selves. With this view, it is insisted that we are people first and only secondly do we possess a "disability". This serves as a meaningless, comfortable generalisation behind which we can hide from unpleasant truths - and even believe that it helps us gain confidence. In fact, however, it merely bows to the able-bodied idea that we possess two aspects: our human-ness and our not-quite-so-acceptable disability. Again, the cause of our problems is held to lie in the way we think about ourselves, which may lead to the view that the concrete barriers set up in the able-bodied world are actually internal barriers in our minds. Some people then conclude that what we face is internal oppression, i.e. we are our own oppressors. Our real oppressors could not wish for a more congenial interpretation - or for one that left them more secure from attack.

We do not organise because we are people first, nor because we are physically impaired. We organise because of the way society disabled physically impaired people, because this must be resisted and overcome. The Union unashamedly identifies itself as an organisation of physically impaired people, and encourages its members to seek pride in ourselves, in all aspects of what we are. It is the Union's social definition of disability which has enabled us to cut out much of the nonsense, the shame and the confusion from our minds. It has raised the floodgates for a river of discontent to sweep all our oppression before us, and with it to sweep all the flotsam and jetsam of "expertise", "professionalism" and "authority"m which have fouled our minds for so long, into the sewers of history.

Disability Challenged

From its beginning the Union always intended to produce a regular, open publication. Before we could set about this task, however, we had to clear away many problems and clarify issues through discussion, if we were not to go the way of all other "disability" organisations. There was a price to be paid for this: many early members left, feeling there was too much talk and not enough action. But for those of us who remained and participated, the active struggles which we undertook in other areas of our daily lives became increasingly identified with the Policies of the Union. Now, more and more struggles are being carried out under the banner of the Union.

This first issue of 'Disability Challenge', therefore, is built on a very carefully laid foundation. It contains articles by several members - but its pages are open to contributions from able and disabled people, whether Union members or not. This will ensure that future issues can become an important forum for clarifying matters amongst ourselves. All letters and articles sent to the Union will be considered for publication. Accepted articles, whether from Union members or otherwise, represent the views of the authors and, in order to promote free expression of ideas, the Union accepts no responsibility for their contents. When anonymity is desired (particularly for contributors living in institutions, who often have to pretend that they are in full agreement with everything said by doctors, wardens, matrons, nurses etc) pseudonyms may be used. Union documents will also be published from time to time, i.e. documents which represent the agreed position of the Union on particular issues. In this edition of 'Disability Challenge', this Editorial, the Obituary for Paul Hunt, and the Union's Aims, Policy and Constitution are all agreed Union documents.

Against Segregation

It will be the task of 'Disability Challenge' to channel the river of discontent against all the able-bodies created falsehoods, myths and distortions of our struggle for emancipation. They will no longer be able to claim credit for our welfare with the same historical impunityrthat they have enjoyed up to now.

We have already mentioned the vital contribution Paul Hunt made to the creation of the Union: but it is worth noting that, while Paul was making his positive contribution to the long-term struggle against oppression, the "official" world of "disability" remained largely in ignorance about the really significant stirrings among disabled people going on under their noses. Thus, while they ignore the contributions of physically impaired people like Paul, they involve themselves in orgies of sycophantic praise for people like the late Sir Ludwig Guttman.

Whatever the merits of Ludwig Guttman's work in saving the lives of spinally injured people, it is well known that he was vain, incredibly arrogant, and an oppressive tyrant towards independently minded physically impaired people. He was not hesitant in banning us from facilities he controlled when his views clashed with ours and, of course, he gained notoriety for systematically channelling physically impaired people into segregated sports. In all this, he not only held us back in the development of our independence, but he positively struggled against us. The contrast between his contribution and that of Paul Hunt to our struggles could not be greater.

