

The Department of Sociology and Social Policy
The University of Leeds

“Bridging the Divide”

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Bridging the Divide

Julian Horsler

Abstract:

The anti-capitalist movement burst onto the scene and into the public consciousness in Seattle in 1999. Since then it has grown in size and spread across the globe. After the attack on the World Trade Centre it regrouped, initiated and linked with the anti-war movement. It has attracted many diverse organisations from social movements such as women's groups, anti-racist groups, anti-privatisation groups, trade unions and environmentalists to name but a few. It has begun to articulate a vision for society after capitalism.

A notable absentee from this movement so far has been the disability movement. The core idea around which the disability movement has coalesced, the social model of disability, has long established capitalism as a cause of disability. Why then should a movement whose central philosophy apparently identifies capitalism as the cause of disabled people's oppression and exclusion be so reluctant to engage with an anti-capitalist movement?

This paper seeks to analyse the disability movement, its history, its structure, ideology and socio-economic context to gain insight into the reasons for the lack of engagement. Through a review of the literature on both movements and their theoretical underpinnings and by interviewing key informants of the disability movement this paper highlights key characteristics of the disability movement which act as a barrier to further engagement. It is argued that the idealist conceptions of the social model of disability have become the orthodoxy within the disability movement and that this has had a major impact upon its culture, leadership and strategy. The movement, it is suggested, has become separatist and reformist and has moved away from an understanding of disability as originating within the capitalist mode of production. The paper also reflects upon structural barriers to engagement that are external to the disability movement; access, internalised oppression and the traditional paternalist nature of the Left.

The paper concludes with the suggestion that this need not always be the case. Disabled people are engaging with anti-capitalist ideas and the anti-capitalist and anti-war movements. Suggestions are made as to how the disability movement can be won to greater engagement by a return to the radical social model of disability and by emphasising the need to build a new cadre of disabled activists.

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1. Introduction

In November 1999 the Anti-Capitalist movement burst onto the streets in Seattle and closed down the World Trade Organisation conference (Danaher and Burbach, 2000). The tens of thousands of protestors who withstood the police violence reached out to millions around the globe thanks to their diversity, their ingenuity and inspiration. The neo-liberal orthodoxy of Reagan and Thatcher that tens years before had seemed impenetrable had been seriously holed (George, 2001a, 2001b; Bello, 2001).

The movement has developed over the last 4 years. It still takes to the streets to protest but has begun to develop its ideas and organisation. The World Social Forum in Port Allegre, Brazil, attracted 50,000 plus delegates from every continent (Callinicos, 2003; Albert, 2003). The subsequent European Social Forum (ESF) in Florence last year culminated in an anti-war protest a million strong (Callinicos, 2003). The diversity and creativity of the movements has been a badge of honour to the movement, in sharp contrast to the homogeneity of those inside the besieged conference centres (Nineham, 2001; Bello, 2001).

These groups have united in the face of a common enemy but also increasingly with common ideas as to what should be the guiding principles of the movement. The movement is a coming together of many different movements around the idea of a common enemy (Harman, 2000). Women's groups, trade unions, anti-racist groups, lesbian and gay groups, environmentalists, third world solidarity

groups, indigenous people's groups, anti-privatisation campaigns and many more have all been contributed to and built the anti-capitalist movement. The disability movement however has been notable only in its absence. Of the participating organisations for the European Social Forum in Paris, not one is a disability organisation (ESF, 2003)

The vibrancy of the anti-capitalist movement contrasts with the contemporary disability movement. The disability movement crystallised out of the experiences of those struggling against the constraints of institutionalised residential care homes. It increasingly organised, theorised and vocalised disabled people's own understanding of their exclusion and marginalisation. The protests against Telethon and Children In Need, later feeding into the protests and mass lobbies for civil rights were the highpoint for a movement. However since the mid 1990's the movement's most influential publication "Coalition" has been full of articles asking "Where Have All the Activists Gone" (Lumb, 2000). The movement has been seen to "fizzle out" (Hudson, 2000).

My contention in this paper is that the disability movement would benefit from engagement with the anti-capitalist movement. My concern is with why this engagement has not occurred, the barriers that prevent it - whether they are ideological, strategic, structural or something else.

I have interviewed some leading figures within the movement in the hope that they can enlighten me to the various twists and turns

of the movement over the last 30 years. I have also interviewed a couple of maybe less well known but nonetheless influential rank and file activists, who have in their own areas (Scotland and London) played important roles. Through a series of interviews they have offered me some important insights as to the lack of engagement which I outline in this paper.

I will argue that the barriers preventing greater engagement of the disability movement in the anti-capitalist movement are deep rooted and diverse. I will show how there is a strong tradition of separatism within the disability movement which is grown out of past experience of working with non-disabled 'allies' but which has since developed into an ideological sectarian principle whereby all non-disabled people are oppressors and hence can no longer be our 'allies'.

I will also argue that the growing influence of idealist constructions of disability and the strategy that derives from those ideas have seriously damaged the movement. The post-modernist concerns with the battle for hegemony, divorcing the mechanisms by which disabled people are oppressed from the material relations of production from which they originate, has resulted in a movement that has failed to build a new layer of motivated activists. It has also meant that the movement no longer articulates the link between disability and capitalism, nor target it in campaigns or activities.

The flip-side of this development is the emphasis on reformism as a strategy and as an ideology for the movement. This is exemplified by the turn towards the campaign for civil rights. I argue this has created passivity within the movement, has coopted many leading members and shackled the voices of many others. Such a movement is in no position to engage with or participate within other movements without a radical shift of organisations, activity and ideas.

I then consider the barriers that are outside the disability movement's control. Those barriers that derive from the poverty of many disabled people or the physical, environmental and information barriers that prevent their participation. I also outline how the paternalistic traditions of the Left have in the past been far from a welcoming and empowering experience for disabled people who do manage to overcome all those other barriers.

My intention however with this study is not mere academic explanation, but also changing the reality I have observed. I have been an activist in both movements and am deeply committed to both. In my view there would be many benefits to a deep engagement – for both movements. Therefore in the penultimate chapter I turn to consider how these barriers to engagement could be overcome and the rewards should this happen.

The barriers although large are not, I don't, believe insurmountable. I conclude therefore with a proposal for how a significant section of the disability movement could be won to

greater engagement, which in so doing could contribute towards reviving a fractured and leaderless movement. By focussing on precisely those areas which have been so ignored in recent years (solidarity, ideology, revolutionary strategy and cadre building) I suggest that the vibrancy of the anti-capitalist movement could feed the disability movement, possibly bringing it back to life.

2. To Change The World

The Anti-capitalist Movement

Anti-capitalist theorists such as Pierre Bourdieu, Noam Chomsky, Susan George, Michael Albert, Walden Bello, Naomi Klein and Toni Negri reached a global mass audience for their critiques of global capitalism. Their ideas have articulated the frustrations, the determination and optimism of millions that not only is another world necessary but also possible (Callinicos, 2003). However, a common accusation levelled against the anti-capitalist movement is that it is very quick to say what it opposes but not what it supports (Albert, 2003) and that it is too diverse to be coherent (Callinicos, 2003). Callinicos accepts that there are many different voices within the anti-capitalist movement yet usefully seeks to describe the main currents within it. Each has its own particular slant on the key failings of the system, what strategy needs to be adopted to defeat it and are increasingly discussing what should replace it.

Some argue for radical reforms to the world economic system, such as Susan George who argues for the imposition of a "Tobin Tax" on foreign exchange transactions, the money used to benefit development in the majority world (George, 1999). Some focus on democratising international institutions such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund (Monbiot, 2003). Others go further and demand a restructuring of the economic decision making processes such as Albert who advocates a 'participatory

economy' where production and distribution process are democratised and wages equalised.

