

Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation

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

These 'comments' were written by Vic Finkelstein for, and adopted by, members of UPIAS. It incorporates amendments suggested by Paul Hunt, Dick Leaman and Ken Davis. The 'comments' document is one of three included in the booklet *Fundamental Principles of Disability* (1975) published and distributed by UPIAS. The other documents are the 'Summary of the Discussion' (prepared by Dick Leaman) and The Disability Alliance's 'comments' provided by them. The UPIAS statement read out by Paul Hunt at the beginning of the discussion between representatives of the two organisations was written by him for, and adopted by, members of, UPIAS: this includes the conditions for the meeting and the three *Fundamental Principles* that guided UPIAS practice and supplied the title of the complete booklet.

(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 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 DIG'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 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 straight-forward issue, requiring the application of fundamental 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 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 social participation. Only when all physically impaired people of working age are as a matter of 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 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 with out 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 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 sub-titled '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 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.