It has always been the Union's view that understanding what happens in institutions, why they were built and how they are fun, is of fundamental importance to our struggle to overcome disability. In our view, it is institutional living which characterises the reality of our lives. Those of us who are not actually imprisoned within such walls carry them with us wherever we go in this society.

Because we view institutionalisation as characterising disability, we have given discussion about this a priority, and our first edition of 'Disability Challenge' is devoted to this form of oppression. We therefore open our new campaign against the disablement of physically impaired people with an attack against segregated residential institutions and, as we begin raising the floodgates, we look forward to the future - a world where physically impaired people are truly people first, and last.

TO DENY OR NOT TO DENY DISABILITY

Disabled people have always struggled against the way they have been prevented from taking part in the normal activities of their communities. More recently, however, these struggles have taken a step forward. Disabled people have begun to organise for their emancipation and joined the growing numbers of groups struggling against social discrimination. We are taking a deeper look at ourselves, at the way we are treated and at what is meant by disability. We have noticed that it has nearly always been others who have researched, written, analysed, examined our history, and proposed their knowing solutions for us. More and more disabled people have had experience of 'disability experts' and increasingly we have come to recognise the humiliation this relationship may take for granted. Can it be that having others research on the lives of disabled people (rather than us expressing our own experience) has something to do with the very nature of disability? What, then, is disability?

To many of us, the single factor that unites us together in our struggles is that it is our society that discriminates against us. Our society disables people with different physical impairments. The cause, then, of disability is the social relationships which take no or little account of people who have physical impairments. If this definition is correct, then it should be possible to prove that other social groups can become disabled, in an imaginary society which took no account of their physical status. In such an imaginary society it would be possible for physically impaired people to be able-bodied.

Let us see whether we can turn the world upside-down and show that disability is a socially caused problem. An upside-down world where the 'able' become the 'disabled' and the 'disabled' become the 'able-bodied' and where we show, too, that far from adjusting and accepting disability perhaps, just perhaps, it is healthier to deny and struggle to eliminate disability?

et us suppose that those who believe in segregation could really have their way. We ill imagine a thousand or more disabled people, all wheelchair-users, collected together nd settled in their own village where they had full management and democratic rights. e will suppose able-bodied people do not often visit the village and that the wheelchair- sers control all aspects of their lives. They make the goods that they sell in their hops with special aids, they work the machines that clean the street, run their own ducational colleges, banks, post offices, and transport system of the village, and so n. In fact, for the villager, being in a wheelchair is like everyone else in their orld of people that she or he meets in daily life. They see wheelchair-users on elevision and hear them on radio. Able-bodied people, however, are only rarely seen and ittle understood.

n the course of the life of the village the wheelchair-users plan their lives according their needs. They design their own buildings to suit their physical situation. e thing the wheelchair-user architects quickly discover in this village is that cause everyone is always in wheelchairs there is no need to have ceilings at 9' 6" door heights at 7' 2". Soon it becomes standard practice to build doors to a height 5' and ceiling or rooms to a height of 7' 4". Naturally the building codes set out the regulations made these heights standard. Now everyone is happy in the village; l the physical difficulties have been overcome and this little society has changed cording to the physical character of its members. At last the buildings and environ- nt are truly in tune with their needs.

t us say that when all the adjustments had been made and became fixed, in this wheelchair- er society, a few able-bodied had, through no choice of their own, to come and settle this village. Naturally, one of the first things they noticed was the heights of e doors and ceilings. They noticed this directly, by constantly knocking their heads the door lintels. Soon all the able-bodied members of the village were also marked the dark bruises they carried on their foreheads. Of course, they went to see the llage doctors, who were, naturally, also wheelchair-users. Soon the wheelchair-user ctors, wheelchair-user psychiatrists, wheelchair-user social workers, etc., were volved in the problems of the able-bodied villagers. The doctors produced learned ports about the aches and pains of the able-bodied in society.