Other have a more revolutionary outlook, such as the 'autonomists' and Marxist socialists (Callinicos, 2003). The former argue for the movement to be organised in the image of the world they hope to create, based on coalitions and networks, which are independent yet co-ordinated (Klein, 2000; Danaher and Burbach (2000); Negri and Hardt, 2001). The socialists argue for socialist planning based on the principles of democracy, sustainability and justice (Callinicos, 2003)

These theories and strategies are interesting to us here because they variously seek to alter the system in which we live in a very major way, and crucially to end the system whereby the free-market and the pursuit of profit determine all else. Many in the disability movement would also identify these features of capitalism as the cause of disability and hence in need of radical overhaul.

Disability and Anti-capitalism

Disability, as a form of social oppression and exclusion, has long been linked with capitalism in the discourses on the social model of disability. Victor Finkelstein's "Fundamental Principles" (1975), drafted on behalf of the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), is the prime example of this and forms the foundation for the social model of disability. This turned the

traditional conception of disability on its head and for the first time identified disabled people as a socially oppressed group. Now disability was defined 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."

(UPIAS, 1976, cited in Oliver, 1990 p11)

It did not take long for this definition to be recognised as encompassing a truth for all disabled people, regardless of impairment and hence was easily widened for this purpose. Vic Finkelstein (2001) went further than this definition however which although was a radical and liberating statement for many on its own, was merely a description of disability and not an explanation. What Finkelstein wanted to do was understand why society was organised and structured the way it was, only by doing that could one know how to change society. For Finkelstein, disability derived from the industrial capitalism of the 19th century. Although pre-capitalist societies tended to have a negative connotation of impairment, people with impairments remained part of and active participants within the community, both at work and socially (Barnes, 1997; Borsay, 1998). Industrialisation introduced large-scale mechanised production geared to the 'average' or 'normal' non-disabled worker. This excluded people with impairments, unable to fit into these new production 'norms', not only from the

workplace but also from their communities. Allied to this was the growth of medical professions who increasingly intervened into disabled people's lives, medicalising of disability (2001). The result was the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream life, and segregation into institutions. (Oliver, 1990, Barnes, 1997, Borsay, 1999).

Deborah Stone (1984) located the origin of disability not with capitalist industrialisation but the increase in vagrancy that accompanied the growth of wage Labour in early capitalism. Disability derived from the capitalist state's dilemma of how to provide social aid to those unwilling or unable to work whilst maintaining to their incentive to work. The answer was to legitimise claims to aid through medical verification and associate a social stigma with the making of a claim.

Mike Oliver developed the 'social model of disability' from Finkelstein's social interpretation. Oliver believed that although the basis of disabled people's exclusion from mainstream society derived from their exclusion from work, he emphasised the role of society's core values and beliefs, its 'mode of thought' (Oliver, 1990). Similarly to Stone he argues that the distribution of the economic surplus is central to the oppression of disabled people, and this is defined by the 'Enlightenment' values and beliefs of capitalist society. Those who were unable to operate the new machines were thus pathologised and stigmatised (Oliver, 1990).

Gleeson (1999) offers a detailed account of the how the capitalist relations of production and commodification of labour and markets caused the exclusion of disabled people from mainstream life. He examines how the life of people with impairments in feudal times gradually changed with the introduction of commodity markets and the putting-out system. He describes how disabled people, once essential parts of the family production process became unable to compete in the market-place with other labour and hence was excluded from work. In time the pressures on the family and communities became so great that they were increasingly forced into poorhouses and workhouses (1999). Borsay's study of the Infirmary in Bath in the 18th century illustrates how it was those workers who were most exposed to the capitalist relations of production and exchange were those who were most likely to be forced into the poorhouse (Borsay, 1999).

These theorists all provide a clear link between capitalism and disability, albeit with a variation of the causal transmission mechanism from one to the other. Others have developed the theme of the role of ideology further and in doing so have increasingly separated the cause of disability from capitalism.

Paul Abberley cites the ideas of the Enlightenment as being a major cause of disabled people's oppression, where one's value is determined by your ability to produce and hence the State reacts accordingly towards those who are unable to produce (Abberley, 1987, 1997). Similarly L.J. Davis looks to Enlightenment concepts of 'normalcy' which viewed impairment as separate from and

different everyday life (1997). The point to note here however is that neither Abberley nor Davis consider Enlightenment ideas to be those specifically of capitalism. They consider Marxist (i.e. anti-capitalist) ideas for example to be equally culpable in normalising the work ethics that disable people (Abberley, 1987, 1997; Davis, 1997).

Some theorists, in developing the 'ideological' approach to disability, have divorced the cause of disability from the capitalist mode of production or capitalist ideology. Colin Barnes (1997) for example has argued that the ideological origins of disability can be traced back to ancient Greece (the practice of infanticide of impaired babies, the idealisation of the perfect body etc). These ideas derived from the material relations of production in ancient Greece (agricultural slaves, taken through war) and were transmitted through culture and religion to the modern day. Hence although capitalism perpetuates disability and disabling ideas, it is not necessarily the cause of them.

The idealism of post-modernist thought has in more recent years had an influential impact on the social model of disability. Tom Shakespeare uses feminist concepts of 'otherness' to describe how non-disabled people distance themselves from disabled people due to their fear and loathing of disabled people, because they represent the constraints and fragility of the body and remind them of their own mortality (Shakespeare, 1997). Disability is primarily an issue of prejudice, propagated through cultural representations of disabled people, caused by the masculine

concerns of potency, supremacy and domination (1997). The cause then is a socio-biological one and not is not a particular mode of production as it is with Barnes (Barnes, 1997) and the link with capitalism is entirely broken.

Thus the earlier social model theorists established a clear causal link between disability and capitalism (Finkelstein, Stone, Oliver). Later theorists, utilising more idealists concepts, have begun to separate the two, to greater (Shakespeare, 1997) or lesser (Abberley, 1997a) degrees. However it would seem fair to suggest that all share a common critique of capitalism in that disability is an inherent and vigorous strand within capitalist society and that if we are to end disability there is a need to change the very structure, dynamics and beliefs of that society.

The Disability Movement

Oliver and Zarb (1989) and then Oliver (1990) seek to understand the nature of the disability movement and the struggle for disabled people's liberation. They describe how disabled people have been excluded from the party-political process and disempowered by pressure group politics as charities and experts spoke on their behalf. It was out of these experiences that they outline the development of groups such as UPIAS and later the wider disability movement itself. The subsequent growth of the movement is celebrated by Oliver and Zarb (1989) who proclaim its achievements in challenging the:

"dominant ideologies of individualism and normality upon which post-capitalist society is based . . . it will come to have a central role in counter-hegemonic politics and the [subsequent] social transformation upon which this will be eventually be based." (p213).

This was written at a time of immense optimism within the movement. BCODP the national umbrella organisation had secured funding from central government, it was growing in size and strength. The movement was spreading the word about the social model of disability and empowering thousands of disabled people to understand their oppression in a new way.

Campbell and Oliver (1996) in an extensive study of the movement in Britain, chart the origins and development of the movement, through a series of interviews with centrally involved disabled people, some of whom I have also interviewed for this study. They consider its roots in the 1960's, the influence of other 'rights' movements and the independent living movement, before assessing its role and impact in the contemporary politics of the mid-1990's (1996). Similarly, Ken Davis examines the movement in the early 1990's as it reoriented itself on the campaign for civil rights (1996).

Diane Driedger in 1989 completed a similar assessment of the Disabled Person's International (DPI). In particular, Driedger considers its influence on and involvement in traditional

international institutions such as the United Nations and the International Labour Organisation.

