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"This House believes disabled people and our organisations will only achieve social justice by collaborating with organisations run by non-disabled people".

I am very pleased to be here this afternoon speaking for this motion. It is time it received some serious reassessment. Some of those who know me well may wonder what I am doing here in this role. Let me reassure them. I am not having a Jack Straw moment. There is a famous story about the cabinet minister Jack Straw from his student activist days. Invited to an international debate he was told when he got there that he was not, as he had been led to believe, to speak against the reactionary motion up for discussion, but instead for it. Without missing a beat he made the switch and of course did well. That in turn reminds me of a saying of Groucho Marx. 'These are my principles', he said. Then quickly added, 'If you don't like them, I have others'!!

Well I don't have others. I shall be sticking to my principles and I shall be speaking for this motion because I think it is time it was subjected to some radical reconsideration. I am here because sadly Baroness Jane Campbell can't be present to speak for it. I told the organisers when they asked me to act as substitute for her, I can't follow Jane's

act. I'll have to do this a different way – my way – and that is what I intend to do. I hope you will bear with me and I am sure we all wish Jane well.

Let's start by remembering that it was only when disabled people began to speak for themselves and set up their own organisations that the achievement of social justice and their rights was identified as an issue, let alone taken forward. So this is a journey – for social justice, human and civil rights - which disabled people first embarked us open. Before then the focus truly was on doing good works and being kind to cripples. If children were meant to be 'seen but not heard', disabled people were not to be seen and not to be heard. It was disabled people who first put disability in a broader social and societal context and highlighted the oppression and discrimination they routinely face.

But then whoever said that disabled people should only collaborate with organisations run by disabled people in their quest for social justice? Well, to the best of my recollection, not disabled people. I have been checking back the movement's literature. I've read what disabled people were saying at the time. They created and highlighted the disabled people's movement – a new liberation and new social movement. They also made a point of highlighting its relation and indebtedness to other movements: the women's movement, the Black civil rights movement, the Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender movement, the grey power and panther movement, the HIV/AIDS movement, the environmental movement.

They highlighted the importance of linking with them. They emphasised the overlaps in all our identities. We aren't one thing or another. We have complex identities. We may face multiple oppressions. Over the years much has been done by disabled people and others to work in alliance from their different movements and organisations. Now that's what I call collaboration.

I am involved with a national service user organisation and network, Shaping Our Lives. We are in close contact with many disabled people's organisations at local and national level. I don't see people arguing against alliances and collaborations with organisations that aren't run by disabled people. Sadly we might all have quite a lonely life in our society if we only spoke to organisations we as disabled people control, such are the exclusions and marginalisation disabled people still routinely experience.

Shaping Our Lives carried out a research project supported by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation about service user networking and knowledge and we spoke to many individual disabled people and disabled people's organisations. And repeatedly they talked about the inadequacy and insecurity of their funding; how they had to compete with each other for the same tiny pots of money. And they also talked of big traditional disability charities who had all the visibility, all the status, most of the money and who spoke for them.

Now so long as this is a reality, there is a problem getting in the way of rights and social justice for disabled people - if they strongly feel

they can't speak for themselves, can't fight effectively for their rights because others dominate and do the talking for them. There is a real block to alliance and social justice. We don't expect men or white people to speak for or run organisations for women or black people. How is the same not true for disabled people? Alliance is about equality and equal roles and relationships. Sadly we don't have that at present in the field of disability and it is a key barrier to achieving disabled people's rights and social justice. It's getting in the way of making the progress that needs to be made and I hope that the big traditional charities will realise that some have a very long way to go in transforming themselves before we have the true solidarity needed to make real progress for liberation as people want – collaborating together.

Similarly I hope the big carers' organisations will be challenged to review their ways of thinking so that the massive potential for alliance between disabled people and those largely left without adequate choice, financial security or wellbeing who are just expected to 'care' for them, can be realised.

We can't continue with a status and construct, 'carer' which has for years been used by governments as the basis for regressive public policy, denying disabled people and their loved ones adequate and appropriate support, undermining their loving relationships.

So of course there must be collaboration between disabled people's organisations and others. We also need to get used to the idea that

we don't live in silos and disabled people have as much right as anyone else to run organisations that aren't focused on disability. Let's put an end to ghettos. This issue of collaboration and alliance must no longer be focused on disabled people as if they are the guilty party who won't play with other people. Words like blaming and victim come to mind here. No traditional powerholders need to look a lot more carefully at what *they* must do to change.

Because so long as we are detained by such difficulties, other key problems are being perpetuated without solution. Many older people, the largest group of disabled people are reluctant to see themselves as disabled – and are all the more readily disempowered and disadvantaged in society. The same is true of many mental health service users who are still too often left in isolation at the mercy of an over-medicalised psychiatric system that takes their rights and often just adds to their difficulties. So we must work for broad and inclusive understandings of disability and being disabled which do not marginalise people and their organisations but instead ensure us the strength of diversity, collectivity and solidarity.

Civil and human rights, yes. Social justice, yes. Alliance and collaboration, yes. But let's stop pretending that the problem in the way of all this is the isolationism of disabled people and the disabled people's movement. There are big issues of access and inclusion here. These are truly equality issues enabling the wide range of disabled people; disabled people from BME communities, in prisons, homeless and as refugees and asylum seekers, who communicate

differently and have multiple and complex impairments – it's about enabling them - each and all - truly to speak and act for themselves. It's not about whether there is a role for the big charities. They already are taking a role. It is ensuring that they are taking on the *right role* – and that must be supporting disabled people and their organisations to speak for themselves as they truly work for their own disappearance.