

PAUL HUNT - A PERSONAL OBITUARY FROM SOME MEMBERS OF THE UNION

Paul Hunt died on 12th July, 1979. With his death, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation lost one of its founder members, and many other members who knew Paul lost a most valued personal friend.

Physically impaired people in general, and in particular we who worked closely with Paul, can only suffer with sadness the loss of his further leadership because there is nothing we can do to change that. What we can struggle to change are the conditions under which people have to live their lives. That is what Paul did unceasingly. For some twenty years he was a leading participant in the struggle of physically impaired people for a better life, and in that time he made a great personal contribution to taking that struggle forward into a new direction with increasingly clear foundations on which to advance it further. The sustaining message of this new direction is a realistic aspiration to full participating membership in a society which does not have to segregate and exclude people because their bodies are impaired. The significance and influence of this work are most clearly contained in the Aims and Policy Statement of UPIAS, and the legacy that Paul has left us is perhaps best seen in the strength of the contribution that he was able to make to these documents and to their application and development.

Whether or not those of us who continue in the struggle are able to carry these developments forward, they are nevertheless a concrete advance in the struggle of physically impaired people. By his own hard struggle for a decent life, by his work, and with the help of his friends, Paul has contributed immensely to the crucial phase of our struggle in which we, physically impaired people as a group, have to bring clearly into consciousness the real social nature of our disabilities. The development of UPIAS has a great historical significance in this struggle in that it has focused the attention of physically impaired people onto the technological means which our society has now undeniably developed to integrate us into the main-stream of life by allowing our full participation in productive work, education, housing, mobility, and all the normal functions which characterise people's belonging to the society in which they live. The fully-realised fact of this technological capability for the first time roots the possibility of full integration in firm reality, rather than in any idealistic, futuristic wish-fulfilment. Nevertheless, with this clear realisation we are immediately forced to face the paradoxical reality - the truth and experience that is known to every ordinary physically impaired person - that the developed means of society are not generally applied to this end. Rather, we still find ourselves systematically excluded from every normal area of social activity, with, if we meet the applicable criteria, 'special' provision sometimes being made for us, as the available resources allow in the economic conditions of the time.

We can all share in some degree an awareness of this contradiction which we experience in our daily lives: and it was in struggling towards a working through of its significance that Paul initiated in 1973 what later became known as the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation. There followed a period of intense discussion and work by a small group of physically impaired people whom Paul had brought into contact. The result of this was that, in the early stages of its development, and in the six years of struggle that remained to Paul, the Union made a major break from other established disability organisations by the clarity of its position and the principled stand of its published Aims and Policy Statement. In applying its clear material basis to the development of our organised struggle, the Union has been able to



redefine 'disability', not as an intrinsic characteristic of certain individuals, but rather as the exclusion from full participation in society that is caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments.

This raising of consciousness creates for us the potential to unite as an oppressed group within society on the basis of our common experience of a particular form of disability, and with a more general experience of oppression which we share with many other social groups. We unite by looking no longer inwards at our differences from able-bodied people, and thereby appealing to those with power over our lives for greater charity towards us, but rather by looking outwards to make the first analyses from our own point of view of the ways in which and the reasons why our present society segregates us as a particular group from normal participation. Instead of being the passive "patients" of so-called "experts" who control our lives, we have to become the active opponents of an oppressive system, and we have to represent for ourselves our own real interest in radical social change.

The shift of perspective is a major one, and its first significance is to take the full burden of struggle and responsibility onto physically impaired people ourselves. For the first time, our individual struggles can be united on an objective (outward looking) basis, and they can be integrated with the struggles of the majority of people whose conditions of life are also being decided for them by those who have power to dominate. Our particular struggle can now become conscious of its real strength, and for the first time the possibility of ultimate victory is opened up for us, if we can find the responsibility, the strength and the determination to carry it through for ourselves. In that sense, with Paul's contribution and with the formation and development of UPIAS, the struggle of physically impaired people for full integration has come of age and reached a maturity which, whatever future we are able to make for the Union, is now at the disposal of physically impaired people as a whole, and cannot be ignored either by those who really wish to help us or by those who stand in opposition to our full integration.

