

THE UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED

AGAINST SEGREGATION

and

THE DISABILITY ALLIANCE

discuss

Fundamental Principles of Disability

*Being a summary of the discussion held on 22nd November, 1975 and
containing commentaries from each organisation*

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INTRODUCTION

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

THE UNION COMMENTS ON THE DISCUSSION

THE ALLIANCE COMMENTS ON THE DISCUSSION

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Introduction

This booklet contains three documents which relate to the meeting held between the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation and the Disability Alliance on 22nd November, 1975.

The events leading up to the meeting are briefly outlined in the opening statement of the Union and presented in the summary document; and in the first paragraph of the Alliance's commentary document.

Under the agreed conditions for the meeting, condition 3 d), the discussion was recorded so as to be available for disabled people. People who wish to have copies of the cassette recording, or to borrow it, should contact the Union to make the necessary arrangements.

Following the meeting a summary of the discussion was prepared from the recording and this document, included in this booklet, is accepted by both organisations as an accurate summary, with neither side retaining any reservations.

Each organisation also prepared its own commentary on the discussion of 22nd November: these are included in this booklet.

November, 1976

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Summary of the Discussion

Summary of the tape recorded discussion between the Disability Alliance and the Union of the Physically Impaired against Segregation, held on the 22nd November, 1975

Speakers:

Alliance: Paul Lewis, Bent Stueland, Charles Taylor, Peter Townsend

Union: Ken Davis, Liz Finkelstein, Vic Finkelstein, Paul Hunt

Observers: Approximately six each from both organisations

Peter Townsend apologised for the absence of Dr. Fred Reid and Betty Veal from the Alliance side; and he then sorted out a complication which arose when he said, "I hadn't really made the distinction between speakers and observers", as had been required by the conditions agreed for the meeting. The speakers were then introduced, and PAUL HUNT read out the following statement which had been prepared by the Union:

"Firstly, we want to emphasise that we very much welcome this meeting between the Disability Alliance and the Union of the Physically Impaired. In our view, it represents a step forward for our two organisations to be meeting on the basis of agreed fundamental principles, and with the purpose of considering ways in which disabled people can become more active and involved in their own affairs".

"Secondly, we think it will be helpful to set out very briefly the origins of this present meeting. Our Union published a Policy Statement at the beginning of the year, and a copy was sent to Peter Townsend on a personal basis. He wrote to us in April, saying he fully supported all our objectives and would like to become an Associate Member. However, he also made a number of statements about the Disability Alliance, which appeared to us to conflict with the Union's Aims and Policy Statement; so the Executive Committee of the Union wrote to him, detailing the apparent differences and asking him for clarification of his position. He replied saying we had raised a lot of extremely important points, and suggesting a small meeting between the Union and the Alliance to try and clear up what he thought might be misunderstandings on both sides. Following the meeting, he would be glad to write a reply to the points we had made".

"The answer from the Union was that we had carefully considered our comments, which were the fruit of 13 months' careful, democratic discussion; and in the absence of any further information we saw no reason to suppose there were any misunderstandings on our side. However, we welcomed the idea of a meeting between the Alliance and the Union, provided there was prior agreement on certain fundamental principles, on the purpose of the meeting, and on the conditions under which it took place. We made the following proposals:

1. Fundamental principles to which we are both in agreement: disability is a situation, caused by social conditions, which requires for its elimination, (a) that no one aspect such as incomes, mobility or institutions is treated in isolation, (b) that disabled people should, with the advice and help of others, assume control over their own lives, and (c) that professionals, experts and others who seek to help must be committed to promoting such control by disabled people.

2. Purpose of the meeting: (a) to consider ways in which disabled people can become more active in the disability field, and (b) to consider a long-term programme of action to involve disabled people in discussions about their own affairs.

3. Conditions of the meeting: (a) there should be an equal number of representatives from the Alliance and Union, up to a maximum of 4 each, (b) the number of observers from the two organisations should also be equal, (c) both organisations will seek maximum publicity about the discussion and results of the meeting, to bring it to the attention of as many disabled people as possible, and (d) the proceedings should be tape recorded and made available to disabled people.

"All these proposals were accepted by Peter Townsend for the Alliance, and so today's meeting was arranged.

"Coming to the discussion we are about to have, we regard the Alliance's agreement to the fundamental principles just quoted as an extremely important development. It ought to clear away the ground so that we can get down quickly to discussing practical ways of helping disabled people to become more involved in their own affairs. However, there are still some points we need to question about the Alliance's approach to disability. Basically we should like to know how the recently agreed fundamental principles are seen to tie in with the Alliance's aims and policy and what it is actually doing.

"Our own position on disability is quite clear, and is fully in line with the agreed principles. In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled

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people are therefore an oppressed group in society. It follows from this analysis that having low incomes, for example, is only one aspect of our oppression. It is a consequence of our isolation and segregation, in every area of life, such as education, work, mobility, housing, etc. Poverty is one symptom of our oppression, but it is not the cause. For us as disabled people it is absolutely vital that we get this question of the cause of disability quite straight, because on the answer depends the crucial matter of where we direct our main energies in the struggle for change. We shall clearly get nowhere if our efforts are chiefly directed not at the cause of our oppression, but instead at one of the symptoms.

"The correct direction for the Union's main energies follows from our view of the cause of our oppression. We see the essential task, at this point in time, as that of helping disabled people to organise together to take a more active part in struggling

for the changes in society which will ensure that we are brought into the mainstream of life, rather than being excluded. We are concentrating on building up an independent, democratic organisation of disabled people, which has solid foundations and which is increasingly clear about the cause of disability and about the changes required to overcome it.

"In time the Union will become strong enough to enter into principled alliances with other organisations, to bring our weight to bear in Parliamentary work, and so on. Of course we welcome every scrap of cash that can be wrung from Parliament for disabled people. Many of our members have worked for this in DIG for years. But it was partly this experience in DIG which brought us to the realisation of the need for a more comprehensive organisation with a wider view of disability. DIG's restriction to the incomes issue has led to an increasing concentration of effort on Parliamentary work, with a small number of experts having an ever more important role, but the majority of members remaining largely passive. DIG appears to be losing its potential as a mass, democratic organisation of disabled people precisely as a result of limiting itself to attacking the one 'symptom' of low incomes.

"We as a Union have drawn the necessary lesson from this experience in DIG, and therefore our Union's Aims and Policy Statement place incomes firmly in the context of the wider struggle for us to participate fully in society, and so achieve our emancipation from all aspects of our oppression, including poverty.

"By way of contrast with our clear position on disability, that of the Alliance appears to be a contradictory one. The Alliance was presumably founded because DIG was thought to be inadequate in some way. But as far as we know there has been no public statement of what deficiencies in DIG made another incomes organisation necessary. This seems strange because the incomes proposals of the two organisations are very similar except for a few details. Nor is the new organisation any more democratic than DIG on the contrary, it appears to be less so. And in fact the Alliance seems to have built on precisely those weaknesses in DIG that we have identified and avoided in the Union the restriction to the incomes issue, the reliance on experts, and the concentration on Parliamentary pressure. So the question remains. Why is the Alliance thought to be necessary when we already have one large organisation devoted to the question of disability incomes?

"A second contradiction in the Alliance's position seems to be this. The Alliance has agreed to the fundamental principles proposed for this meeting. Yet as far as we can see the Alliance Aims mentions only the incomes issue, that is, it is treated in isolation. There is also no mention of disabled people having to assume control of their own lives as part of the process of eliminating disability. And there is no mention of professionals, experts and others being committed to promoting control by disabled people.

"So finally, the two main things we should like to know from the Alliance are these: (1) How can the Alliance be said to conform with the fundamental principles we have all agreed on for this meeting? and (2) What was thought to be wrong with DIG so that a second organisation concentrating on disability incomes was considered necessary?"

PETER TOWNSEND then replied to what he called "a very respectable statement; one which I would feel demands the most serious thought and consideration.

"I suppose I would want to try to argue," he said, "that the Alliance was very much a spontaneous development, which tried to take account of one particular situation developing in late 1974. So, to give my off-the-cuff reactions to the two main questions. The first one was really, 'If one large organisation existed already, why create another?'. I had been involved with the Disablement Income Group from its earliest days. In September, 1974, the new Labour Government announced its proposals about its programme on the disabled. This was from a lot of points of view and I think I'm speaking here for a very large number of disabled people in this country a piecemeal programme which, as far as the public was concerned, seemed to suggest, it was doing a lot for the disabled when it wasn't. Many people were angry, and we also

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recognised that it meant that, after 10 years campaigning by the Disablement Income Group and others, the comprehensive incomes scheme was not proposed to be implemented by the Labour Government at that stage. After sounding out other people, (we) quite spontaneously improvised a meeting in the House of Commons in either September or October, 1974. A very large number of different organisations were represented, (and the suggestion was that) a counter move by those people concerned with the whole issue for many years ought to be developed. The proposal was that we ought to form an umbrella organisation very different from just another organisation as such. This was an umbrella body where all organisations concerned with the disabled, including those which consisted only of disabled people, would all have a voice and be represented. The idea was that, if we got sufficient support, then this whole issue of a comprehensive income would gain fresh authority. The Government couldn't play off one disabled body against another, pretending that it was meeting the wishes of disabled people. At the same time, this body was seen as primarily an educational body, trying to convey to the public that they had been misled, and what the issues really were about poverty, so that one could mobilise political support on behalf of one programme.