Possibly more pertinent to us is here however is how all of these studies conceive of the disability movement – as an example of a 'new social movement'. This is the theoretical model for understanding contemporary social movements that holds sway over the disability movement. It is the mirror through which the movement views itself, however distorting an image it may give or misleading strategies it encourages. Those who have studied the disability movement have all done so with reference to this perspective (Oliver and Zarb, 1989; Oliver and Campbell, 1996; Priestley, 1999). As Oliver and Zarb assert:

"It is only by understanding that the disability movement is centrally placed within the rise of a whole range of new social movements which are characteristic of post-capitalist society, that its significance can be grasped." (1989, p195).

But since the mid-1990's there has been less written about the British Disability Movement. This may reflect a downturn in attitudes towards the movement. The analysis of the movement in recent years has mainly come in discussion forums and newsletters such as the widely read "The Coalition" the monthly newsletter of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People. For example, Finkelstein, one of the key early theorists and leaders of the movement in Britain in an article in the Coalition (October 2000) discusses how the movement has focussed on

consciousness raising activities, leading to elitism and individualism.

Understanding Social Movements

Contemporary theories of social movements can be grouped into two main strands, the resource-mobilisation theories and the new social movement theories (Martin, 2001). Each has something to offer our understanding of the disability movement but it is the Marxist understanding, much maligned by post-modern theorists that I believe offers us the most useful tools, particularly in relation to the role played by 'leaders' of the movement – the particular focus for this study.

The resource-mobilisation model developed by Tilly, Olson, Zeld and McCarthy was a response to the rise in protest groups of women, environmentalists and pacifists for example, which didn't appear to fit the structuralist Marxist class based-analysis (Cohen and Rai, 2000; Boggs, 1986). For Resource-Mobilisation theorists conflicts of interest in society were accepted as a given, and so their concern was not with the motivational causes of movements, but instead with how organisations developed to mobilise this inherent potential (Dalton et al, 1990). The subject of study was therefore the organisational structures and processes that determine why movements rise and transform over time (Cohen and Rai, 2000). This inability to explain the source of solidarity that forms the basis of any collective action is the main criticism of Resource Mobilisation Theory (Martin, 2001).

New Social Movement theorists rejected both the Structuralist notion of class position and the resource-mobilisation notion of organisational structure as the defining features of contemporary social movements. These new movements, developing as they were in a post-industrial and post-modern era, Offe and Touraine argued, were defined by their post-materialist cultural, ethical and quality of life goals and values (Cohen and Rai, 2000; Priestley, 1999). Collective struggles had shifted from the industrial arena and had become 'symbolic challenges' for diversity and plurality in the realms of identity, culture and life-styles (Barker et al, 2001; Martin, 2001). Their structures and strategies were derived from their values and goals, being decentralised and democratic, and concerned with protest and direct action (Dalton et al, 1990).

The premises upon which new social movement theory have been variously challenged by theorists. Fagan and Lee (1997) explain how social movements may not be as democratic or unconcerned with formal lobbying as their proponents suggest, and Calhoun argues that these movements are not as 'new' as has been suggested (Fagan and Lee, 1997; Martin, 2001). Harman (1996) similarly challenges the premise that we live in a post-industrial world, citing the changing patterns of industrial production, but not its class based nature.

Nonetheless New Social Movement theory is important to us in this study not least because it is how the Disability Movement has understood itself, informing its strategy and organisational values (Oliver, 1990; Oliver and Zarb, 1989; Campbell, 1997). In particular

New Social Movement has highlighted the nature of the struggle for radical change which we can reflected time and again within the Disability Movement (Priestley, 1999).

New Social Movements are thought of as being at once radical and self-limiting, challenging and reformist; actively seeking incorporation rather than threatening the social order as a whole (Cohen and Rai, 2000; Fagan and Lee), 1997). They frequently seek to square this circle by calling on Gramscian notions of hegemony (Priestely, 1999). The struggle was one of ideas within civil society, to self-empower through activity and identity, to create the cultural and ideological space for a counter-hegemony to the prevailing ideas. This unfortunately was where they ignored Gramsci's critical emphasis on the united front, the need to root the battle for ideas in the working class struggle (Ashman, 1998) which we will see later has been a strong characteristic of the disability movement.

Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (2001) consider an area of social movements that is largely ignored by many theorists; leadership. Despite theorists such as Zald and Ash Garner recognising the crucial importance of leaders in developing cadre and strategy (Barker et al, 2001) resource mobilisation studies have added little to our understanding of "the way in which leaders function" (Klandermans, cited in Barker et al, 2001, p3). New Social Movement have generally ignored leadership, viewing movements as decentralised, non hierarchical networks, suspicious of leadership which value spontaneity instead (Barker et al, 2001).

Alone among the new social movement theorists Melucci has attempted to address the issue of leadership and how it relates to the wider movement; describing how they "supply scarce skills to assist the 'support base', and in return receive member involvement, loyalty, prestige and power." (Barker et al, 2001, p3). Barker rightly identifies how this may accurately describe the way organisations operate that rely on a largely passive membership but not those that emphasise a more active membership role.

In contrast, Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (2001) urge an understanding of the nature, role and types of leadership as crucial to understanding social movements. They describe the various roles of leaders: theoretical visions and conceptualising of strategies, proposing action, organisation based on experience, and argument and persuasion. They identify the imperative for a dialogical relationship between a leadership and the mass movement, understanding the active and creative role played by all parties in this relationship. The resources at the disposal of leaders, both structural and personal, determine the effectiveness of leaders in all these areas, as does their ability to respond to changing contexts and challenges. Furthermore they conceive of leadership as a fluid entity that can quickly be conferred on various activists in differing locations and levels in movements, often determined by those able to best adapt to changing circumstances. They also consider how leadership should be democratic but how it can become bureaucratic or exclusive in nature.

Chapter 2: To Change the World

This provides us with useful tools for understanding the disability movement and helps us to identify the role the leadership of the movement has played in failing to engage the disability movement with the anti-capitalist movement. Furthermore the methodology of this paper is based on interviews with people I believe have been critically placed to comment on the movement, its decisions and strategies, due to their own leadership roles within that movement.

3. Methodology

Research Objectives

My research has three mutually dependent objectives. Working backwards from my ultimate aim that I outlined in my introduction, I hope to be able to suggest a means by which the barriers to the disability movement's engagement with the anti-capitalist movement can be overcome. Before I can understand this I must first understand what the barriers are to engagement, and thus is my second objective. But this too has a prerequisite. My concern is with the disability movement and the barriers that it can affect. Thus my final objective is to understand the nature of the disability movement; its history, its ideology, its strategy, its activities, its culture and its socio-political context that have all contributed to those barriers.

Ontology

My ontological perspective will be informed by a 'realist' (May, 2001) Marxist dialectic. The dialectical approach has three central features. It is a theory based on the principle of totality: the various separate components of the world cannot be understood in isolation from each other – they are all in a relationship with one another (Rees, 1998). The nature of a part is determined by its relationships with other parts and hence its relationship with the whole. "The part makes the whole, and the whole makes the parts." (1998, p5) But more than that, "the parts also become more than they are individually by being part of the whole." (1998, p5)

For this study it means to understand the Disability Movement you cannot separate it from the rest of the world –the ideas which shape its actions, the political, economic and social realities in which it takes its decisions, the experiences and consciousness of those involved.

The approach is anti-reductive (Rees, 1998). The engagement of the Disability Movement cannot be understood by reference only to the social and political realities. Nor can it be reduced to the sum of its constituent parts (the individuals and organisations that make it up) as do empiricists, objectivists and positivists (May, 2001). My dialectical approach entails understanding the disability movements interdependence and inter-relation with the outside world, its members, its leaders, its structures and its ideas. Only that way can we know its true nature.