It is no intention of this article to suggest that the achievements mentioned here are Paul's work alone, nor that they were reached by him working in isolation from other physically impaired people. Central to the Union's Policy is the insistence on joint activity and the absolute necessity for physically impaired people to become involved - in whatever way we can and with whatever help we need - in our own struggle and particularly in the processes of decision-making which affect our lives. This principle informed all of Paul's work in "disability": and his struggles were never for us but with us to achieve a better life for all.

It is a crucial distinction. In the face of such ability and qualities of leadership as Paul developed, there is a temptation for us - physically impaired people as a group - to follow passively the guidance of others or to leave our struggle in their hands, confident that they will contend with the accredited "experts" better than we can in establishing our best interests. At the same time, the people who now hold power in "disability" continually proffer respectability and inducements to our ablest leaders to draw them over to their own ground of compromise and what is "reasonable" for us. The Union's first principle of active participation is totally opposed to both of these tendencies.

Paul, perhaps, came to realise the importance of this principle most directly in the long and difficult struggle at Le Court Cheshire Home, where, with his powerful participation, residents achieved for themselves more representation on controlling committees, establishment of rights, and control



over their own affairs than in any comparable institution. The special responsibility of leadership always to bring the struggle back to the group concerned, and to avoid making decisions and compromises with authorities above our heads or on our behalf, had very clear meaning in that situation. The point is not that Paul never made any mistakes in this respect, but rather that his own struggles clearly demonstrate that the principle of active participation by physically impaired people is something which has to be actively striven to apply at all levels of our group's overall struggle. It is a principle which, despite the difficulties and apparent advantages of compromise, he always tried to let guide his work and activity, because he understood better than most of us that real advances could never be made in any other way.

Often people who talk in praise of Paul, and quite often those who do not, mention his integrity and this refusal to compromise on basic principles. They are undeniably qualities he possessed, but what it is necessary to add here to the mere praise of them is an understanding that they were developed and used as an essential element in the work of finding and beginning to build the new direction of struggle for physically impaired people as a whole.

Active participation in struggle by physically impaired people at all levels is a basic necessity, without which our Aims of full integration are unobtainable. If our struggle is to be effective, we must each apply that principle at every turn: and we must criticise both those who do not and ourselves when we fail. If we are to become this active group working for our own emancipation, then we must unite to organise and work together. In order for such a various group of people with different experiences and attitudes to unite, there must be a common objective understanding of our real position in society as a group. Throughout the Policy and activity of UPIAS is the uncompromising determination to establish that clarity of understanding as a basis for united struggle. For the first time, the work has been started by the only possible means to success, that is, the prior establishment of an objective method which relates our position as a group directly to the reality of our daily social experience. Characterised by openness and full democratic participation, this method is part of a wide struggle towards Truth, which recognises the conflicting social interests involved in the processes of historical development, and unashamedly strives to represent the real interest of physically impaired people in that struggle. One example of the strength of this approach is seen in the publication of the Union's meeting with the Disability Alliance. There, despite the sophistication of so-called "disability experts", the Union's insistence on fundamental principles enables us to clarify the real interests involved, and to take the struggle of physically impaired people one step forward by seeing what is reasonable from our own point of view, and by exposing the confusion that is the hallmark of those who would perpetuate our oppression. Real integrity and the uncompromising quest for truth are our weapons in the developing struggle which we need have no fear of using.

It may seem that for an obituary we have said very little about Paul's life and his qualities and too much about UPIAS and what it stands for. We would say that every word that is written here is about Paul Hunt, and that we would hope that what is written concentrates on the things that Paul would have wanted to be said-



## PAUL HUNT

Paul Hunt, a founder member of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation, died on 12th July, 1979, at the age of 42. Paul's sudden death has not only been a great personal loss to his family, to the members of the Union, and to his many other friends, but it is also a significant loss to all physically impaired people who struggle to improve their conditions of life by integration into the mainstream of society. In his life and work, Paul consistently fought against all forms of oppressive relations, and he devoted a major part of his efforts to improving the conditions of life of physically impaired people. To our organised struggles he made a contribution that was characteristically dynamic, determined, selfless and courageous in its content and practice.