"This issue was kicked around and discussed at some length; and it was felt that it was very much a fragile experiment to get the different organisations into one room and get agreement on one issue, and let us start with one issue and move on to other issues if that is possible later on. Now this may not have been the right way of going about it, but this was agreed. This is how the Disability Alliance came into being as an umbrella organisation, primarily concerned with public education and therefore the issuing of information in pamphlet form, etc; and secondly as a more authoritative body concerned with pressure, authoritative in the sense that it could decently claim to be speaking on behalf of the majority of organisations concerned with disabled people.

"The Alliance is not in conflict with a political movement of the disabled as such. Clearly it is merely responding, given existing agencies and organisations of and for the disabled. There may be a lot wrong with those organisations, (but) it seemed to some of us it was a step forward to get them acting on behalf of a political issue. It

was not in conflict with a movement of the disabled, and that could only grow among disabled people themselves, who perhaps could have friendly contracts with an Alliance which in some ways had a lot of defects. We, as an Alliance have not taken a decision to recruit individual members or have branches; and I don't think that what has occurred in a kind of improvised response, angry response, to Government failure, is inimical really to a movement of the disabled. I would hope and pray that that could grow and strengthen, and outgrow the need for such an organisation as the Disability Alliance."

CHARLES TAYLOR then spoke for the National Federation of the Blind. He pointed out that his was an "organisation of blind people and not for blind people", and also that being a "contributing organisation to the Alliance in no way undermines our democratic action within our own group", but rather held the possibility of "broadening the scope of our activities in the political climate. At that time it was felt necessary to concentrate on an issue which was very live at the moment.

"DIG," he said, "was set up with what was rather a narrow basis we felt at the time. We see no contradiction in the functioning of the Alliance on any other "organisations, and we see the possibility of a lot to be gained from widening its scope."

BERIT STUELAND said that "When I joined the Alliance last year, the situation was so desperate. DIG had failed on many levels to reach the people whom it should have reached. I didn't think the Alliance was the complete answer, but it was an improvement. This is the way I want to work to improve the lot of disabled people. At the moment we are concentrating on incomes."

PAUL LEWIS then referred back to the Union's opening statement, saying that he agreed with it, that it "was very carefully prepared, and had clearly been made by a process of discussion". He added, "It does, though, put us in a slightly awkward position because we can't reply in the same carefully prepared way. I hope you realise that what we say now is off-the-cuff and we are trying to present what we believe in.

"I think the value of the Alliance is that it brought in a11 organisations any organisation could join as long as they were working for the disabled; and I would welcome the Union, not so much because I believe in what you stand for, but simply because you are an organisation for the disabled, and if you obviously have a very strong point of view. I can only see that that would strengthen the Alliance". He said that it was "a slight red herring" whether or not everyone agreed fully about details of policy "we are all working eventually towards the same goal, that is, as you quite rightly said, the control by the disabled of heir own lives. Personally I believe no problem has one solution. You quite rightly believe you have found a solution, or at least have recognised the

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problem where other people have failed to recognise it, and you may of course be right in that. I think it is the discussion, the mixing of views, that is the important thing, and the Alliance is a unique body that can provide this. I see nothing wrong

with the Alliance concentrating on income matters". The Union, he claimed, could strengthen the Alliance by making use of its expertise, and for the same reason they had not openly criticised DIG's failings, if any because then DIG itself might have been a loss to the Alliance.

VIC FINKELSTEIN then pointed out that there is no disagreement in regard to the situation which arose in 1973/4 wherein both organisations had their origins. He said, however, that "the way (you) organise to effect change is going to be decisive in terms of whether the organisation will succeed in reaching the objectives or not. If previous organisations failed to help disabled people take increasing control over their lives, the Alliance is only taking this a step further by setting up an umbrella organisation on a piecemeal basis". He said that, for the Union, mass participation by disabled people was crucial; but "the Alliance has taken almost the opposite approach that the basic thing to do is organise groups of experts to speak for disabled people, and this can only entrench the disability of physically impaired people". He insisted that there is no disagreement on getting an income, but "it's how one's going to get there that's the fundamental issue", and the Alliance had still not answered the questions raised on this subject.

PETER TOWNSEND replied by saying, "I think you underestimate the importance of the disabled organisations agreeing about objectives". He claimed a "modest contribution" by the Alliance on this score, in getting an agreement on a policy statement which went further than DIG. On the subject of organisation, he said it "would really be rather arrogant" to suggest that some of the organisations in the Alliance were not representative of disabled people; he said the Alliance "is open to different organisations, development of different groups of people mentally ill, groups concerned with the mentally handicapped, National Federation of the Blind, who are of disabled people".

PAUL HUNT then said that it was the Alliance itself that was under discussion, not the member organisations. He again pointed out that there was a contradiction as yet unanswered between the fundamental principles to which the Alliance had agreed, and its actions both in treating incomes as an isolated issue, and in having no mention in its policy of the principle that disabled people should control their own lives. Also he asked again about "the deficiencies in DIG which led you to your conclusions (that) another disability incomes organisation was necessary?"

PETER TOWNSEND took up the last point, saying that the Alliance was not another organisation, but "entirely different". It was a "federation of organisations" which, unlike DIG and the CCD, acts "in an executive capacity" and reflects its wider representation in the subject matter of its pamphlets.

VIC FINKELSTEIN agreed "there are differences in structure in that respect". But, he said, "the crucial issue again for us is on what basis did these organisations get together. Lots of people get together and are angry and can make a thorough botch-up of their position. What was the fundamental unity of purpose and unity of perspective in understanding the problems of disability: because this is going to be the basis from which the Alliance will produce its work?"

CHARLES TAYLOR said that the NFB saw the Alliance as an "amalgamation of the expertise and grass roots effort", enabling them to present their case on a wider basis, and in no way restricting the member organisations.

VIC FINKELSTEIN answered that the Union policy welcomed the formation of alliances on a principled basis, but "precisely this limitation" of lack of principle is in the Disability Alliance. "The incomes policy", he said, "is no different from the DIG policy, apart from some minor details".

PETER TOWNSEND conceded that "one might wish that there may be a much heavier representation of organisations of the disabled within the Disability Alliance in the future". But he protested that the Union speakers "keep on harping" on why the Alliance did not move forward from DIG's position. He stressed that "DIG did not, in its Policy Statement, say how much particular kinds of disabled people would get. The Alliance at least put forward figures. Maybe they are wrong, and maybe they can be changed democratically within the Alliance: but at least we went to the effort, as any reasonable federation ought, of clarifying the objective in very considerable detail".

When KEN DAVIS and PAUL HUNT pointed out that this had been done by some 30 experts before the Alliance's Constitution had even been drawn up or ensured the involvement of disabled people, PETER TOWNSEND explained that the original use of experts was really just to give dignity to an exchange of correspondence with the Prime Minister". In fact the Alliance, he said, has become an organisation of representatives who are involved in discussing the policy statement and Constitution draft for the first proper AGM in a year's time.

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PAUL LEWIS added that the value of the Alliance was that it brought in organisations, such as his own, Age Concern, who were "for groups in society which happened to contain lots of disabled people". The Alliance's achievement, he said, is to "present facts to the public".

VIC FINKELSTEIN pointed to the dramatic difference in approach between the Alliance and the Union illustrated here. "Putting out more pamphlets to the public", he said, "is only different to what has gone before in terms of degree. If it did not work before, why is it going to work in the future?" Forming an umbrella organisation has not touched the fundamental issues, and unless you raise and investigate these questions "what is disability, and how come we are impoverished in the first place you are not going to deal with the causes of disability, and it may well be that your approach will help to perpetuate them".

PETER TOWNSEND then asked, "Who do you have to persuade about what are the causes of disability? We are trying to educate the public about disability...I mean, what is the alternative?"

VIC FINKELSTEIN pointed to the "distinct break with the past" presented in the Union Policy Statement "in as much as the prime task is to raise the involvement of disabled people, to help disabled people to recognise their particular position. This

will involve them in their struggles". To PETER TOWNSEND's question: "What about the non disabled element of the population?", he replied, "What about the disabled element in the population? This is the element that has been ignored!"

The discussion then centred round whether the Alliance was really involving disabled people, and what it was doing to stimulate such involvement. BERIT STUELAND argued that "There are lots of (disabled people on the committee. Several disabled people are writing the pamphlets". But VIC FINKELSTEIN said "We are talking about 1% disabled people", and asked, where is their involvement? He suggested an example of the meeting with the Union today, and asked how the representatives were chosen. PETER TOWNSEND answered, "We had a discussion on the steering group which agreed to the four people. It's as simple as that".

PAUL LEWIS then said "We want disabled people to involve themselves", and that for him the meeting today is "desperately to try to get yourselves involved in the Disability Alliance. And if you choose not to be involved, I hope that you won't in any way feel that it's our fault then that we are not representing disabled people".

VIC FINKELSTEIN replied that that was confusing, and that "If we decide not to join the Alliance, we decide on a principled basis because we think you are wrong", adding that the Union would make known and publish its criticism. Returning to the example of the present meeting, he pointed out that the Union "circulated the correspondence to all our members we have politicised all our members to involve them in these issues that affect their lives. What have you done to actually involve disabled people in this kind of way?"