Epistemology

The dialectical approach insists that, unlike for example idealist and interpretivist perspectives (May, 2001), knowledge is not merely interpretation and meanings. Empirical facts exist that we can know and seek to understand; what organisations, leaders, theorists and activists have done and said in the disability movement are identifiable. However to understand them they must be in context – to each other and the outside world. As May explains, realist perspectives, such as the dialectic, argue:

“. . . the knowledge people have of the social world affects their behaviour, and unlike the propositions of positivism and empiricism, the social world does not simply ‘exist’ independently of this knowledge.” (2001, p13).

We can also seek to know how these actors interpret and understand the world – how they understand why they do what they do. But to reach these explanations means understanding how these ideas are shaped by and influenced by other factors, by social relations. We must also look deeper than surface appearance. Reality can be very different from appearances (or interpretations) and it is the underlying structure that helps us to understand why things appear the way they do and are interpreted the way they are (May, 2001; Rees, 1998).

Data Gathering

I gathered data for this research from two prime sources; a tertiary analysis of literature and a qualitative and primary analysis of data gathered from sample of key informants within the disability movement. There was no separation of topic between these two sources – both were investigated for an understanding of the movement’s history, ideology, actions and structure. Likewise both investigated wider issues of the socio-economic context and about class struggle and consciousness.

Given my epistemology, the ‘population’ from which to sample and acquire evidence is both diverse and ill-defined. I was also concerned with identifying key informants, those with particular

knowledge and experience to share, a very subjective process. Thus *quota* or *probability* samples were neither appropriate or feasible. I therefore used a *judgemental* or *purposive* sample (Silverman, 2002).

In my sampling I made a conscious decision to limit the population to disabled people and organisations run and controlled by disabled people. This is how the disability movement has defined and understood itself (Campbell, 1997, Oliver, 1990). I also attempted to reflect (but necessarily be representative of) the range of organisations and activists involved in the movement, to ensure the key informants would have the relevant knowledge about small radical groupings, BDOCP (a large national 'umbrella' organisation), user-led service provision and local groupings.

But movements are not just organisations and actions. They are also the common ideas and theories that shape the purpose, understanding and goals of the movement (Barker, Johnson and Lavalette, 2001). I therefore also ensured that my key informants included theorists who have played a leading role in developing the ideas around which the movement has coalesced.

Although the initial sampling was purposive, the final sampling was based on '*convenience*' (Blaikie, 2000): the six willing participants were ultimately selected utilising connections established through academia and my own political activity.

The participants identified were: Victor Finkelstein, Anne Rae, Ken Davis, Maggie Davis, Brenda Ellis and Paul Brown. A brief biography of each is attached as an appendix.

I conducted semi-structured in-depth interviews to allow for elaboration and probing of issues (May, 2001). The aim was to illicit information concerning complex inter-related forces and actions where further questioning and clarifying by both parties may be necessary to establish meaning and interpretation or to reconsider responses and challenge concepts. The outline interview questions are attached as an appendix. On average the interviews lasted approximately two hours.

When requesting their participation, I wrote to prospective interviewees clearly outlining my objectives and political approach to the subject (attached as an appendix). I invited interviewees to identify any access requirements they may have for the interview which were met when requested. Interviewees have all been sent the transcripts and an audio recording for verification. Interviewees were invited to make any amendments that they wished before I analysed the transcripts. I assured interviewees that before I made any attributable comments I would check these for accuracy against the original recording. I also assured participants that if I intended to use the data for any other purpose than this dissertation research project I would seek their agreement first.

Methodological Limitations

I needed, first and foremost, people who are very familiar with the organisations I am studying, their strategies, activities and discussions. Consequently whilst I recognise that there may be differing experiences of women or black and minority ethnic activists within these movements and hence be able to give differing perspectives as to the reasons for a lack of engagement, given my limited resources I will not be seeking to reflect this within the profile of interviewees unless the prior concern of 'influence' can still be met. In the result, my key informants were 50% female.

I am dealing with a small sample size that has been purposively sampled (and to an extent convenience sampled). To what degree those selected can be thought to be representative of the movement as a whole is very subjective. There are many in the movement who would not agree with the observations made by the interviewees nor the conclusions I have drawn. Others would argue that I could have chosen a more representative sample, possibly that I have chosen a 'biased' sample. I have at all times been open about my own 'bias' and motives behind the research and this will undoubtedly have influenced the research in many ways beyond the issue of sampling. All I can do, as I hope I have, is explain the reasoning for the sample I have made and the conclusions I have drawn. The rest is up to the reader.

4. Separatism

Separatism has been a strong theme within the ideological and tactical discourse of the Disability Movement and is hence one of the main reasons why it has failed to engage with the Anti-Capitalist Movement. It has changed and developed in form as the movement has been increasingly influenced by idealist conceptions of disability, but was originally advocated by the radical materialists as a strategy for the movement.

The Separatist Strategy

There was a separatist strategy from the very beginnings of UPIAS, when "membership was only open to disabled people" (Finkelstein, 2001, p4). The argument was that disabled people first needed the space to understand and articulate their own oppression and develop the strategies and organisations they need for liberation (Campbell, 1997). Maggie Davis emphasised the importance of understanding your own oppression first:

"you also need to be clear as to what your own movement does in great clarity. If you are asked what your movement says and does. You must be clear on that first."

This strategy was not unique to UPIAS. It was also articulated within the Liberation Network (1981) and in BCODP which restricts membership to those groups that were controlled by at least 51% disabled people. Again the aim was not for complete separation

but for a strategic goal to ensure alliances were made effectively, as Campbell explains:

"Hence BCODP's tradition of organising separately and then coming to the integrated table from a position of strength has been its hallmark" (1997, p84).

This strategy came out of disabled people's experience of disability campaigns such as the Disability Income Group and the Disability Alliance (Oliver and Zarb, 1989) which became elitist, controlled not by the grass roots but by professional "experts" and "lobbyists" (Finkelstein, 2001, p3). Anne Rae described her personal experience of working for a disability charity controlled by non-disabled people:

"their appalling attitude towards disabled people who worked there. Their ethic was more about those who ran the charity not those who they were supposed to work for."

However the strategy did recognise that if society were to be transformed alliances would be necessary, as Finkelstein and Ellis both make clear:

"Of course, to transform society you've got to work with others, form alliances." (Finkelstein, 2001, p4)

"Disabled people in isolation are not going to lead the revolution." (Ellis)

The difficulty with the separatist strategy comes when you need to assess whether you are ready to make alliances. Paul Brown for one understands this problem:

"It was important for disabled people to develop their own ideas about the social model, oppression and all that but you must at some point be linked to other struggles, recognise we have things in common."

The problem comes with understanding who your allies should be, what your common aims are and whether the alliance be one of equals. How do you assess this if you are separate from them?

Mutual solidarity is crucial to helping with this assessment. Paul Brown explains with despair how despite disabled people and single parents having their benefits attacked by the Labour Government at the same time

"The fear was that non-disabled people would take over and discriminate against us. We both campaigned against these cuts but did so separately and we both lost!"

Experience of working with the women's movement may have been negative in the past as Maggie Davis explains:

"The women's movement ignore us because they see us as being what they don't want – as dependent. So you don't want to get involved with them."

But surely here was a clear example of how we could have common cause. The disability movement had just come out of its civil rights campaign with considerable respect and awareness of our struggle. This was an opportunity to build some bridges and demonstrate our ability to fight for ourselves on our terms, thus paving the way for future unity in struggle.