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They saw how the bruises and painful backs (from walking bent double so frequently) were caused by their physical condition. The wheelchair-user doctors analysed the problems and wrote their definitions. They said these able-bodied people suffered a loss or reduction of functional ability which resulted in a handicap. This handicap caused a 'disadvantage or restriction of activity' which made them disabled in this society.

Soon special aids were designed by the wheelchair-user doctors and associated profession for the able-bodied disabled members of the village. All the able-bodied were given special toughened helmets (provided free by the village) to wear at all times. Special braces were designed which gave support while keeping the able-bodied wearer bent at a height similar to their fellow wheelchair-user villagers. Some doctors went so far as to suggest that there was no hope for these poor sufferers unless they too used wheelchairs, and one person even went so far as to suggest amputation to bring the able-bodied down to the right height! The able-bodied disabled caused many problems. When they sought jobs no one would employ them. Special experts had to be trained to understand these problems and new professions created for their care. When one able-bodied disabled person applied for a job as a television interviewer, a special medical examination had to be arranged to see whether he was fit for this work. In the end it was decided that he was not suitable. It was felt, the wheelchair-user doctor pointed out in the case file, that a television interviewer wearing a helmet all the time would not be acceptable. Since the cameras would only show the top of his head (because the able-bodied were always bent double by the harnesses' they had to wear) he would not be suitable for interviewing. It is well known, the wheelchair-user doctor wrote, how difficult it is to communicate with the able-bodied because it is not easy to see their facial expressions and meet eye-to-eye while they are bent double.

In time special provision had to be made in the village to provide a means of obtaining money for these able-bodied disabled to live. Voluntary societies were created to collect charity and many shops and pubs had an upturned helmet placed on the counters for customers to leave their small change. Painted on the helmets were the words Help the able-bodied disabled . Sometimes a little plaster-cast model would stand in the corner of a shop - the figure bent double, in their characteristic pose, with a slotted box on the figure's back for small coins.

But one day, when the able-bodied were sitting together and discussing their problems they realised that they were never consulted by the wheelchair-users about this in the little society. In fact they realised that there may be solutions to their problems which had never occurred to the wheelchair users simply because they never looked at these in the same way as those who had them. It occurred to these able-bodied disabled people that perhaps the cause of their problems had a social solution - they suggested that the door and ceiling heights be changed! They formed a union to fight segregation. Of course some of the wheelchair-users thought the able-bodied disabled were failing to accept and adjust to their disabilities, and they had chips on their shoulders because they argued so strongly for social change and a change in attitudes by the wheelchair-users. The able-bodied disabled even argued that perhaps, just perhaps, their disabilities could be overcome (and disappear!) with changes in society.

Extract from: Handicap in a
Social World
(Vic Finkelstein)

UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED

AGAINST SEGREGATION

AIMS

The Union aims to have all segregated facilities for physically impaired people replaced by arrangements for us to participate fully in society. These arrangements must include the necessary financial, medical, technical, educational and other help required from the State to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, to undertake productive work, and to live where and how we choose with full control over our lives.

POLICY STATEMENT

1 DISABILITY AND SEGREGATION

Britain today has the necessary knowledge and the advanced technology to bring physically impaired people into the mainstream of life and enable us to contribute fully to society. But instead of the Country's resources being concentrated on basic human problems like ours, they are frequently mis-spent, for example, on making sophisticated weapons of destruction, and on projects like Concorde and Centre Point. So despite the creation today of such an enormous capacity, which could help overcome disability, the way this capacity is misdirected means that many physically impaired people are still unnecessarily barred from full participation in society. We find ourselves isolated and excluded by such things as flights of steps, inadequate public and personal transport, unsuitable housing, rigid work routines in factories and offices, and a lack of up-to-date aids and equipment.