PAUL LEWIS said that what the Alliance does only comes about as a result of the thought and discussion of its members, and had the Union joined it might have been different. But PAUL HUNT referred back again to the agreed principles for the meeting, and said that he thought the Union would certainly consider joining the Alliance if it implemented them "But when you've got this completely unprincipled approach, how could we? We're committed to control by disabled people, we accept these principles and we mean them". In answer, PETER TOWNSEND said that the Alliance's members had democratically agreed to form a federation, which was not a political movement of the disabled. But in order to stimulate involvement, he said, "We are publishing material of concern to disabled people". PAUL LEWIS agreed, "We are doing work that we consider important. We agree with your principles and in my view it is more important for us to spend money publishing material in a week or so, and 3 pamphlets we've published, than in typing, duplicating and posting details of a meeting which was about to occur". PAUL HUNT said that this was the same contradiction: "You set up a spontaneous, ad hoc organisation, putting forward policies to the Government in the name of disabled people" without involving them.' PETER TOWNSEND said, "Give us enough money" and we will. "We are", he said, "at least consulting other organisations of and for the disabled. We don't have individual members. This is the point. We were talking at great length today about trying to get the different organisations that were represented (at an earlier meeting) to go back to their executive and get agreement and circulate details about the Alliance literature and its work, in order to try and sell enough pamphlets to pay for the service of this umbrella organisation".

CHARLES TAYLOR said that he appreciated the points made by the Union speakers, though he thought they were a little hard. "My organisation", he said, "certainly wouldn't agree to anything that in any way took away from disabled people the control over their own activities. At the moment the

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Alliance is feeling its way still as an aftermath of the spontaneity which brought it about; and in another year's time the Constitution will be framed, and it will be then that your criticism will be valid if it doesn't conform".

At this point. Paul Lewis gave the meeting his apologies and left.

PAUL HUNT then directed a series of questions to Peter Townsend, which he answered with great hesitation. He was being asked why, when he had already agreed to the Union's policy and the principle that it is a priority to help disabled people become involved, he did not "concentrate on helping disabled people in this way".

PETER TOWNSEND said, "there are several ways" of helping, and he found it "difficult to say" which was "the best way", given that he had a limited amount of time and energy. He was unable to make any clear statement when it was put to him by PAUL HUNT that, in our opening statement, we said "poverty was a symptom rather than a cause of disability: does it not make sense to concentrate on the cause rather than the symptom, with your limited energy?" PETER TOWNSEND said he thought "it is not too easy to distinguish cause and effect here". When pressed, he said he did not disagree with the Union position, but that "it depends what you mean

VIC FINKELSTEIN said that the Union Policy Statement was clear about what it meant, but the Union found Peter Townsend's position a "bit confusing", which was "why we keep asking these questions". PETER TOWNSEND then said that statements of policy, etc, were "open to different and acceptable meanings". But PAUL HUNT reminded him that they were talking about absolutely fundamental principles, and PETER TOWNSEND then replied, "You must understand, a social scientist who is asked to make a declaration about cause and effect takes up a very complicated position about factors which are so associated as to make it difficult to, in lay terms, to distinguish cause from effect I have to make that point".

VIC FINKELSTEIN interrupted to say, "That's just not acceptable, because it's implying that disabled people can put their necks out by making a declaration of what we feel is cause and effect, but you as a social scientist can't". He pointed out again that the Alliance and the Union had faced exactly the same set of problems, nevertheless we find it absolutely essential to clarify (this) and sharpen our understanding so that we are able to get to the fundamental issues, because we feel that this has been hitherto the failing of all previous organisations".

PETER TOWNSEND replied, "I don't know why you are making such heavy weather of this". People belong to organisations without necessarily subscribing to every phrase of the policy or Constitution. When asked again about the fundamental principle of not treating a single issue in isolation because of the agreed, social

definition of disability, he said; "I don't think in the solution of the incomes question you can fail to affect the other issues

PAUL HUNT then referred to the Alliance's pamphlets, and said that there, "as far as I can see, you don't accept the social definition of disability. You talk about disability as though it's something personal. Now, we just find it very strange you appear to be saying two things".

CHARLES TAYLOR said that he saw the Union's point quite clearly and that it was in agreement with the NFB position. But, he added, "we do not see the Alliance as treading on our toes", because it was not preventing the NFB taking up the social issue and bringing their view of it to the Alliance.

VIC FINKELSTEIN took this point and said that the Union clearly had a lot of sympathy with the NFB. But he said that the Alliance's position of treating incomes in isolation appeared to arise from an incorrect definition of disability. "If the question of incomes arises out of the oppression of disabled people, it's not an issue that you'll be able to deal with and put aside and then get onto other issues". He said that when resources and effort were limited, it was most important to be sure that they were directed in the right way: but the Alliance is turning things on its head. It would seem to us that the correct way to form an umbrella organisation would be on the social issues, because this would give the framework to tackle the incomes issue. You've taken an aspect, an important aspect to be sure, of the oppression of disabled people, but made that into a major issue around which you organise". Looking at the actual incomes policy, he went on to say, "some of the solutions about assessment involving panels of professional people coming around with tape measures and so on we have already had means-testing and we know what this means: it would be to perpetuate the stranglehold the professions have over disabled people. Far from freeing them, would put them in more chains. And it seems to us that there is a certain logic in this approach, and this arises from organising around the question of incomes before you organise around the question of social organisation".

PETER TOWNSEND said that "That comment does not tell us how disabled people will get their income. If you cannot assess the degree of disability", he

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asked, "how do you do it?". The Union representatives referred him back to their own position as outlined in their Policy Statement, which "talk(s) about the disablement of impaired people by society. It is not a question of degree". They insisted they were at the meeting to discuss "how we can involve disabled people more in their own affairs", and PAUL HUNT said, "I think the answer is that the Alliance doesn't see any different way of acting than in the past". PETER TOWNSEND said he could not "get away with that. . . I'm really, genuinely trying to find out, to understand more" about what specific policy the Union advocates on incomes and social security, in the light of its definition of disability. PAUL HUNT then offered to hold another meeting, or for the Union to correspond in discussing definitions of impairment in relation to Union policy, where "incomes is integrated very closely into all the other arrangements we need". But he emphasised that the present meeting should stick to the agreed purposes.

PETER TOWNSEND again asked, "What would it be to organise on the social basis that you mention?". PAUL HUNT replied that "These are the issues that disabled people need to discuss. Don't you accept", he asked, that disabled people should discuss their own affairs?" PETER TOWNSEND said, "Of course", and PAUL HUNT replied, "Well, let's go and discuss with them: that's what this meeting is about. We don't take final answers to disabled people. We want to involve them in discussion it's their lives, after all".

BERIT STUELAND suggested that the Union could have been formed 10 years ago when she started DIG. You see things this way now, she said, but we ought to be able to work together; and the Union could find some way "perhaps of informing the Alliance, of feeding information if you think we get the message wrong".

PAUL HUNT asked, "What have we been doing today?" and added, "We see no sign that the Alliance is going to implement the principles. You won't talk about involving disabled people".

BERIT STUELAND argued that disabled people were involved, "and I never do anything without trying to ask disabled people to join me".

PAUL HUNT said they were not talking on a personal level, but about "what the Alliance says and does". The principles of involvement were not seen in its Aims or actions.

CHARLES TAYLOR pointed out again that "they will be embodied in the Constitution; and as soon as the Alliance doesn't embody it in the Constitution, my organisation will be out. But regardless of that, we do consult our members" and, he said, "I don't feel the Alliance ought to do the same thing".

PAUL HUNT replied that the first suggestion would be something worth considering, but at the moment there was no consistent effort to involve disabled people.

PETER TOWNSEND then conceded that maybe the Alliance had not sought as energetically as it might to achieve involvement through its organisations; but they had felt they were doing it by "acting as an agency for the transmission of information". He said, it was a problem of time and organisation. The Union representatives replied that they had the same problem: "If you are poor what do you think we are?", and they pointed out the cost of getting their members to the present meeting. PETER TOWNSEND again agreed, said he was "very conscious of this", and suggested that the Alliance could do more to ensure that disabled people themselves could get to their meetings. He said, "I certainly would like to accept this last thrust", but he pointed again to the newness of the Alliance and suggested that the Union was impatient with them.

PAUL HUNT replied that that was a question of priorities, which they had already been over, and of finding new ways rather than old ones, when the latter had been found not to work. He added, "To disabled people it's crucial whether we put all our energies into fighting for incomes in DIG or the Alliance, or set up a separate organisation. To us it's a matter of life and death which way we go".

PETER TOWNSEND agreed, but said, "We don't see it as an alternative. We regard the two activities as complementary". He felt, "There is nothing to prevent a political movement and complete representation of disabled people in an organisation working with such an organisation as the Alliance". He added that a political movement representing disabled people "may make the Alliance entirely unnecessary, I hope".

VIC FINKELSTEIN said this was "pretty tortuous logic" because it meant such a strange idea of priorities if it were correct.

PETER TOWNSEND in conclusion, said he thought "we've benefited a lot from this exchange of views, and you certainly provided speakers from the Alliance with a lot to think about". He said that, on their part they thought the Alliance still worth experimenting with for a year; but "whether it is the sort of organisation that disabled people want to keep in being a year hence, that is very much up to them to make known.