The world outside has radicalised over the last few years. The reactionary nature of the unions that Oliver comments upon (1990) and that was the backdrop to the separatist strategy being developed no longer characterises the trade union movement. Strikes are increasingly led by low paid women workers; the $\frac{3}{4}$ million strong local government strike last year (Unison, 2002), the wildcat strike at Heathrow this spring being a notable examples. Unison recently voted to call for an end to Cochlear implants for disabled children (Unison, 2003). The anti-capitalist and anti-war movements have been an expression of and impetus to this new radicalisation. The world outside the Disability Movement has changed. Paul Brown argues that the time has come to leave separatism behind and join the anti-capitalist movement:

"Maybe we needed a period of separation, but the time for that is now over. The anti-capitalist movement is the most

exciting movement to happen for god knows how long and we have to be linked to that."

However when millions took to the streets in opposition to the war the disability movement missed it totally. The BCODP magazine, "Activate", ignored it entirely (Kelly, 2003), as did the rest of the movement:

"there was no disabled people's organised activity to attend which shocked me rigid. . . there was no transport to go to the demo." (Anne Rae)

"I tried to run an anti-war article in LDN. But the freelance editor didn't think the article was right or relevant for LDN." (Brenda Ellis)

The fact that disabled people in their thousands involved themselves in the anti-war movement despite the movement's separatist approach exposed how activists have expressed a desire for unity that their leaders have failed to deliver.

Separatism has become a culture for the Disability Movement. The outside world from which it has been sheltering for fear of being swamped has moved on leaving the disability movement behind. Because of this it missed a fantastic opportunity to join in the anti-war movement as equals. But the culture of separatism cannot be laid solely at the door of the separatist strategy. With the onset of

idealist thought within the movement so it brought with it
separatism as a sectarian principle.

Idealism and the Sectarian Principle

The comments of Fran Branfield in "Disability and Society" (1998,1999) were made with the confidence of someone who knows they have wide acceptance within the movement. Here there was no support for alliances with non-disabled people who were all oppressors benefiting from the exclusion of disabled people:

"the relation of 'non-disabled' people to the disability movement involves a degree of exclusion' ... 'Non-disabled' people ... are always in the position of being 'non-disabled' and all that carries with it – domination, oppression and appropriation." (1998, p143).

This shift from strategy to sectarian principle can be traced to the idealist interpretations of disability that, as Tregaskis (2002) and Priestely (1998) have explained, increasingly gained weight within the movement through the 1980's and 1990's. These idealist concepts themselves derive from the 'post-industrial' or 'late-capitalist' interpretations of society developed by the likes of Boggs (1986) and Laclau and Mouffe (1985). These theorists observed the changing nature of the capitalist world, with new forms of social organisation and struggle, new technologies opening up new forms of communication networks, and the decline of traditional heavy

industry in the Western World (Fagan and Lee, 1997). Our struggles are no longer over wages and benefits but identity, lifestyles and culture (Castells, 1996; Oliver, 1990; Priestley, 1998; Dalton and Kuechler, 1990).

Theorists such as Mann (1997), Harman (1996) and Marfleet (1998) have demonstrated that the death of industrial capitalism has been greatly exaggerated, and nor have the fundamental conflicts within that system been changed with the demise of old industries and the rise of new ones. Whilst I accept this critique of the post-industrial concept, the crucial point here is that the post-industrial, late-capitalist concept has been accepted by the Disability Movement and therefore cannot be ignored.

This post-modernist thought has included Shakespeare (1997) with his emphasis on the cultural oppression of disabled people. Others such as Crow (1992), Abberley (1987) and Morris (1991) have argued for the reclaiming of impairment as a source of pride and identity, thereby enabling it to become a site of resistance. More recently Shakespeare and Watson have argued for the jettisoning of the social model entirely (2002). Mark Priestley (1998) explains how the social model so revised thus describes not a socio-economic construction of disability but a cultural one.

These revisions of the social model have not gone unchallenged because it leads the movement "a long way from analyzing the market economy" (Finkelstein) but they continue regardless. Priestley similarly criticises these revisions for failing to account

why disability "occurs in particular historical contexts" (1998). Nonetheless, Tregaskis (2002) has argued that these idealist revisions have been adopted in practice by activists, even if they haven't been fully accepted by the original (materialist) theorists of the social model.

The crucial point here is that an understanding of the social model, in a post-industrial and post-modern world, leads directly to separatism as a sectarian principle in two crucial ways – it denies a role for the wider working class and identifies all potential allies as oppressors.

No Role For the Working Class

If one accepts that capitalism has entered a distinctly new phase where class struggle is no longer the main focus of conflict within society then the working class are no longer the prime agents of progressive radical change (German, 1996). Lindsay German (1996) criticizes this conception of the working class, arguing that class is not a subjective matter, one of life-styles or occupational group. Instead class is an expression of the objective relation workers and bosses have to the means of production. Workers still have to sell their labour to those who own the means of production and this remains the fundamental conflict in society (German, 1996).

Nonetheless post-modern and post-industrial theorists have argued that the major division in society was no longer the

economic struggle between workers and the bosses, but instead the struggle for identity and hegemony between the oppressors and the oppressed (Priestley, 1999). Many commentators and theorists go as far as to argue that the trade union movement sits in opposition to such change (Boggs, 1986). Oliver accuses the trade unions of being racist, sexist and disablist (1990) and Francis Salt criticised Finkelstein for "harping back to 'working class struggle' ... [which is] irrelevant to the struggles many disabled people are engaged in." (Salt, 2002). The Disability Movement has never seriously looked to the trade unions and the working class as a source of solidarity.

Movements such as the anti-capitalist movement have expressed the centrality of the working class and have involved large delegations of trade unions at all its major events and protests (O'Brien, 2001). But if the ideology argues that the working class are not the agents for change and are therefore at best an irrelevance, why be involved?

All Non-Disabled People Are Oppressors

However the anti-capitalist movement has involved more than the organised working class, encompassing many other groups fighting oppression. The experience of disabled activists has generally not been positive when seeking to work with these other groups either. Brenda Ellis remarks:

"The lesbian and gay community doesn't want people like me there – we don't fit the body image. It is marginalisation within your own community."

Anne Rae, explains that her experience of trying to work with the black or women's groups has been a negative one. For example she reflects that:

"it has never been my experience that feminists have welcomed the inclusion of disability politics within the women's movement."

This criticism of other social movements struggling against oppression has been reflected in the academic discourse also. Feminist writers such as Morris (1991) and Thomas (Tregaskis, 2002) have noted that disability has been excluded from mainstream feminist analysis (Tregaskis, 2002). Likewise other theorists such as Swain and French (2000) and Vernon (1997) have "exposed the potential for those conventionally seen as oppressed to themselves, in turn, become the oppressors of others" (Tregaskis, 2002, p466).

The post-modernist and idealist discourse which runs through much of the contemporary writings on disability (Barnes, 1999) has an explanation for why this is. If disability was a construction of cultural oppression (Shakespeare, 1997), not rooted within material circumstances, then you are left with a socio-biological cause of disabling attitudes and culture. For Shakespeare disabled

people are considered as 'other' feared and loathed by society based upon a masculine norm "which is the real focus of concerns with potency, with supremacy and with domination" (1997, p235). Thus non-disabled people fear us because it is natural for them to do so.

Barnes (1997) criticises this for its fatalism "making the struggle for real and meaningful change ... doomed to failure" (1997, p12). If it is inherent for non-disabled people to hate disabled people then this can never be changed. This not only explains the futility of such idealist concepts that ignore materialist contexts, but also explains why separatism becomes a sectarian principle. If all non-disabled people are our oppressors (and always will be) then there can be no benefit from uniting with them. The task in hand is to make non-disabled people bend to our will. This involves empowering disabled people, winning civil rights, reclaiming a positive identity and a disability culture. It does not involve alliances with anyone.

This idealist conception of disability however had another, related, impact on the movement. It not only encourages separation from other oppressed groups, it also encourages an ideological separation between the effects of disability and its capitalist causes, and hence from an anti-capitalist perspective.