2 There are a few individual examples of severely impaired people being able to overcome many of these barriers by the use of sufficient resources in the right way. They prove that integration is possible. But as a group we are still often forced to put up with segregated and inferior facilities. We get sent to special schools, colleges or training centres. We are systematically channelled into segregated factories, centres, Homes, hostels and clubs. If we <u>do</u> manage to become mobile, it is often in antiquated tricycles or specially labelled transport. All these segregated forms of help represented progress in years past. But since the means for integration now undoubtedly exists, our confinement to segregated facilities is increasingly oppressive and dehumanising.

3 RECENT ADVANCES

The struggles of disabled people and their relatives and friends, together with advances in technology and medical science, have it is true resulted in larger numbers of us participating more fully in ordinary society in recent years. Some of the barriers which segregate us have been partially overcome or dismantled. So a good proportion of people with paraplegia, or those who are blind, for example, have become able to work and to lead relatively active lives which would have been hard to imagine less than 50 years ago. These developments have meant a positive shift in the attitudes of some able-bodied people as they have responded to our presence amongst them.

4 Such advances show that general attitudes can be changed for the better. They also point to our increased participation in society as the principal means for achieving further change. But they cannot blind us to what remains the basic reality of the position of disabled people as a group. This society is based on the necessity for people to compete in the labour market in order to earn a living. To the employer of labour, the physically impaired are not usually as good a buy as the non-impaired. We therefore end up at or near the bottom of this society as an oppressed group

5 LOW BARGAINING-POWER

When we do succeed in getting employment, our comparatively low productivity means that we have low bargaining-power when it comes to negotiating decent treatment and facilities. Our position is similar to that of many people who are middle-aged or elderly, who have had breakdowns, or are 'mentally handicapped', black, ex-prisoners, unskilled workers, etc. We are usually among the first to lose our jobs and be cast on the scrap-heap when it suits the 'needs' of the economy. If we are lucky we may be drawn in again, to do the worst paid work, when business starts to boom once more. If we are unlucky, then we could face a lifetime on the degrading, means-tested poverty line. If we are very unlucky we may be consigned to a soul-destroying institution.

6 INSTITUTIONS - THE ULTIMATE HUMAN SCRAP-HEAPS

The Union of the Physically Impaired believes that the reality of our position as an oppressed group can be seen most clearly in segregated residential institutions, the ultimate human scrap-heaps of this society. Thousands of people, whose only crime is being physically impaired, are sentenced to these prisons for life - which may these days be a long one. For the vast majority there is still no alternative, no appeal, no remission of sentence for good behaviour, no escape except the escape from life itself.

7 The cruelty, petty humiliation, and physical and mental deprivation suffered in residential institutions, where isolation and segregation have been carried to extremes, lays bare the essentially oppressive relations of this society with its physically impaired members. As in most similar places, such as special schools, there are some staff and volunteers doing their best to help the residents. But their efforts are systematically overwhelmed by the basic function of segregated institutions, which is to look after batches of disabled people - and in the process convince them that they cannot realistically expect to participate fully in society and earn a good living. This function was generally appropriate when special residential institutions first came into being, since in the competitive conditions of the time many physically impaired people could not even survive without their help. But now that it has become increasingly possible for severely impaired people not just to survive, but also to work and become fully integrated, the need for segregated institutions

no longer exists in the way it did. They have become seriously out of step with the changed social and technological conditions of Britain today.

8 SUPPORT FOR RESIDENT'S STRUGGLES

The Union of the Physically Impaired regards the neglected issues of institutions as of crucial importance in the field of disability. We therefore place great emphasis on supporting the struggles of residents in existing residential institutions for better conditions, for full control over their personal affairs, and for a democratic say in the management of their Home, Centre or Unit. The Union strongly opposes all attempts by the authorities to impose restrictions on visiting; to fix times for getting into and out of bed; to limit residents' freedom to come in and go out when they wish; to enforce medical and nursing opinions, or to transfer residents to other institutions against their will.