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PAUL HUNT pointed out that the contradictions had not been resolved either regarding the Alliance's development from DIG, nor its actions in relation to the agreed principles.

BERIT STUELAND took up the first point again and said, DIG "became not democratic enough, and the result of that was not enough pressure by disabled people themselves".

VIC FINKELSTEIN agreed that this was precisely so, and that was why it was necessary to put our energies into creating an organisation that was democratic. Speaking finally, he said: "I think that from our side we need to stress once again that we don't welcome experiments with disabled people. We think that there are rights and wrongs about this a right way of organising, learning from the lessons of the past, of DIG; and not just to experiment with different kinds of organisations because this is what comes into mind, into the minds of many people. We think that one needed to look at what was wrong with the other organisations and correct those mistakes".

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Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

Comments on the discussion held between the Union and the Disability Alliance on 22nd November, 1975

(This Commentary is attached to the Summary of the Discussion, prepared from a cassette recording made at the meeting. For background information, see the opening statement made by the Union, which is included in the Summary. Copies of the letters between the Alliance and the Union, preparatory and subsequent to the meeting, can be made available to those interested. The Union's Aims, Policy Statement and Constitution are also available.)

Amateurs versus Experts

Right from the opening remarks made in the discussion, physically impaired people and those who seek to help us in our struggle for a better life, will be able to see significant differences between the ways that the Union and the Alliance prepared for the meeting. On the one hand, in a carefully prepared statement, the Union representatives immediately began to draw out and develop the agreed topics for discussion, relating these to the basic principles which both sides had previously accepted as being fundamental to the struggle against disability. The Alliance, in contrast, responded to what they called this "very respectable statement" by apologies for their lack of preparation, and because "we can't" as they said, "reply in the same carefully prepared way". The question is, why not? This was not a spontaneous or improvised meeting. It was the Alliance who had originally asked for it to be held, and they had had at least as long as the Union to prepare. Nevertheless, they continually pointed out that their statements "trying to present what we believe in" were "off-the-cuff", implying they should not therefore be held up for serious criticism. Having made no preparation for the meeting, the spontaneous urge of the Alliance's speakers was to talk only about State benefits, assessment proposals and strengthening the Alliance. Thus they totally ignored the agreement with the Union that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss "ways in which disabled people can become more active in the disability field" and involved "in discussions about their own affairs". When the Union tried to raise this point (of vital concern to every physically impaired person), the Alliance's speakers were curtly dismissive, saying: "Give us enough money" and we will involve disabled people, and "it is more important for us to spend money publishing material . . . than in typing, duplicating and posting details of a meeting". As we shall see, this attitude which allows indifference to previously accepted fundamental principles, to agreements made with an organisation of disabled people and to the need for a serious analysis of disability itself, consistently characterises the way in which the Alliance works. It applies to even the simplest agreement they had made with the Union; for example, they "hadn't really made the distinction between speakers and observers".

During the course of the discussion, the Alliance's speakers took up the emotional stance of anger and frustration at the failure of DIG's incomes campaign, which had characterised their pamphlets and numerous public statements. When confronted by the Union's principled position, however, it soon became clear that they had never

taken the time to analyse the very basic and elementary problems which they wish to help overcome. They had accepted our fundamental principles without even understanding what they had accepted! Thus it emerged that at the time when both organisations were being developed to take account of the same set of circumstances, it had been left to the Union to take the first historically significant step of turning to question the real cause of disability rather than just railing at one of its symptoms. From this, the Union had logically gone on to consider the best organisational structure to involve disabled people actively in the struggle for our emancipation. This meant a struggle to encourage disabled people to think through the problems, to plan carefully the action we need to take and to make the task of understanding disability a serious endeavour. The Alliance's paternalistic tolerance of the Union's serious preparation for the meeting, when they were themselves unable to produce anything constructive or new, demonstrates their conception of the role they are able to see for disabled people in our own affairs.

The Union's firmly principled approach to disability is so radically different from the Alliance's own approach that it quickly got to the centre of their weakness and thereby threatened to expose their way of working to disabled people. They therefore tried to blunt out attempts at clarifying their way of working by asking "why you are making such heavy weather of this" (the fundamental principles), and "keep on harping" on the Alliance's position? They maintained that there are many acceptable interpretations of fundamental principles. They said that the policy was "open to different and acceptable meanings, and even that it was "a slight red herring" whether or not everyone agreed about what they

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called details of policy. Clearly, this method of working without principles means that any interpretation of anything is acceptable and the whole struggle for emancipation becomes an academic question in which "it is the discussion, the mixing of views, that is the important thing". Thus the Alliance's approach leaves them indifferent to, what they have already accepted as fundamental principles. They therefore can see no need for a rigorous and deeper analysis of the real nature of disability and the development of a principled approach which would flow from this. In other words, their approach is the very opposite of an expert way of working which would seek to clarify the correct interpretation of the cause of disability and hence the correct way of struggling to improve our lives.

While it is true that many interpretations of fundamental principles are possible, it is sheer childishness to believe that any interpretation serves equally well. But rather than seek the correct, and therefore most effective approach, the Alliance rushes headlong into action. For the Alliance "no problem has one solution" (in effect, any interpretation any solution), and by this formula they encourage us to use the most amateurish approach possible in our struggles. It is quite plain that this is the weakest way to organise, and the surest way to misdirect our energy and resources. The Alliance has learnt nothing from the failures of the past; and, although they maintain they have particularly sought to achieve "authority" for their opinions, disabled people should ask what sort of authority is due to such amateurish views. When it comes to considering even the most fundamental principles of disability, the

Alliance (and its "experts") behave like amateurs and the Union (and its "amateurs") behave like experts!

Imagine a lecturer going into a class to talk about sociology, starting by saying that he had not thought very much about the fundamental principles of sociology. Serious students in the class would consider that they were being mocked and that the lecturer was patronising their desire for education. Yet the Alliance, they tell us, was seen "as primarily an educational body, trying to convey to the public that they had been misled, and what the issues really were about poverty". Obviously, we cannot have any confidence in their ability to educate the public when they have shown clearly that they themselves do not even understand the fundamental principles of disability. The Alliance's amateurish and "unprincipled approach" is in sharp contrast, and functions as a barrier, to any attempts by physically impaired people to make our struggle serious and to approach it in an expert way.

'Spontaneity' excuses all

The Alliance, having reacted with extreme frustration and anger to the failure of "ten years" campaigning by the Disablement Income Group and others", neglected the fundamental question of why this failure had occurred. Physically impaired people might have expected that this failure was significant enough for their lives to be an urgent reason for re-examining fundamental issues. The Alliance, however, saw only the possibility of a superficial "counter-move". This follows from their failure to produce an analysis of what went wrong, and from their reliance only on their spontaneous feelings about the cause such as, that DIG did not put enough pressure on the Government, did not educate the public enough about the need for a comprehensive incomes policy, and DIG did not have enough "authority" for their policies to be accepted, etc. Consequently the Alliance set out to meet these imagined defects in the previous incomes campaign. "The idea", they say, was that, if we got enough support, then this whole issue of a comprehensive income would gain fresh authority". Yet, at the same time, they try to sell us the view that the Alliance contains something new, and is "entirely different" from what has gone before!

It did not seem to occur to the Alliance, when making its "kind of improvised response, angry response, to Government failure", that the incomes campaign has largely failed, not because of a lack of authority in DI C's approach, but in the first instance because of a basic weakness in the incomes approach to the poverty of physically impaired people in this society. When the failure of DIG's campaign raised the pressing need for thinking, the Alliance turned its back and chose "spontaneous" action.

The Alliance adopted "spontaneity" as its basic method for reacting to the problems we face and we find that they use this approach every time it is necessary to stop and think about what needs to be done. Therefore, when it emerged in the discussion that the Alliance did not know what it was talking about, they made no attempt to understand why they were in ignorance, but "spontaneously" began excusing this by blaming their past "spontaneous" actions. "I suppose I would want to try to argue", their spokesman said, "that the Alliance was very much a spontaneous development"; and another explained that "the Alliance is feeling its

way still as an aftermath of the spontaneity which brought it about". Yet this group has already published a number of pamphlets setting out in considerable detail their views on disability, apparently with disabled people's support. It is time that we asked how long the plea

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of "spontaneity" can excuse and justify the fact that the Alliance has not yet considered the fundamental questions raised by the failed incomes approach. Their excuses are only another way of saying that physically impaired people are not capable of, or ready for, thinking clearly about our problems, and that the Alliance's "experts" are not going to do it for us. Yet they are ready enough to "educate" the public!

While the Union's Policy document conclusively proves that "spontaneous" reactions and "spontaneous" excuses for ignorance are not the only ways people can respond to their problems, the Alliance organises in a way that entrenches blind "spontaneity" and perpetuates this by refusing to examine basic questions, even when the discussion with the Union showed the inadequacy of their understanding of what they were doing. "Spontaneity" feeds on the genuine emotional feelings of physically impaired people and those who want to help us. See, we are united in fury, the Alliance proclaim, as though this is the only way to establish the sincerity of their actions. But, having raised the emotional temperature to gain the sympathy of disabled people, they then divert our attention from the fundamental issues, posed by DIG's failed incomes campaign, into common, "spontaneous", unthinking reaction. The Alliance certainly does not have any monopoly of "uniting in fury". All organisations really struggling against the conditions of life of physically impaired people have been angry. Such anger can, for example, be seen in the Union's Policy document, but we have no need to promote our anger as a focal point in encouraging a campaign. On the contrary, we display our anger by drawing attention to the way in which we are oppressed by society. It is clear that the Alliance, lacking analysis and a new approach to disability, parades its anger so as to create the climate for "spontaneously" continuing a campaign based upon a demonstrably inadequate incomes approach to poverty. They cannot see any new approach, and like frustrated children they stamp their feet while making the same old demands of society with their discredited incomes panacea.