5. Beyond Theory

As we explained above the idealist constructs of disability increasingly held sway over the movement. Civil rights fitted perfectly with this construction of disability. The capitalist system was increasingly not seen as the cause of disability, but where any link did remain there was a common realisation that it could not be changed – the defeats for the Left in the 1980's and the fall of the Berlin Wall made sure of that. The subsequent rightward shift in society Ken Davis explained had an impact, as the disability movement:

“moved away from its left-ish view as to where the source of our problems lay to a centrist or right wing view. [It] was accepting the change in British society in terms of individualisation and managerialism.”

The neo-liberal victory meant that people only had rights to rely on to protect them:

“Labour Party dropped the nationalisation clause, . . . the defeat of the miners and the privatisation of services. . . as you start to dismantle services and privatise them, the rights approach is needed otherwise you have anarchy.”

(Finkelstein)

The civil rights strategy appeared at first to be a great success. The Rights Now campaign thrust disability politics into the public

consciousness for the first time. Thousands of disabled people were mobilised by the campaign, forcing the Government to concede the Disability Discrimination Act which was considered to be at least a partial victory (Hurst, 2002).

New Social Movement theory suggests that the movement should have been at the peak of its influence. Disabled people were still oppressed. They had undoubtedly enhanced their collective identity, empowerment and pride through the Rights Now campaign. All the motivations that Melucci (Barker et al, 2001) discusses as the prerequisite for a vibrant movement were still there. But in many important ways the movement no longer was. The campaign for civil rights rumbled on but as Brenda Ellis explains, "Since the legislation came in you couldn't get people to a lobby for love nor money."

Alienated Leadership, Disempowered Membership

The interviewees identified a central problem facing the disability movement, that by focussing on the campaign for civil rights the leadership simultaneously alienated itself from and disempowered the grass-roots of the movement.

A campaign for civil rights needs an active membership in so far as it needs bodies on protests and postcards sent to MP's. However in another way this made for a very passive membership. Lobbying MP's became a role for experts once again and those in the leading positions within the movement were soon thrust into such

a role. The struggle became focussed not on the structures of power within society but inside them, in the corridors of parliament, disempowering members.

"To get rights you will have to lobby. To lobby you need expertise of a certain kind. You don't need grass roots membership ... That starts to alienate the membership."
(Finkelstein)

"[The] organisation became hivebound and insular and ... undermines the development of the movement. The power now stays in the hands of just a few people and that is quite wrong – understandable though." (Anne Rae)

"... the movement hasn't grown because it is stagnating. They control it, they suppress discussion, they don't encourage or train new people. If it doesn't move quite radically and we get new people in it will die and almost disappear." (Brenda Ellis)

Ideological Poverty

It crucially disempowered the grass-roots membership in another way however: ideologically. The idealist construction of disability that formed the basis for the civil rights 'all eggs in one basket approach' (Brown) clearly broke the theoretical link between disability and capitalism. For the leadership such questions were mere distraction from the campaign for civil rights and were never

discussed within the movement. The result was a grass-roots membership with only a very limited understanding of disability that had no link with its capitalist origins.

Anne Rae for example says:

"as a body there was no analysis of capitalism. There were people ... who were happy to discuss those issues, but for the movement as whole it just didn't happen."

Interviewees bemoaned the fact that the social model is little understood by most within the movement beyond the barest 'barriers approach'.

"People's understanding of the social model generally amounts to no more than ... 'disability is not our problem it is what society is doing to us'." (Finkelstein)

"people only understand it superficially as knocking down barriers, but it is so much more than that and so much more far reaching. It frustrates me completely that that full understanding has got lost for a contrite and superficial understanding. (Anne Rae)

The campaign did not ask people to question why civil rights was needed in the first place, why businesses would want to discriminate against disabled people, or why employers would not want to employ them. It did not challenge disabled people or their

non-disabled allies to question whether civil rights would deliver the mass of disabled people out of bread-line poverty.

In this way the campaign was creating passivity. The members were not encouraged to open a dialogue with the leadership, merely to respond with action. The poverty of an ideology is exposed when it at once both discourages debate about the strategy itself and leads to a general democratic passivity on the part of the wider movement.

No New Cadre

But why should an idealist conception of disability with its commensurate civil rights strategy result in the movement going so flat? Barker, Johnson and Lavalette (2001) urge us to understand the fluid nature of leadership, how it can shift to those who are able to best respond to changing circumstances, and to articulate this through action or argument within the movement. Why were the proponents of the radical social model, who had the ideological understanding of the shortcomings of the rights strategy, unable to step into the void and organise those grass-roots members who had been disillusioned by the civil rights strategy?

UPIAS would have been the obvious candidates for undertaking such a project. They had a long experience of building a strong ideological cadre that formed the backbone of the early disability movement, as Campbell explains:

“. . . [UPIAS] and its founders were so crucial for disabled people’s personal and then collective liberation.” (1997, p1)

But UPIAS by this stage had effectively ceased to exist. It had dissolved itself into the wider movement, unleashing a cadre of motivated, ideological and committed activists into local and national bodies, helping to build them from the ground up.

“Several Union members were involved in BCODP. The Union had a policy to get involved in local areas. . . These were very time consuming activities, as well as the BCODP. Being active in other organisations fitted in with our policy but there was no further development of the Union itself.

(Finkelstein)

Ken Davis explains how the ethos of the Union, education and debate, had to take a back seat when they became involved in BCODP:

“[the Union] provided a thrust for when members were back on their own patch and not just talking to each other we had so many discussion groups that we set up. We would discuss the nature of disability and the work to be done to eradicate disability. It wasn’t an easy task . . . taking that into an organization where the membership is in the hundreds is very difficult to do.”

The result however was that the 'left' within the leadership of BCODP became isolated and unable to resist the strategic shift to the rights campaign. Now there was little opportunity for radicals in the movement to provide coordinated resistance to the rightward shift. So when he and Dick Leaman were effectively shunned by the BCODP Committee, Finkelstien reflects why he didn't receive more support:

"There were a lot of Union members on the council at the time . . . but I don't think [they] understood the issues. I asked them afterwards why they didn't support us and they rightly said 'why didn't you discuss it with us beforehand?'"

Maggie Davis similarly reflected upon Anne Rae's criticism that she didn't receive support when trying to maintain democratic control over Richard Wood the new director of BCODP:

"Anne was quite critical . . . that Ken was so busy in Derbyshire and not giving her support. It was understandable and we don't blame her but Ken was very busy here."

The result was that those who had argued for the radical social interpretation of disability were soon neutralised and cut off from their leadership role.

"I never saw any minutes or anything. . . .I feel absolutely out of touch and alienated. Which is awful, after you were so involved." (Maggie Davis)

"After that I never heard from BCODP again. It was clearly a deliberate attempt to isolate the 'left'." (Finkelstein)

But possibly more importantly the demise of UPIAS has meant that there is no longer any organisation within the disability movement that has a clear understanding of the link between disability and capitalism. Nor is there an organisation that articulates a strategy that can both fight for reforms whilst simultaneously pursuing the ideological and active struggle for the greater prize, the overthrow of the capitalist system itself. There was no group able to coordinate an ideological rearguard action against the rightward shift the leadership was taking.

This was the legacy for movement at the start of this decade. New activists had been kept passive and when the campaigning was over there was little remaining of the movement. There was no strategy to build a cadre, a layer of activists armed with the ideological weapons you need to build and sustain a movement. The title "Where have all the activists gone?" (Lumb, 2000) could have been the refrain for the movement when it appeared in the GMCDP Coalition magazine.