9 The Union sees a need for a Charter which will focus on basic rights often denied when people are dependent on others for personal needs. Disabled people living in institutions will be offered help if they wish to organise locally in defence of their rights. The Union will develop an advice and mutual-help service to assist with negotiations, formation of residents' committees, etc. When asked, we will mobilise support and publicity on a national basis for those involved in particular struggles.

10 ALTERNATIVES NEEDED

The Union is opposed to the building of any further segregated institutions by the State or by voluntary organisations. We believe that providing adequate services to people in their own homes is a much better use of resources. We also call urgently for the provision of non-institutional alternative housing, for example, along the lines of the Fokus scheme in Sweden, which makes genuine progress towards secure, integrated, and active living for disabled people who need extensive personal help. The Union will try to assist anyone who seeks to move out - or stay out - of an institution. But we fully respect the feelings of individuals who regard institutional life as their best solution at the present time. We understand also that some disabled people will disagree with our views on segregation, and we hope that they will organise to put forward their arguments too.

11 REAL CHOICE

The Union's eventual object is to achieve a situation where as physically impaired people we all have the means to choose where and how we wish to live. This will involve the phasing out of segregated institutions maintained by the State or charities. While any of these institutions are maintained at huge cost, it is inconceivable that we will all receive in addition the full resources needed to provide us with a genuine opportunity to live as we choose. This point applies not just to residential Homes, hospital units, hostels, villages and settlements, but also to other kinds of segregated facilities. As long as there are vastly expensive special schools, colleges and day-centres, heavily subsidised workshops and factories, and separate holiday camps and hotels, there can be no question of sufficient alternative provision being made to ensure that we all have a real opportunity of equal participation in normal educational, work and leisure activities.

12 DISABLEMENT OUTSIDE INSTITUTIONS

Our Union maintains that the present existence of segregated institutions and facilities is of direct relevance even for less severely impaired people who may expect to avoid having to use them. Those of us who live outside institutions can fully understand the meaning of disability in this society only when we take account of what happens to the people who come at the bottom of our particular group. Their existence and their struggles are an essential part of the reality of disability, and to ignore them is like assessing the condition of elderly people in this society without considering the existence of geriatric wards

13 It is also true that the kind of prejudiced attitudes we all experience - other people being asked if we take sugar in our tea is the usual example - are related to the continued unnecessary existence of sheltered institutions. Those who patronise us are indicating that they think we are not capable of participating fully and making our own decisions. They are harking back to the time when disabled people had to be sheltered much more, and they imply that really we ought to be back in our rightful place - that is, a special school, club, hospital unit, Home or workshop. Physically impaired people will never be fully accepted in ordinary society while segregated institutions continue to exist, if only because their unnecessary survival today reinforces out of date attitudes and prejudices.

14 MEDICAL TRADITION

Both inside and outside institutions, the traditional way of dealing with disabled people has been for doctors and other professionals to decide what is best for us. It is of course a fact that we sometimes require skilled medical help to treat our physical impairments - operations, drugs and nursing care. We may also need therapists to help restore or maintain physical function, and to advise us on aids to independence and mobility. But the imposition of medical authority, and of a medical definition of our problems of living in society, have to be resisted strongly. First and foremost we are people, not 'patients', 'cases', 'spastics', 'the deaf', 'the blind', 'wheelchairs' or 'the sick'. Our Union rejects entirely any idea of medical or other experts having the right to tell us how we should live, or withholding information from us, or take decisions behind our backs.

15 We reject also the whole idea of 'experts' and professionals holding forth on how we should accept our disabilities, or giving learned lectures about the 'psychology' of disablement. We already know what it feels like to be poor, isolated, segregated, done good to, stared at, and talked down to - far better than any able-bodied expert. We as a Union are not interested in descriptions of how awful it is to be disabled. What we are interested in, are ways of changing our conditions of life, and thus overcoming the disabilities which are imposed on top of our physical impairments by the way this society is organised to exclude us. In our view, it is only the actual impairment which we must accept; the additional and totally unnecessary problems caused by the way we are treated are essentially to be overcome and not accepted. We look forward to the day

when the army of 'experts' on our social and psychological problems can find more productive work.