Any scientist, seeking to deal effectively with a problem, knows that the cause must first be identified. Therefore, if disability is a social condition then an analysis of the ways in which society actually disables physically impaired people is obviously required before the condition can be eliminated. To persist in concentrating on the effects, on the other hand, is to divert attention from the real problems; and in fact it entrenches disability even further by seeking its remedy in the opposite direction from the social cause by concentrating on the assessment of the individual. The Alliance's approach would increasingly direct us to an analysis of the minutiae of the ways in which the individual performs social activities. They thus encourage us to neglect the task of analysing how our society is organised in such a way as to segregate out individuals with physical impairments and exclude us from the mainstream of social life.

Although the Alliance was prepared to accept the fundamental principle that disability is a social condition, their preference for "spontaneity" rather than for any considered examination of the real problem, reduced this principle to a mere form of meaningless words. Blindly adhering to a failed campaign, the Alliance tries to give its intellectual bankruptcy some respectability by suggesting a fine-sounding formula: we should, they say, stop looking at the cause of disability but instead look at its effects.

When the Union challenged the Alliance's "spontaneous" retreat from analysing the cause of disability by insisting that, "For us, as disabled people, it is absolutely vital that we get this question of the cause of disability quite straight", they became devious. First they agreed with our proposal that, "disability is a situation, caused by social conditions. . .", and then they protested "it is not too easy to distinguish cause and effect here". Thus it emerged that far from agreeing with our principles they were in fact patronising our carefully worked out position. This consistent position of the Union on the cause of disability, and the fact that the Alliance had originally agreed with it while in fact not feeling committed to the view, finally reduced their argument to the pathetic defence: "You must understand, a social scientist who is asked to make a declaration about cause and effect takes up a very complicated position about factors which are so associated as to make it difficult to, in lay terms, to distinguish cause from effect".

The social problem of the poverty of physically impaired people requires for its solution the same intellectual rigour as any other problem which is approached scientifically, not less. The approach of the Union of the Physically Impaired has clearly demonstrated that disabled people do not need to be talked down to in "lay terms". On the contrary, when we seriously address ourselves to the problems of our own social situation, we are capable of rapidly developing an expert approach. Even in its infancy, the clarity and consistency of the Union's approach makes an important break with the traditional amateurish "spontaneity" encouraged by the Alliance. Our approach helps to clear the confusion that the "experts" introduce into what is basically a straightforward issue, requiring the application of funda-

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mental principles, drawn from the actual experience of disability, rather than the adoption of "a very complicated position".

The Union maintains that, far from being too concerned with the cause of disability, the "experts" in the field have never concerned themselves with the real cause at all. The fact that they had delusions that they were looking at the cause, when they were typically concentrating on its effects, or confusing disability with physical impairment, underlines the imperative need for disabled people to become their own experts. It is only when we begin to grasp this expertise that disabled people will be able to see through the "experts" attempt to disguise as something "entirely different" the traditional, clearly failed, "spontaneous" struggle against aspects of disability, such as poverty.

The poverty of the incomes approach

No one can accuse the Alliance of inconsistency in the amateurishness 'of their approach to disability. Having elevated "spontaneity" to their preferred method of working, they not only obscured the vital connection between cause and effect, but then went on to make the other clearly stated fundamental principles quite meaningless. They accepted, for example, that "no one aspect such as incomes" should be "treated in isolation", while at the same time publicly stating that this was precisely what they intended to carry on doing. "At the moment", they said, "we are concentrating on incomes", and they insisted that they "see nothing wrong in the Alliance concentrating on income matters". To them, it appears that if you state that you will not isolate incomes from other questions, you can continue to do this provided you maintain that you will not stop others, such as the National Federation of the Blind, from acting on this fundamental principle. Such verbal nonsense could normally be dismissed with contempt, but the Alliance is bent upon obtaining "authority" so that "it could decently claim to speak on behalf of the majority of organisations concerned with disabled people". If its amateurish views were left unchallenged we would concede their right to gain respect as "experts" in the field, when they have clearly not gained this right through intellectual competence.

The Alliance's "spontaneous" avoidance of serious thought on the subject of disability left them unable to conceive alternatives to an incomes approach to poverty. They reacted almost with incredulity to the very suggestion that such a possibility existed. "I mean", a spokesman said, "what is the alternative?" To answer the same questions which the Alliance has clearly avoided, and to prevent the errors of the past which the Alliance blandly perpetuates, the Union from its inception spent much time reconsidering the prevailing interpretations of the nature of disability. The result of this groundwork was that at the meeting with the Alliance the Union representatives spoke with a single voice and were able to state unequivocally that, our own position on disability is quite clear...In our view, it is society which disables physically impaired people. Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. Disabled people are therefore an oppressed group in society". To understand this it is necessary to grasp the distinction between the physical impairment and the social situation, called 'disability', of people with such impairment. Thus we define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as 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. (These definitions refer back to those of Amelia Harris, but differ from them significantly).

From this social point of view it follows that the impoverishment of physically impaired people arises out of the fact that, as a group, we are excluded from the mainstream of social activities. In the final analysis the particular form of poverty principally associated with physical impairment is caused by our exclusion from the ability to earn an income on a par with our able-bodied peers, due to the way employment is organised. This exclusion is linked with our exclusion from participating in the social activities and provisions that make general employment possible. For example, physically impaired school children are characteristically excluded from normal education preparatory to work, we are unable to achieve the

same flexibility in using transport and finding suitable housing so as to live conveniently to our possible employment, and so on. The need to make a full analysis of the organisation of society is most pressing as this leads to the very essence of disability and its poverty aspect. It is clear that our social organisation does not discriminate equally against all physical impairments and hence there arises the appearance of degrees of exclusion (degrees of disability). For example, people having mild visual impairments (wearing glasses) are doubtless not more impoverished than their visually unimpaired peers. Our

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social organisation does not exclude people using glasses to the same extent that it excludes people who are blind, or deaf, or cannot speak, or who have brain damage, or who use wheelchairs. Nevertheless, it is the same society which disables people whatever their type, or degree of physical impairment, and therefore there is a single cause within the organisation of society that is responsible for the creation of the disability of physically impaired people. Understanding the cause of disability will enable us to understand the situation of those less affected, as well as helping us to prevent getting lost in the details of the degrees of oppression at the expense of focusing on the essence of the problem.

A crucial factor in this coming together, this growing social identification amongst disabled people, and hence the realisation of a social cause of disability, is that in the last fifty years or so developments in modern technology have made it increasingly possible to employ even the most severely physically impaired people and to integrate us into the mainstream of social and economic activity. It is this development that the Alliance is unable to assimilate in its redundant thinking. The Union's social theory of disability, itself a product of the technological changes in society, reflects the most advanced developments which make it clear that the alternative to an "incomes" (or more properly, "pensions") approach to the particular poverty in disability is to struggle for changes to the organisation of society so that employment and full social participation are made accessible to all people, including those with physical impairments. Setting "incomes" in the context of this struggle to change the organisation of society, would help physically impaired people recognise the correct emphasis to be placed upon incomes. To avoid retreating in the face of DIG's failed incomes campaign it is necessary to go forward with the serious struggle for the right to paid, integrated employment and full participation in the mainstream of life.

Of course the Union supports and struggles for increased help for physically impaired people, there can be no doubt about our impoverishment and the need for urgent change. However, our Union's Aims seek the "necessary financial...and other help required from the State to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, undertake productive work and to live where and how we choose with full control over our own lives". Financial and other help is placed here in relation to the achievement of independence and integration into ordinary employment. This is the fundamental principle by which schemes for meeting the financial and other needs of disabled people can be judged. This means that for people of working age financial and other forms of help must above all be geared to the retention or achievement of integrated employment:

dependence on the State must increasingly give way to the provision of help so that a living can be earned through employment. Similarly, the assistance given to physically impaired children must be directed towards their progressive integration into ordinary employment. And for physically impaired people of all ages, the financial and other special help required to meet the extra costs and problems of living with impairments must increasingly be replaced by arrangements which include us as an integral part of society for example, fully accessible and reliable public transport.

"Benefits" which are not carefully related to the struggle for integrated employment and active social participation will constantly be used to justify our dependence and exclusion from the mainstream of life the very opposite of what is intended. This is why the Alliance's appeal to the state for legislation to implement a comprehensive, national disability incomes scheme is in reality nothing so much as a programme to obtain and maintain in perpetuity the historical dependence of physically impaired people on charity. It does not even have the merit of revealing to the public it wishes to educate that its incomes policy is really a form of State Charity that is, help which essentially entrenches our dependence on the state instead of encouraging our independence and active participation in the mainstream of life. The Alliance's appeal to the public on our behalf is still the same old appeal to pity, the begging bowl in modern form. A hundred years ago such an appeal for state rather than personal or voluntary charity might have made some sense. But today, when technological and social changes have radically altered the possibilities for us to take independent control over our own lives, to continue to stress our incapacity and helplessness is to bind us with more chains instead of emancipating us. What we really need is to be helped to make our maximum active. contribution to society as full members.