So we can see how all this would lead the movement to ignore the growing anti-capitalist movement and subsequent anti-war movement. Effectively it had taken a conscious decision to leave the radical social model behind in favour of the opportunist campaign for civil rights which more fitted the post-modern, post-

industrial idealist conception of the social model that it had bought into (Finkelstein, 2001). The 'success' of the Rights Now campaign masked the reality, that the movement was not sinking roots and tying disabled people into a wider movement and a wider struggle. By the time the anti-capitalist movement came along the movement had forgotten its own anti-capitalist origins.

However the shift towards understanding disability as an idealist construct and the focus on civil rights entailed a commitment to reformism, both ideologically and strategically. This too had a role to play in preventing engagement with the anti-capitalist movement.

6. The Ideology and Practice of Reformism

I have shown in the preceding chapters how the disability movement has bought into the post-modernist, idealist constructs of the social model of disability. The result was a movement that orientated itself towards seeking to ameliorate the worst effects of the system whilst ignoring the forces and mechanism which caused the oppression and discrimination in the first place. Such a strategy is necessarily reformist, utilising the existing structures of power and control. Such a strategy is however not neutral in the impact it has on the movement.

In Chapter Two I explained how the New Social Movement theory considers contemporary movements to be inherently self-limiting, actively seeking incorporation rather than the overthrow of the social order (Priestley, 1999). To win what has become a battle of ideas, some organisations may choose to 'win a seat at the table', others may opt for greater autonomy and emphasise direct action (Dalton, et al, 1990). Zarb and Oliver (1989) have argued that the disability movement has sought to straddle both of these options and in doing so has maintained its revolutionary edge. The experience of the disability movement over the last decade would suggest otherwise.

Co-option

The disability movement has had many links with the Labour Party as Brenda Ellis explains:

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"The movement is full of Labour Party people who still have faith that it will change things. You can tell who the Labour Party people are. It holds them back really. I have never felt that 'you are one us'. If I joined the Labour Party I am sure I would be right in there."

The disability movement expected the Labour Party to deliver on civil rights when it defeated the Tories in 1997. The close relationship that leaders of the Disability Movement has developed with the Labour Party were demonstrated when Jane Campbell, Rachel Hurst, Richard Wood, Caroline Gooding and Joe Mann were invited to sit on the Disability Rights Taskforce alongside the representatives of big business and charities (DWP,2003).

Finkelstein had foreseen such developments however:

"The more that the rights people mixed with the parliament lobby, the more they get to know them, the more rewards they get, the more important they feel. A separation begins."

It speaks volumes for a movement when its widest read publication, the GMCDP magazine devotes an issue to the question of "Selling Out" (Lumb, 2003). However another feature of reformism is the move towards service provision. The increase in the number of CIL's around the country providing a range of direct payments, peer support and advocacy related services (Barnes, Mercer and Morgan, 2000) also had a major coopting effect on the

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movement's leading activists; politically separating them from the rank and file membership of the movement.

"I think that is partly because money has taken away from the movement many of the most effective people in the movement . . . Lots of well paid jobs opened up for disabled people ... but it weakened the movement ... they started to say that they now saw the larger picture and their views started to change somewhat. The money has corrupted the united front of disabled people." (Anne Rae)

". . . [they] want to keep control of a safe small unchallenging organisation, terrified of their funders seeing them as too radical." (Anne Rae)

The separation was not just political however, but also practical. Disabled people now ensconced in paid work or management committees found their freedom for militancy was constrained, by time and money.

"The success of getting grant aid is a two-edged sword. You land yourself with an administrative role." (Ken Davis)

Charitable status which many disabled people's organisations opted for out of financial necessity has also been a political ball and chain. When considering why disabled people's organisations haven't been more involved in the anti-war movement, Finkelstein comments:

"[they] are prevented by having charitable status. You would expect BCODP to have done so but I suspect this is because of charitable status."

Hence how could those coopted into the policy making process and service provision engage with anti-capitalist ideas and events? The ideas of the anti-capitalist movement were themselves a challenge to the market reformism strategy which had won them those exalted advisory roles. If you were are a local or national activist recruited to run a user-led service would you jeopardise the funding by campaigning alongside the anti-capitalists? Given your workload would you even have the time?

Reformism drags people into the polity, encouraging cooptees to identify common interest between the system and the movement. Those who do not conform are quickly passed over for those who do. The independence that Oliver and Zarb (1989) argued was possible hasn't proved quite so manageable in practice.

What to do when you lose?

Brenda Ellis describes the importance and success of the Rights Now! Campaign:

"I thought it was a really good campaign. I think it is fundamental to the whole way the movement is organised ... People came from all over because they felt it was a real

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focus and it was. It had to be, we had to get legislation, it was a big part of our struggle."

But for the disability movement civil rights had become the goal and this it at least partially achieved. Hence according to the reformist measure this was an unmitigated progress. Brenda Ellis puts her finger on the problem with this analysis:

"I do think that people thought that civil rights would give more than it would in reality. It wouldn't provide decent care or independent living services nor be able to park in central London. But your average punter thought that. But it hasn't been the case."

As a movement you have a problem when the leadership's strategy doesn't deliver the benefits they have promised. The reality of disabled people's lives hasn't changed, as Brenda Ellis suggested. The vast majority of new build housing continues to be inaccessible to disabled people (JRF, 2003). They increasingly live in poverty (JRF, 2000). They continue to be systematically excluded from the workforce (Russell, 2002; Roulstone, 2002).

On top of that realisation the Labour Party then added insult to injury. It was not long however before the Labour Government began its assault on disabled people. It cut disabled people's benefits, it accused many more of fraudulently claiming them (Disability Now, 2001). It continued to emasculate public services

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and those public personal care services that were left were increasingly charged for (2001).

As a reformist leader of a movement, closely tied to the Labour Party, what do you do when that party not only fails to deliver on tackling disabled people's exclusion and marginalisation, but continues to pursue neo-liberal policies that further undermine disabled people's financial security and independence? How do you explain such setbacks to the movement?

The leadership has had no way of understanding these continued attacks on disabled people and can offer no answer to them. The BCODP newsletter and you find no mention of campaigns it is launching about the treatment of disabled asylum seekers, of the privatisation of public services, or the cuts in wages of disabled people working for Remploy (Kelly, 2003). Instead we have the "People's Parliament" proposal which has encountered widespread scorn from activists within the movement:

"Most people I have talked to think it is a joke." (Finkelstein)

"Why are we setting up yet another organisation that will be saying bugger all and making disabled people look stupid?"
(Maggie Davis)

The result of such a strategy and the failure to effectively respond to defeats is explained by Finkelstein:

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"The grass roots are becoming leaderless. So in this climate people are getting very dissatisfied but unclear about where to go. . . As it stands at the moment I think the BCODP is effectively dead; less and less relevant."

Reformism as an ideology and strategy conceives that liberation and equality, in this case for disabled people, comes from the continual and gradual struggle for reforms. Its critical problem is that when reforms are won or lost it cannot conceive of the bigger picture – reforms gained are simply successes, reforms lost are simply defeats. This narrow conception can be sheltered from reality when reforms are being won but this is not so easy when you experience defeats.

Rosa Luxemburg provides us with an important understanding about the nature of reforms with her analogy to the Labour of Sisyphus (Frölich, 1994). Luxemburg likened the struggle for reforms to pushing a rock up the hill – as soon as your will slackens so the rock falls back down the hill. Reforms are seen for what they are; temporary in nature, a reflection of the balance of the class forces at that point in time (Frölich, 1994).. To win reforms is good, for themselves and for the confidence it can bring to those who collectively achieved them. However more importantly fighting for reforms are part of a process. Hence to evaluate the success of a campaign for a reform a revolutionary would ask: "how has this victory helped us in our ultimate purpose to overthrow the system – has our movement emerged stronger or weaker?"