16 THE RIGHT KIND OF HELP

We know that as a small, weak, minority group, disabled people cannot achieve a fully human life by their own efforts alone. We need and welcome the help of sympathetic able-bodied people. But the basic problem we face is our exclusion from full social participation. It follows that this oppressive situation can be put right only by disabled people actually taking a more active part in society. The efforts of professionals and other able-bodied people are therefore really constructive only when they build on and encourage the self-help and activity of disabled people themselves. This is why our energies as a Union will be directed mainly towards discussion and common action with other disabled people. Neither we as a Union, nor able-bodied people, can solve other disabled people's problems for them. Those problems will be correctly tackled precisely to the extent that we all as disabled people become involved and active in our own rehabilitation.

17 THE NEED FOR A UNION

Disabled people everywhere are already struggling against their isolation, segregation and other forms of oppression. Every day each of us has to face our own individual problems. And we are now increasingly getting together in groups to tackle more effectively the problems we find we have in common. This is shown by the vast growth of disability organisations in the last 25 years in Britain. Our Union takes this process of coming together a stage further. We are not restricted to one aspect of physical disability (e.g. mobility or incomes), nor to people with one medical diagnosis, nor to those in one locality. The Union exists simply to offer help to all physically impaired people in the fight to change the conditions of life which oppress us and to realise our full human potential.

18 ACTION

Various kinds of action in support of disabled people's struggles will be undertaken by the Union as resources become available. Apart from publishing pamphlets and an open Newsletter, we will mount action campaigns on various issues. We will build up information and advice services, and organise financial, secretarial and other forms of practical assistance. For example, individuals may ask for help in fighting bureaucratic delays and inefficiency, or a refusal to provide equipment, aids or other kinds of service. Other people may want assistance in tackling organisations about the provision of ramps or lifts in buildings. Residents in institutions may seek help and national publicity if they are victimised by the authorities. People in sheltered workshops or centres may ask our support in their struggles to improve their appalling rates of pay. The Union will succeed only when it helps to achieve real benefits and improved conditions for disabled people.

19 GUIDE-LINES FOR ACTION

But our actions will become more effective if we make sure that we also learn from the practical struggles which take place. So an essential part of the Union's task is to develop increasingly clear guide-lines for further action. We will do this by careful discussion about what we and other disabled people are doing, and about the real nature of the problems we face at a particular time. We need to learn from our failures and successes, and so develop arguments and a theory which have been proved to work - because they do actually bring about practical gains for disabled people. In this way the value of our practical experience will be multiplied many times over, as the essential lessons learned from it are made available to other disabled people now and in the future.

20 TERMS OF MEMBERSHIP

Full membership of the Union is open to residents of Britain who are significantly physically impaired and who accept the Policies and Constitution. Full members are expected to take some active part in Union affairs, since the Union is firmly based on the conviction that as disabled people we can only make real progress through actively struggling for change. Members will of course have different capacities at different times, and 'active' here means at least some involvement in discussion of policy. We are sympathetic to the fact that some potential members may have problems of communication, and the Union will give encouragement and help in these circumstances. However, disabled people who feel they cannot at present contribute in this way may keep in touch by subscribing to our open Newsletter.

21 Able-bodied people who agree with the Union Policies and Constitution can become Associate members. Associate members may receive the internal Circular, the open Newsletter and other publications, and may take part in meetings, discussions and other events. But they are not entitled to vote on Union affairs, nor may they hold any Union office. Genuine supporters will recognise the need for us to control our own Union and so develop our powers of decision, organisation and action. They will understand too, that since we experience daily the actual reality of disability, we are less likely than able-bodied people to be deceived about the true nature of our oppression and the radical changes necessary to overcome it.