The Alliance's analysis makes no attempt to grasp the central importance of our exclusion from work in the genesis of poverty amongst physically impaired people, but treats poverty purely empirically as a fact which does not have to be explained. Yet the struggle to achieve integration into ordinary employment is the most vital part of the struggle to change the organisation of society so that physically impaired people are no longer impoverished through exclusion from full participation. Only when all physically impaired people of working age are as a matter of

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course helped to make whatever contribution they can in ordinary work situations, will secure foundations for full integration in society as a whole be laid. All the other situations from which physically impaired people are excluded are linked, in the final analysis, with the basic exclusion from employment. The discrimination against physically impaired people as a whole (including children and those over retirement age) and the lack of positive help for us all to participate fully in areas of life outside employment, can only be systematically and successfully struggled against when this connection is grasped.

It is obvious that this struggle requires a major rethinking of old attitudes and ideas about the social roles of disabled people. It will be necessary to draw the mass of disabled people (of whatever age or type of physical impairment) into the great

movement to raise our consciousness of our social identity. A general mass movement of disabled people, and our increasing integration into normal work and other social situations, will radically improve our social status as a group. Experts begging for state charity on our behalf can do nothing but lower our status, by reinforcing out-of-date attitudes. There are no easy options of the kind the Alliance is trying to sell us. The struggle for the right to employment and full social participation, that is, to eliminate disability and its poverty aspect, of necessity requires our active involvement. If the mass of disabled people do not engage in this struggle we will not develop the physical and mental capacity to meet the active demands of employment and other integrated situations.

Once the struggle for incomes and benefits is divorced from the struggle to make employment and the other related areas of life accessible, the involvement of disabled people is no longer required. The campaign to provide more charity (whatever it is called) requires only a small group of "experts" who know the laws, who are recognised as "authorities" on the subject, and who have detailed schemes for negotiation. None of this requires any attempt actively to educate physically impaired people, nor to raise our level of social awareness. On the contrary, the struggle of a small group of people for "authority" on incomes means turning their backs on our needs while they concentrate on parliament. It is not only that the so called "experts" suffer a poverty of thinking, but also that this narrow approach impoverishes the intellectual development of disabled people in our own struggle by continuing to isolate us from the social and ideological developments of our time.

Raising an umbrella against the storm

The past decade has seen a growing storm of criticism of the way society treats physically impaired people. This storm built up during the passing of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970), and culminated in the failure of DIG's incomes campaign. It was in this period and subsequently that there was a growing need for our criticism to be sharpened and directed into the correct channels. At the same time as we were presented with this challenge for greater understanding the Alliance "spontaneously" set about raising its umbrella against the storm. The Union maintains that the umbrella structure serves to prevent the development of clear thinking just at the time when this is most needed.

Basing itself on the struggle to achieve State Charity, even in the light of DIG's failed incomes campaign, the Alliance has "spontaneously" seen more consistently than DIG the way to organise for this purpose. Since the incomes approach does not require the active participation of disabled people (in fact, dealing with our grumbles may take much time away from the "experts" single-minded concentration on the incomes issue), it is more logical to do away with the active membership. At the same time, the incomes "experts" cannot completely ignore the disabled population, because this is necessary today to help establish their "authority" in talks with the Government and in "education" of the public. The ideal formal structure, then, for organising around the incomes content of DIG, is one that can establish a legitimate distance between the "expert" leaders and the "amateur" ordinary members. The answer is "a federation of organisations" which, unlike DIG and the CCD, they claim, acts "in an executive capacity" and reflects its wider representation in the subject matter of its pamphlets. This frees the incomes "experts" from the cumbrance of

dealing directly with disabled people and at the same time allows them to claim "authority" through the membership of the constituent organisations (which are then left to deal with the problem of what to do with their members). This amounts to no less than the willingness of the incomes "experts" to use disabled people to give authority to their own social interests. That they can use people in this way is frankly demonstrated when they say that the original use of many other experts by the Alliance "was really just to give dignity to an exchange of correspondence with the Prime Minister" a remark which, less than flattering to the other experts, says even more of the Alliance's real attitude to disabled people. It would be folly for us to have any confidence in such an organisation which can "use" people in this manner. The tendency, then, of separating incomes "experts" from those they claim to represent was initially built into DIG by its organising around the single issue and is now completed in the structure of the Alliance. Far from this

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being a new approach, the Alliance has carried the weakness in DIG to its logical and consistent organisational level.

The way this separation between the "experts" and the "amateurs" works can be demonstrated when we look at the production of the Alliance's educational pamphlets. A relatively tiny group of individuals write, discuss and print pamphlets advocating State Charity. These are then circulated to the public in the name of disabled people before we have had a chance to evaluate their contents critically. The mass of DIG members, for example, were not consulted about the contents of the Alliance's pamphlet, 'Poverty and Disability', which, because of DIG's membership of the Alliance they found themselves ostensibly supporting. The Alliance, by a neat organisational trick, is able to disclaim responsibility for the lack of consultation of physically impaired people. "We are," they told us, "at least consulting other organisations of and for the disabled. We don't have individual members, this is the point". The point being (quite correctly) that the Alliance does not have the responsibility for consulting physically impaired people, as this lies with the constituent organisations in our example, with DIG, who must bear the responsibility for bringing their disabled members into such an organisation as the Alliance. By its umbrella structure the Alliance of amateurs is able to render harmless and shelter from any storm of criticism levelled at its State Charity approach. The "experts" have expertly protected themselves from direct contact with the mass of disabled people, while at the same time they claim to speak for us.

We need not despair, however, of having an effective say in our own affairs. The umbrella is full of holes.

Tying up disability with a tape measure

The horrific implications contained in the inexorable logic of the Alliance's State Charity approach are best revealed by their plans for assessing what they call the "degree of disability". It is here, in their scheme to control our lives, that these amateurs are truly transformed into "experts", as we shall see.

We should firstly note that the Alliance makes no attempt at a careful, critical analysis of the various methods of assessment which have already been developed for existing schemes. Such an analysis is the least we expect from "experts" who are promoting their own supposedly improved brand of assessment as a big advance. It is even more significant that the Alliance's incomes proposals bear a marked resemblance to the War and Industrial Disablement Pensions Schemes, except for the method of assessment, which is replaced by their own method without discussion. Yet, of those methods of assessment developed to date, the one used in the War and Industrial Schemes appears to have most advantages and least disadvantages. It is based on a medical examination of impairment, and is relatively objective and straightforward. Once awarded, the basic allowance payable is not affected by the achievement of greater independence and activity through determination, aids or techniques in contrast to the Alliance's scheme. In looking for an assessment procedure for an expenses allowance which would positively assist and not discourage active participation in work and other situations, this is the one which seems to have the most potential for development. At the very least we can expect that a method of assessment which was evolved in the context of struggles by workers and service personnel for decent treatment will contain some basic elements for advance and be worth very careful study.

However, the Alliance typically ignores what it wishes to ignore, and concentrates on selling its own pet schemes the superior merits of which we are supposed to take on trust. And we find that by also ignoring the social cause of disability, and therefore the need to bring about integrative social change, the Alliance encourages us to see our oppression as a matter for detailed negotiation. Their narrow proposals immediately create for us a vested financial interest in claiming what becomes our main asset "disability". In addition, since the amount of charity will be determined by the degrees of disability, physically impaired people will also have a vested interest in playing down our abilities. The best financial contribution we could make to our families would be to become, or pretend to become, more dependent. The State, of course, will automatically be in conflict with us for it will seek to limit its handouts, otherwise there would be no one at work. State Charity, therefore, creates a conflict of interests between the State and its social administrators on the one hand and physically' impaired people on the other. Thus the Alliance logically sees the need to establish objective criteria which would enable the State's social administrators to determine the "degree of disability" and to exclude the malingerers from benefit. A whole new generation of researchers and testers will be created to administer the incomes policy of the Alliance.

The scene facing every physically impaired person, then, is of an army of "experts" sitting on panels which are set up all over the country. These "experts", armed with the latest definitions and tests for measuring, will prod and probe into the intimate details of our lives. They will bear down on us with batteries of questions, and wielding their tape measures will

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attempt to tie down the last remaining vestige of our privacy and dignity as human beings. To calculate the "degree of disability" they will be forced to snoop and spy. How else could they decide whether a physically impaired person dresses

her/himself, for example, or is helped? Just to test this simple act would require considerable investigation to make sure the person was not "malingering" (or, what would inevitably be the new jargon, "dress-lazy"). It should take physically impaired people little imagination to see where all this leads. Every single act would have to be performed in front of a panel while they measure and pry. Already the details are being worked out, the definitions constructed, criticised and reconstructed. The hated means-testing would seem like a formula for privacy compared to the Alliance's proposals for assessing "degree of disability".

