

Vic Finkelstein's sixtieth party

By Rosalie Wilkins

He's the Pied Piper of the disability movement and we've all been dancing to his tune for the last 25 years. So concluded Mike Oliver's warm tribute to Vic Finkelstein at his 60th birthday party. Vic had invited nearly two hundred people to celebrate with him the last 30 years' struggle for emancipation. Any new researcher to the disability scene would have been in clover as most of the luminaries were there. Tribute after tribute emphasised the impact which Vic's thinking has had on all our lives - often through a fog of incomprehension and dis-belief only to discover that he had been on the right track all along. When Vic

resigned as Chair of BCODP to devote himself to the undreamt-of 'disability arts'. Mike thought 'the old man had finally lost it'. But DAIL bears monthly witness to Vic's vision! Meanwhile, Vic sat there in his embroidered cap, with helium balloons tied to his chair, toasting the 60th birthday which Stoke Mandeville had predicted he would never see. An enigma as always but he seemed delighted and bemused at the celebration which his family and friends had created around him - mountains of food, music and poetry, and a barren sports hall transformed by photo-graphs of the last thirty years' struggle, cardboard candles and balloons in the colours of the ANC.



Vic Finkelstein celebrating.
Photo © Tom Claxton.

Vic's history of imprisonment and exile from South Africa for anti-apartheid activities isn't known to many in today's movement - nor is his relationship to Trotsky! - but it was that experience which illumined the social model for him. The upside down world where his brutal interrogator was forced to abandon his usual threat "I'll make you crawl out of here unless you talk", to find himself saying "You'll talk or you'll walk out of here"! Even he danced to Vic's tune and with Vic's new-found freedom in semi-retirement I think that we'll be hearing a challenging, totally unexpected, new tune quite soon. J A half hour televised profile of Vic Finklestein was made by Rosalie for LINK in 1986