22 OTHER OPPRESSED GROUPS

The particular forms which oppression takes in this society differ somewhat for each distinct oppressed group. Some, such as people who are called 'mentally handicapped', or those labelled 'mentally ill', clearly have a great deal in common with us. Full membership of our Union is however based simply on the fact of physical impairment. This is because we believe the important thing at the moment is to clarify the facts of our situation and the problems associated with physical impairment. But it is fundamental to our approach that we will seek to work with other oppressed groups and support their struggles to achieve a decent life. What all oppressed people share is a vital interest in changing society to overcome oppression, and the Union is therefore anxious to join in common action to achieve such change.

23 DEMOCRATIC CONTROL

Democratic control of the Union rests with all full members, and policy is decided on a majority basis after thorough discussion in a confidential Circular or at General Meetings. Full discussion of policy by members is necessary if we are continually to develop our action and thinking along the right lines. But once decisions have been made, members undertake not to oppose them publicly while they wish to remain in the Union. Both elements in this combination are regarded as essential for genuine progress - thorough internal discussion by members, together with a refusal to indulge in public criticism of Union policies.

24 Day-to-day decisions on Union affairs are in the hands of an Executive Committee, elected by, and responsible to, all full members. The Executive Committee holds the Union's funds. It arranges for the production of the internal Circular, the regular open Newsletter, and of occasional pamphlets and other publications. The Committee also speaks and acts officially for the Union on the basis of agreed policy. The overall task of the Committee within the Union is to facilitate the active participation and development of all members.

25 SPECIAL INTEREST GROUPS

Special-interest groups within the Union will be formed by members concerned with a particular aspect of disability. Examples may include residents' rights in institutions, incomes, employment, special education, provision of aids and equipment, housing alternatives in Britain and overseas, medical and technical research, rehabilitation. Within the general principles of the Union these groups will work out actions and ideas based on their special interests and experiences. Reports by them on particular topics will be published in the name of the Union from time to time.

26 FINANCE

All registered charities receive valuable tax concessions, but they are not allowed to campaign directly for political change. We regard political involvement as essential if disabled people are ever to make real advances. So in order to protect our independence of action we are not registered with the Charity Commissioners. Nor do we intend to appeal for funds publicly in the name of the Union. We believe the time has come for an organisation in the disability field which does not depend heavily on public fund-raising. We shall be free to speak and act on the basis of Union members' views rather than those of financial supporters and noble patrons. Union expenses will be met by subscriptions, by donations, and by such means as the sale of literature.

27 OTHER DISABILITY ORGANISATIONS

The Union aims to ensure that all the organisations concerned with disability become fully democratic and responsive to the real needs and wishes of disabled people. We therefore seek a much greater say in all the organisations which affect our lives, both by Union members as individuals and by other disabled people. Any official Union representatives appointed to Committees of other groups will promote Union policies and report back regularly to members. In addition, the Union will keep a watchful, independent eye on the policies and practice of all disability organisations. We will try not to duplicate effort, and will welcome constructive comment and help from other groups. We will ourselves offer support and co-operation whenever possible. But the Union will not hesitate to speak out freely, and act independently, when we believe the interests of disabled people require it. It will be for disabled people as a whole to judge whether or not we are correct.

Adopted : 3 . 12 . 1974
Amended : 9 . 8 . 1976

UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED

AGAINST SEGREGATION

CONSTITUTION

1 NAME

The name of the Union is the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTS

The Union aims to have all segregated facilities for physically impaired people replaced by arrangements for us to participate fully in society. These arrangements must include the necessary financial, medical, technical, educational and other help required from the State to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, to undertake productive work, and to live where and how we choose with full control over our lives.

3 MEMBERSHIP

(a) Full membership is open to residents of Britain who are aged 13 or over, who are significantly physically impaired, and who accept the Policies and Constitution of the Union.