It is a horrifying picture; but, a logical extension of the campaign to assess "Needs not Means" which the incomes approach of DIG developed and the Alliance now takes forward. As we have already seen, the Alliance puts no store by organising itself in a principled way. It has not yet even clarified its function with a proper, democratic Constitution that seeks the involvement of all disabled people in controlling its affairs. Nevertheless, the Alliance's "experts" have already drawn up and published their minute and detailed plans for how we disabled people -should be controlled. When we look at these plans we can get a glimpse of just how close the Alliance is to putting us into the situation outlined above. The following is a direct quotation from their pamphlet 'Poverty and Disability', taken from the section subtitled 'Assessment':

"First, there is impairment arising from some physical or mental condition. Second, there are consequences of such impairment, or functional incapacity or disablement. This incapacity or disablement underlies the actual behaviour, and is usually consistent with such behaviour. However, there are individuals who make Herculean efforts to conceal their incapacity, and other individuals, by contrast, who exaggerate their incapacity. The assessment would therefore be based on an individual's considered judgement (or that of someone living with him) about his capacity to undertake a list of activities, checked as far as possible with other evidence whether from medical practitioners, social workers, tests of physical or mental performance or other sources. The testimony neither of the individual disabled person nor of specialist witnesses can be ignored". (emphasis added in the last three sentences).

Can one imagine able-bodied people passively putting up with this?

Thus in practice the Alliance's assessment plans, developed logically from the narrow incomes approach, can be seen to increase the isolation and oppression of physically impaired people. We would be required to sit alone under observation on one side of the table, while facing us on the other side, social administrators would sit together in panels. We would be passive, nervous, deferential, careful not to upset the panel: in short, showing all the psychological attributes commonly associated with disability. It would be the social administrators who would gain strength, support and confidence from colleagues on the panel. A token number of the more privileged physically impaired people might be included, as they are in the Alliance. But the whole approach would reinforce the historical and traditional situation whereby physically impaired people are made dependent upon the thinking and decisions of others.

The Alliance's "spontaneous" defence of the failed incomes approach can be understood when we realise that it is the result of the social experience of "experts"

in close affinity with sociology. While the medical profession has long been the traditional, dominant group in "disability", sociologists have been engaged in chipping away at this privilege for some time and it is this group the sociologists who instinctively gain from an incomes approach to "disability". The achievement of a national incomes policy would of necessity require an army of social administrators who would be given enormous power over physically impaired people. In this way sociologists would oust the medical profession and replace them as the dominant group in the field. The Alliance's structure and its ability to gain "authority" as the voice of disabled people, enables social administrators to use disabled people (just as they used other experts earlier) to become the dominant profession in our lives. In other words, if we as disabled people do not become our own experts, but concede that role to the Alliance, we will be helping them to advance their cause as our new social controllers!

While the Alliance proposes to assess physically impaired people (what they call "degree of disability") as though we were things, the Union encourages the alternative of physically impaired people assessing things (found in what we have called the "organisation of society"). Since it is the social organisation that prevents us from gaining an adequate income from employment and meeting our other needs it follows that it is this social organisation that needs to be assessed by physically impaired people and our supporters. Thus the logic of the Union's approach based upon its definition of "disability" also leads to the creation of assessment panels. But

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in contrast to the Alliance, the kind of panels the Union supports would be made up of disabled people (who are experts in their own right) sitting with committed experts and others who are equally involved. In this situation physically impaired people would come together, help each other in the assessment procedure and so develop our own confidence in social participation. Helpful experts of many professions would undoubtedly contribute to the work of these panels. But these experts would be committed to seeing the social organisation from the point of view of our true interests as a group, and therefore would be in our service. Thus the committed experts would need to be, not those who take up a "very complicated position", but rather those who have really understood the objective fact that society causes our disablement by the way it is organised. The involvement of others on these panels would follow according to how the social situation which requires change to bring about our integration also excludes from full participation other oppressed groups, or to the extent that changes in the social situation will affect the lives of other people.

Although the details of assessing "disability" in this way obviously need careful consideration the basic ideas can be easily seen. Office blocks and factories, for example, would have to be designed with accessibility for physically impaired people and once a business occupied such a building it would be required to maintain that accessibility and improve it. The State would be an active participant in this process. Since society already has the technology that could integrate severely impaired people into social life it would be the task of the panels to ensure that adequate assistance, human and technological, is provided for the working person at his or her place of work. This would help ensure that nobody is refused work on the grounds of physical impairment. Instead of approaching physically impaired people as though

our physical status decides whether or not we can work (as implied in' the Alliance's assessment of "degree of disability"), the conditions of work, and those other environmental situations leading to a working life and enabling one to get to work, etc., would be assessed. The purpose would be to solve the problems and make the work situation accessible to the successful applicant. A strong Union responsible to the mass of physically impaired people would obviously have an important part to play here providing representatives for the assessment panels, working as a political movement through which disabled people can gain expertise and take control over our own lives, and campaigning for the legislative support that the panels would require for their work to be effective. In this way, the problems of poverty, immobility, unemployment, etc., of physically impaired people would be increasingly integrated into the common problems of social life which also include these aspects and affect many other social groups. Increasing numbers of people who are not physically impaired experience problems with employment, transport, the educational system and retirement? for example, and we would be able to work with these groups to the same ends. Thus the Union's approach to disability does not avoid these pressing social problems but leads the way to a truly integrative struggle to bring physically impaired people into line with the general, social situation and away from 'special' struggles, etc. Whereas the traditional segregationist approach, which treats our problems as a 'special' case, has always left us isolated and weak, the struggle for full integration will develop our strengths and bring us into contact with many groups who also have an interest in influencing social change. This is the realistic alternative which the Union proposes to the incomes scheme of the Alliance's "experts" which still seeks to tie down physically impaired people with tape measures and inflict on us the probing, prying, interfering, dominating control that we have all experienced and struggled against.

Closing the umbrella and coming out of the rain

While the Union could have no objection to the Alliance conducting its "fragile experiment" with umbrellas, we do emphatically reject this academic approach applied to our lives.

Clearly, from our discussion, we can see no indication that the Alliance really does, nor will, accept the fundamental principles to which they ostensibly agreed for their meeting with the Union. They could not defend their position on disability, nor their actions, in terms of these principles, and show no significant signs of seriously implementing them. We therefore hope that the National Federation of the Blind will hold to the principled stand which they took during the discussion, when their spokesman said that, "as soon as the Alliance doesn't embody it" (the principle of involvement) "in the Constitution, my organisation will be out". In the Union's view, physically impaired people should struggle for active participation in all our organisations, and for their withdrawal from the Disability Alliance, leaving the discredited incomes approach to a discredited body of "amateurs".

The Union considers that the Alliance represents an historic and significant step backwards, following the failure of DIG's incomes campaign. Its adherence to the traditional charity approach serves to confuse the

fundamental issues that face disabled people; and the Alliance has not, therefore, earned the "authority" to educate the public, or in any way speak for the true interests of physically impaired people. We will therefore publicly campaign against the Alliance, against its false interpretation of the nature of disability, and against its "spontaneous" promotion of sociology as the new, dominant profession in disability. We will encourage physically impaired people to read the assessment plans of the Alliance, drawing their attention to the dehumanising implications of this scheme, and to why a State Charity approach leads to this situation. We will also draw attention to the fact that, on its own figures, if the Alliance's State Charity scheme were implemented in full, this would still leave about 1 million disabled people in need of means tested Supplementary Benefits -- although their declared aim is to eliminate poverty!

The Union maintains that the ultimate failure of DIG, its loss of vitality and campaigning spirit, are related to its organisation around the "rather narrow basis" of an incomes approach to the poverty of disabled people. This has led DIG to rely on a small group of "experts", who concentrate on Parliamentary work, while the mass membership stagnates and becomes increasingly uninvolved. While the Alliance builds on these past mistakes, and becomes increasingly uninvolved. While the Alliance builds on these past mistakes, DIG itself still retains the organisational potential to involve its mass membership in a wider struggle which does not isolate incomes from related social issues, such as the right to employment. The State Charity approach developed by the "experts" has become a powerful and insidious disease within the consciousness of disabled people, and the Alliance's consistent organisation around it should enable 'DIG to rethink its own basic premises. The choice has been presented by the Alliance for DIG either to follow lamely behind the more consistent incomes campaign and thereby continue its own decline, or else to break with this discredited approach and move forward to the campaign for the right to employment and an earned income and full integration into society. This, of course, would mean developing the possibilities for a close, constructive exchange of critical ideas between membership and leadership in the DIG organisation.

In contrast to the Alliance, the alternative struggle proposed by the Union is logically developed from a social theory of disability. We pose the question as to why the Alliance and its "experts" have not produced an adequate social theory of disability. We ourselves look for our expertise to the wealth of talent and intellectual imagination of disabled people, which will be freed for expression once we contemplate our own situation from our own collective experience. The Union therefore seeks to help disabled people to 'recognise and oppose all approaches which can only see answers to our problems in terms of different forms of charity. We call on physically impaired people and others who want to help to join the Union and help us build a mass, democratic organisation, with a principled approach to disability that will struggle to win the right to employment in integrated work situations, and to eliminate from our society the disablement of people who have physical' impairments.