This powerful and radical contribution to organised struggle, made consistently throughout his life, placed Paul in a position of leadership over the past two decades. From the work that he did, he came to hold an unshakable conviction that full integration for physically impaired people into normal housing, employment, education, mobility, etc, had become socially and technologically possible, and was therefore a realistic goal for which physically impaired people had actively to strive. The strength of his views, and of his principles approach to the issue of 'disability', became well known to those of us who were active in the growing movement of physically impaired people against our disablement by forms of social organisation which needlessly exclude us from normal participation and consign us to 'special' segregated facilities.

Paul himself suffered a degenerative physical impairment from early childhood. His formal education was curtailed when, at the age of 13, he became chairbound and was forced to go and live in hospital. In 1956, at the age of 18, he got himself moved from a chronic sick ward to Le Court Cheshire Home in Hampshire. He spent 14 years at Le Court, and throughout that time took a leading part in many struggles to improve conditions for physically impaired people. The 'Cheshire Smile', a journal that is distributed internationally throughout the Homes, bears witness to Paul's regular and outspoken contributions promoting progressive changes in the Cheshire Homes. Paul also edited and contributed to 'Stigma', a book of essays by physically impaired people. He vigorously promoted the introduction of Fokus, the Swedish integrated housing and work scheme, into this country; he had published a number of articles on different aspects of the needs of physically impaired people, and he was an active member of the Disablement Income Group from its inception up until the foundation of UPIAS around 1974.

Paul believed fundamentally in the principle that people should have control over their own lives and that, in contemporary society, this control should not be denied to anyone, including those who need particular kinds of technological or personal help because of physical impairments. At Le Court, despite any fears of intimidation, Paul was over a considerable period of time a trusted leader and outspoken participant in the eventually successful struggles of residents for representation on controlling committees and for a much greater voice in running their own Home and their own affairs.

In 1970, Paul married and left Le Court to live in the community and work as a computer programmer. His wife, Judy, shared Paul's convictions, and with her support his dedication to the cause of full integration never wavered, but if anything became even more urgent when other demands were made on his time and severely limited energies. He never forgot the struggles of physically



impaired people who remained segregated and isolated in institutions of all kinds, and the focus of his work was consistently to encourage and support those who are most oppressed by their exclusion from normal society.

For some twenty years, then, Paul Hunt was at the forefront of our struggle. He consistently opposed the intimidation of physically impaired people by established authorities and noble patrons, etc, who control our lives and claim to speak with our voice. He strove always, and often at personal cost, for the concrete application of the lessons that he learnt in struggle, and the principles that he developed, for the benefit of the mass of physically impaired people. His natural hatred of oppression and its attendant suffering, for example, led him to an increasingly conscious struggle towards its root causes in our particular society. He also came to understand the fundamental need for the mass of physically impaired people to unite and organise ourselves to put forward our own agreed views as a group and in support of each other. To that end, Paul was determined that we should have an independent and democratic organisation of our own which could campaign against all segregated facilities and institutions, and give support to such struggles as furthered this aim. It was through Paul's initiative in 1973 that the organisation which eventually became known as UPIAS was formed; and in the six years of struggle that remained to him, Paul's strength, humanity, experience and abilities made a major contribution to the organisational and ideological character of the Union, as well as being a profound influence and source of strength for all of us with whom he joined in struggle.

No brief obituary can pay full tribute to the contribution Paul Hunt has made to the organised struggle of physically impaired people in the United Kingdom. Such a tribute can only come when a complete and honest history is written about our struggles for emancipation. Such a history will be free from misplaced praise for patronage and so-called experts who claim to act in our interest. It will look to the struggles of physically impaired people themselves, and in this light Paul Hunt will certainly be recognised as the figure of leading significance in his time.

To Paul's wife, Judy, and to their son, Patrick, we offer our deepest sympathy.

As members of UPIAS, we pledge that Paul's death will allow no respite to our oppressors; and with confidence we assert that others will come forward to join us in developing the struggle which Paul Hunt did so much to advance, that is, the struggle of physically impaired people for emancipation and the elimination of our disabilities.

Union of the Physically Impaired  
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