(b) Junior membership of the Union is open to residents of Britain who are aged less than 13, who are significantly physically impaired, and who accept the Policies and Constitution of the Union.

(c) Overseas membership is open to people normally resident overseas who are significantly physically impaired, and who accept the Policies and Constitution of the Union.

(d) Associate membership is open to people who are not significantly physically impaired, but who accept the Policies and Constitution of the Union.

(e) Junior, Associate and Overseas members have all the rights in the Union except the right to vote or hold Union office.

(f) The subscription for all types of membership will be determined by the Union from time to time, and membership of each kind will lapse unless the appropriate subscription is paid within three months of January 1st each year.

(g) The Executive Committee (referred to below) has power to refuse applications from all types of membership. They must however in such an event inform all full members of the reasons for such a decision at the earliest reasonable opportunity, and their decision may be reversed by a vote of all full members, called at the request of 10% or more full members. Similarly the Executive Committee has the power to expel members who in their view are acting contrary to the Policies and Constitution of the Union, where discussion has failed to resolve the matter. The member concerned is entitled to a written statement of the Committee's reasons for expulsion, and has the right of appeal through the Circular to a vote of all members.

4 CIRCULAR AND GENERAL MEETINGS

(a) Because of the dispersed membership, and mobility problems, the principal means of formulating and deciding policy will be a confidential Circular which will be sent to all members at least 4 times a year. All members are entitled to have their views printed in the Circular up to a limit in a particular issue of a number of words to be decided from time to time. Proposals for changes in Union Policy, or for major Union decisions, put forward by the Executive Committee or by 10% or more full members in the Circular, will be decided by an open postal ballot, with each full member having one vote. This vote is to be arranged by the Executive Committee as soon as practicable and in any case within no more than 3 months of a reasonable degree of discussion having been possible through the Circular on the proposal.

(b) All votes in the Union, including those in any Committee, will be by a simple majority of those voting. Such a majority may decide to hold a General Meeting which all members will be entitled to attend. Notice of resolutions and any other business to be transacted will be sent to all members at least 1 month beforehand, and arrangements will be made for full members unable to attend to vote by post if they so request. In the event of any dispute about voting, resolutions, elections or other Union business, the Executive Committee will have the right of decision, but if 10% or more full members wish, a vote of all full members must be arranged on the point in question within 3 months.

5 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

(a) An Executive Committee of the Union will be elected annually, by an open ballot of all the full members if there is more than one candidate for a position. Any full member may volunteer or be nominated by another full member for a position on the Committee. In the event of vacancies occuring between elections, the vacant position may be filled by the Executive Committee co-opting a full member of their choosing. Any member of the Executive Committee may be removed from office at any time by the vote of a majority of all full members voting in a ballot called at the request of at least 10% of all full members at the time.

(b) The Executive Committee will consist of: General Secretary; Treasurer, Membership Secretary; Information Secretary; Internal Circular Editor; Open Newsletter Editor; and 4 Regional Secretaries, that is, one for Scotland, one for Wales and the West, one for the North and Midlands, and one for London and the South East.

(c) Members of the Executive Committee may speak and act officially in the name of the Union on the basis of the Union Policies and Constitution. Each Executive Committee member is personally responsible to the Union as a whole for the carrying out of the functions of his or her office, but as far as is practicable they will consult each other and act together as a Committee. The Committee as a whole is responsible for controlling Union funds and property, and for ensuring that proper books are kept and full account of Union finance is given at least annually to all members.

(d) The Committee will draw up guide-lines for its own conduct, and the distribution of responsibilities between its members, for the approval of the Union.

(e) The overall purpose of the Committee within the Union is to facilitate the active participation and development of members in fulfilling the aims of the Union. The purpose of the Union is to offer help to members and other disabled people in our struggle to change the conditions which isolate, segregate and oppress us.

Adopted : 3 . 12 . 1974
Amended : 9 . 8 . 1976