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The Disability Alliance

Commentary on the summary of the tape recorded discussion between the Union of the Physically Impaired and the Disability Alliance on 22nd November, 1975

The background to the communication leading up to the meeting on 22nd November, 1975 has been described in the attached summary. Essentially, it began on a personal basis when the Union of the Physically Impaired sent a copy of its Policy Statement to Peter Townsend, who is Chairman of the Disability Alliance, and he replied giving his personal support to the Union's objectives, and requesting Associate Membership. Before this could be decided upon, the UPI requested clarification on a number of points in his letter which appeared to be at odds with the Union's position and Peter Townsend thought that these might be discussed personally, rather than through a prolonged correspondence. He also suggested that the Alliance and the UPI might be able to co-operate in some way in the future, and therefore suggested a meeting between himself and several members of the Steering Committee of the Alliance and the UPI.

The Alliance anticipated an informal meeting in which these points might be discussed and a further understanding gained of all points of view, and that this might in turn lead to further discussions and perhaps an eventual agreement and statement of mutual co-operation and assistance. When the UPI submitted its written conditions for a meeting, the Alliance was therefore surprised by its approach and its desire for strict formality, but was willing to agree to its requests in the interests of co-operation. The Alliance felt that there was no need for the careful planning of contacts and statements at this stage, since this first meeting was to be essentially an exploratory one, based on mutual trust and friendship. It was therefore not anticipating a written statement from the UPI, and would have found it helpful (a) to have been given notice of this, so that it could have prepared a similar document, and (b) to have been given copies of this statement for easier discussion and reference. This would have been especially appreciated by the blind representative from the Alliance.

The discussion was devoted to the discussion of the Union's two main questions, i.e.:

"How can the Alliance be said to conform with the fundamental principles we have all agreed on for this meeting?"

"What was thought to be wrong with DIG so that a second organisation concentrating on disability incomes was considered necessary?"

The Union clearly felt that the Alliance could not in fact accept the fundamental principles by virtue of its aims and its structure, and further made it clear that nothing less than complete alignment with the Union view point could be acceptable if progress was to be made. Discussions on the purpose of the meeting, i.e. "to consider ways in which disabled people can become more active in the disability field, and to consider a long term programme of action to involve disabled people in

discussions about their "own affairs", could not really take place, and this is reflected in the summary.

Although the Alliance agreed with the Union that "disability is a situation, caused by social conditions", it also believes that the issue of finance is fundamental to much of their oppression, and is a major contributory factor to the isolation and segregation of disabled people. The Union's first question ("How can the Alliance be said to conform with the fundamental principles we have all agreed on for this meeting") challenges the possibility that the Alliance can recognise that a large number of social conditions combine to further impair disabled people, whilst at the same time be pressing for the introduction of a comprehensive income scheme for all disabled people. It suggests that the Alliance could not in fact agree with the Union's first stated principle ("Disability is a situation, caused by social conditions, which require for its elimination (a) that no one aspect such as incomes, mobility or institutions is treated in isolation .") if it is pursuing a campaign for a change in legislation of a financial nature. The Alliance would reply that its work is not devoted solely to income in isolation, since income is inextricably linked with education and employment opportunities, mobility, adequate accommodation, clothing, recreation, freedom from anxiety, and so on, and all of these are discussed in its research work and is emphasised in its arguments with Government representatives. The absence of income for disabled people has a traumatic effect on all aspects of their life, whereas deficiencies in specific areas mentioned above could be eased to some extent by a reliable and adequate income.

The Alliance therefore submits that the absence of income has a far greater effect on a disabled person's life than other individual aspects of his social situation, and that in fact all of these individual aspects are crucially linked to his financial status. It further submits that a full examination of the implications of inadequate income cannot but include his entire social

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situation, and is therefore not discussed in isolation, as principle 1 might suggest. The aim of the Alliance's research work as published in its pamphlets, memoranda and press statements is therefore to draw attention to the disproportionate effect that the continued denial of a reasonable income has upon the lives of disabled people, whilst at the same time illustrating how this and other attitudes as expressed through current legislation and administration result in their segregation, and their condemnation to the status of a second class citizen.

The Alliance believes that the introduction of a comprehensive income scheme would make substantial inroads into these oppressive social conditions, and bring about the beginnings of a fundamental change in the status of disabled people in society. The adage that money is power has some bearing here, since his lack of entitlement to a standard of living at least equal to that of the able-bodied, and his inability to buy services, reduce the status of a disabled person to that of a dependent, in which his right to free choice, action and association are curtailed in direct proportion to the degree of his disability and the extent of his financial means. The curtailment of these rights are crucial in causing the disabled person's isolation and exclusion from full participation in society, just as admission to the workhouse

meant the withdrawal of all rights to emphasise society's condemnation of the individual's insolvency. Thus the absence of an income as of right for disabled people is - in our view more than just one more symptom of their oppression and segregation: it is rather fundamental to the way in which Society exacts payment for being "not as others". Penalising those who are different whether in health, skin colour, marital or sexual status, or physical ability through financial sanctions is a powerful means of confirming the supposed superiority of the majority. The movement for women's equality, for example, aptly illustrates the importance given to the relationship between status and income. Although women are pressing for equality in all aspects of life, it is primarily in the arena of income and so employment opportunity that they are concentrating their fire, since it is through these that they will most effectively gain control over their own lives.

The relation between income and status has thus repeated itself too often to be classified simply as one more symptom of the disabled person's oppression. When the Government announced its financial package for the chronically sick and disabled in 1974, many individuals and organisations concerned with the disabled were therefore disgusted, and responded with a desire to express that disgust with a united voice that could not be long ignored. Unity and co-operation between such organisations, and agreement on a radical change of policy, is a rare commodity, a sad fact which has led them on many occasions to the Government's "divide and rule" strategy as illustrated in the invalid trike affair. These organisations and individuals did not want a new grass roots organisation devoted to disability incomes, so much as a common platform upon which they could repeatedly state their individual and joint view that the disabled person was getting a raw deal by virtue of his neighbours' and his political leaders' attitudes. They had their own grass roots members, calling for the same thing. They did not want to join an organisation such as DIG, and so lose their sovereignty, so much as to link with other groups of the same opinion on a broad front to illustrate their solidarity on the need for legislative change, whilst continuing with their own work. That common platform became known as the Disability Alliance.

The Union observed that the Alliance differed only in structure from DIG. Even if that were so, the structure is sufficiently different to merit a different approach. For the first time, a wide and very diverse number of fragmented organisations and groups for and of people with many kinds of disabilities are joining together to press for a fundamental and long overdue change of attitudes to and legislation for disabled people. For the first time they are saying, not, "We want a larger slice of the cake for our own blind/deaf/mentally ill/physically impaired members", but rather: "The cake must be made bigger to provide equally for all disabled people, whatever their impairment". This willingness to begin sinking partisan differences and loyalties for a common cause is something of a revolution of attitudes in itself, in which the social status of disabled people is being placed increasingly within the broader context of changing the entrenched attitudes of the able-bodied world towards them.

The effect of this changed approach should not be underestimated. More and more self help groups are joining the Alliance or expressing interest in its activities, and we hope that they and their disabled representatives will wish to become involved in its administration. We are grateful to the Union for pointing out the lack of clarity in the

wording of our aims in our draft constitution, and it has subsequently been amended with the unanimous agreement of all member organisations to read:

"As part of the process of transforming the position and status generally of disabled people in society, the object of the Alliance is to persuade society to pay an income as of right and on equitable principles to all disabled persons, whatever

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their age, cause, type or place of disablement, or working capacity, in order to eliminate their poverty or financial hardship...

...In furtherance of the above object the Alliance shall have the following powers:

(i) to promote a more widespread understanding of the circumstances, needs and views of disabled people, especially as they relate to living standards and the distribution of resources.

(ii) to advocate the right of disabled people whether living at home, in residential homes, or in hospitals to exert control over their own lives...

There appears to be some confusion about the role of able-bodied "specialists" and "experts" in the development of the Alliance which requires clarification in the light of the Union's conditions 1b and 1c. In the early stages of co-operation between the organisations that were to form the basis of the Alliance, it was agreed that a round-robin letter be sent to the Prime Minister, condemning the paucity of the announced provision for the chronically sick and disabled, and calling for a further review. In the style of round-robins, the signature of a large number of well known individuals in professions related to disability were sought and obtained to lend emphasis to its contents. These "specialists" added their approval to the Alliance's proposals, but have had little to do with its further development as a pressure group.

This has been supervised by meetings of its elected Steering Committee and by mailings to and from representatives in all member organisations. Election for the Steering Committee will take place at our first ACM in December, and we are encouraging members to nominate disabled representatives wherever possible. Much of the work carried out during the last year has been in answering queries from disabled correspondents, in contacting groups that might be interested in sharing in the Alliance, and in talking to variously disabled people as a basis for the views put forward in our pamphlet series. Much remains to be done to encourage more disabled people to become closely involved in the Alliance through their own organisations, and we would like to see at least half of the places on the Steering Committee taken by disabled representatives.

The Disability Alliance is essentially an educational form in which disabled and non-disabled people alike are coming together to press for fundamental changes in attitude and policy, but it in no way takes away from the activities of its member organisations who might concentrate on a specific disability, or from the growth of a movement entirely made up of disabled people pressing for broad social reforms. Whilst its members wish it to continue, the Alliance will complement their efforts and

activities, and so contribute to the realisation of the Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons, as adopted by the United Nations in 1975. If it achieves its aims, it will in time be no longer needed.