

HUMAN RIGHTS — AND — DISABLED PEOPLE

*W*hy
anti-discrimination
legislation
is essential



BRITISH COUNCIL OF ORGANISATIONS OF DISABLED PEOPLE

Throughout the 1980's disabled people watched with a growing sense of disbelief as the traditional voluntary organisations continually failed to present disability issues as the infringement of their basic human rights, and successive governments failed to introduce anti-discrimination legislation to enable them to participate fully in the economic and social life of the community.

However, the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) since its formation in 1981 has insisted that disabled people are denied their basic human rights in British society. This is because disabled people encounter discrimination daily and do not have the same rights as non-disabled people.

Parents of disabled children do not have the right to send their child to local schools. Employers can discriminate openly against disabled workers. Many disabled people don't have the right to choose what time they will get up in the morning or go to bed at night. Disabled people don't even have the same legal protection from discrimination as do women and black people.

While the Government and many of the traditional voluntary organisations have now come to acknowledge the existence of discrimination against disabled people, it is again BCODP which has identified just how pervasive and pernicious such discrimination actually is. The type of discrimination encountered by disabled people is not just a question of individual prejudice, it is institutionalised in the very fabric of our society and is faced by disabled people every day of their lives.

Institutional discrimination operates throughout society and is supported by history and culture. Historically, disabled people have been viewed with a variety of emotions including suspicion, ridicule and pity. Until fairly recently they have been excluded almost completely from all aspects of community life. Our culture is full of ableist language and imagery which keeps the traditional fears and prejudices alive.

Institutional discrimination is evident when the policies and activities of all kinds of organisations result in disabled people being denied the same treatment or equal access to goods and services as non-disabled people. Modern welfare services continually deny disabled people their basic rights by refusing disabled people their entitlements, by constantly redefining or refusing to acknowledge their needs or by providing services which infringe on their freedom and/or invade their privacy.

BCODP firmly believes that the only way institutional discrimination can be tackled is with anti-discrimination legislation, as a number of other countries as politically diverse as Sweden and the USA have realised.

To this end, BCODP will campaign continuously until anti-discrimination legislation reaches the statute books. Already it has carried out a two-year research project financed by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and has produced a book on the subject entitled "Disabled People in Britain and Discrimination" by Colin Barnes. At its recent tenth anniversary Annual General Meeting it launched its political campaign for anti-discrimination legislation which will continue until the shameful walls of exclusion really do come tumbling down.

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