This is what Finkelstein, Anne Rae and Ken and Maggie Davis understood when they argued against the civil rights strategy. By emphasising this above all else would the movement be strengthened or weakened? Ken Davis for example describes what happened:

“. . . once the civil rights focus was taken up in people's heads as something to fight for it drew people towards that centre-right point of view as to what the movement was for. All that was needed of the movement was to win legislation that would protect individuals from a horrible society.”

They understood that civil rights was not the solution, only a part of the solution, but how this understanding was not generally held across the movement. We saw in the previous chapter how the leadership made no attempt to widen this understanding. For the leadership however the depth of understanding was not a means of measuring the success of the campaign.

“where you are dealing with the effects, getting rid of barriers and people can see those barriers coming down, it has been easier to deal with effects. People assume that is the same as dealing with the cause but it isn't.” (Ken Davis)

A revolutionary approach to the struggle for reforms allows you to keep your successes and defeats in context and understand why the attacks from a Labour Government continue. Reforms can only

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ever ameliorate the effects of a disabling society yet leave capitalism as a system untouched. Capitalism is still there, alive and kicking, and kicking disabled people hard. However despite the failure of reformism the leaders who advocated it and carried it out are in no position to break from it – they are wedded to the system ideologically and coopted to it institutionally. They will not lead the movement into alliances with those who would seek to challenge the capitalist system itself.

In contrast, Brenda Ellis understands the anti-capitalist imperative:

“The state is the main oppressor and international monopoly capital. We are part of that – but it is about how do you get from disability to anti-imperialism?”

It is time for the leadership to pass into new hands, to those who can better understand and adapt to the reality (Barker et al, 2001):

“we need to go back to the social model and really try to understand it this time... the Disability Movement needs to disintegrate a bit further in order to sift out the different elements. But disintegration such as this also gives birth to something new and people are in the process of working through this.” (Finkelstein)

7. External Barriers

We have considered what we could loosely describe as the ideological, structural and organisational barriers within the disability movement itself that prevent an engagement with the anti-capitalist movement. However there are other barriers external to the disability movement, many of which have already been thoroughly explained in other contexts by theorists such as Oliver (1990) and Barnes (1991). Furthermore, other barriers are also erected by organisations in the anti-capitalist movement itself. As these lay outside of the disability movement's control, towards which this study is primarily orientated, I will consider them only briefly here. This should not however infer any lesser importance be given to them.

Resources, Resources, Resources

The whole body of work on the social interpretation of disability has been based on the premise that disabled people are systematically marginalised and excluded from mainstream society (Finkelstein, 1976). A range of factors create this reality, not all of which are universally accepted or given the same degree of emphasis by disability theorists who have approached the exclusion from varying ideological standpoints (Barnes, 1997). However the result that disabled people are amongst the poorest section of society is not in dispute.

When faced with the idea of travelling to an unfamiliar city several hundred miles away for a three day conference you are immediately faced with problems of finance, transport, accommodation, personal support, and information – and that is before you have even thought about attending the conference itself and joining in the debates. Hence when asked about the prospects for disabled people participating in the anti-capitalist events, such as in Florence or Paris interviewees are obviously quick to respond:

“Most disabled people are struggling to survive day by day. You can’t think about world capitalism if you can’t get out of the house.” (Finkelstein)

“You would need people to pay for it!” (Brenda Ellis)

Internalised Oppression

Much has also been written about the way the structural barriers in society impact upon the individual. Barnes and Mercer explain that the consequences of internalised oppression “all too often leads to lowered self-esteem and self-confidence, and a significant withdrawal from everyday social interaction.” (2003, p17).

Anne Rae illustrates how this internalised oppression impacts on disabled people.

"Our lack of self-respect makes us reticent to put ourselves into an arena where we may be rejected. Groucho Marx's assertion that I wouldn't want to join a club that would accept me, I think that is also sometimes at the back of a disabled person's mind."

After listing all the barriers disabled people would face to attend an anti-capitalist conference she then remarks:

"Some of us are hard nosed enough to say stuff, that we still want to be there. Pretty intimidating for those more tender soles who have not become immersed or experienced of awfulness of group rejection. It can be very grim."

What about them?

It would be no surprise if anti-capitalist meetings were held in inaccessible buildings without interpreters or personal assistants. The publicity promoting the events are generally inaccessible and certainly rarely, if ever, explain the access arrangements. The disabled people's movement, if it were to be involved in these wider movements would have to make demands. Brenda Ellis for example found that although she was involved in the anti-war movement:

"You try and get info off the sods you never hear from them again."

But potentially a larger barrier when it comes to getting involved in wider movements is the attitude and awareness of those you are seeking to work with. Ken Davis explains the problems he and Maggie Davis had when trying to influence service provision in Derbyshire Council:

“. . . it was an uphill struggle against a lot of interests such as trade unions and politicians. People's jobs were affected and so there was a reaction against what DCIL was trying to do. It was characterised as part of Thatcher's project of individualism. That was not what it was about at all."

Historically the Left has had a paternalistic attitude towards disabled people, as Paul Brown explains about his involvement in the Labour Party and in Militant:

"There was the tradition of paternalism, the idea that disabled people would be properly looked after when we have socialism."

However there was cause for optimism, Paul argued.

The issue of disability wasn't really discussed but it is good that it is now. There is a shift in the anti-capitalist movement which is to have a meeting at the European Social Forum on disability. I think this is because so many disabled people have been involved in it."

Chapter 8: Making Engagement a Reality

It is to this optimism that I now want to turn in more detail. We have considered the barriers to greater engagement, but what of the benefits and the solutions?

8. Making Engagement a Reality

I outlined earlier that my intention with this study was not merely to describe and explain the disability movement's lack of engagement with the anti-capitalist movement. My hope was by so doing I could chart a path by which this engagement could become a reality. I therefore have two tasks here. Firstly I have to make the case for further engagement. Secondly I must propose a strategy that can overcome the barriers I have explored in this study.

How then would participation in such a movement be of benefit to the disability movement in Britain? Finkelstein for one doesn't accept there would be benefits:

"I think the anti-capitalist movement is liberal anarchic and won't go anywhere. It hasn't got structure to take it forward. I think that for the radical disability movement that is emerging ... it isn't an issue for them to join the anti-capitalist groups and be swamped at the moment... My view is that the anti-capitalist movement would run out of steam because it has no alternative for the kind of society that it wants."

Finkelstein raises important criticisms of the movement here. Certainly it has both 'liberal' and 'anarchic' elements which Callinicos(2003) identifies. These are certainly the elements that get most media coverage. The so-called "Black Bloc" and the 'tute blanche' grab the headlines, often covered in padding standing up to the police violence (Callinicos, 2003). They emphasise

horizontal networks of independent yet coordinated groupings (Klein, 2000; Danaher and Burbach, 2000). The Liberals that Finkelstein identifies are what Callinicos defines as the 'localist' strand – those who emphasise fair-trade and ethical local production (Callinicos, 2003). These achieve prominence through their links to major Non-Governmental Organisations and the contributions of journalists such as George Monbiot in the Guardian.

However to describe the anti-capitalist movement by reference solely to these elements would be like suggesting that the disability movement could be summed up by reference to the Direct Action Network and RADAR. In both cases the movement is so much more. The anti-capitalist protests have involved hundreds of thousands of trade unionists, peace activists, socialists, anti-racist groups to name but a few. The revolutionary socialist bloc within the movement is a minority but growing in size and influence (Callinicos, 2003).

The structure of the movement is certainly loose. It would be amazing if it were anything else given the wide range of organisations that comprise it with their multifarious traditions of organising. However the move towards the social forums being established around the globe is the beginnings of the movement coalescing (Gonzalez, 2002). The events or conferences involve tens of thousands of delegates who through debate and discussion are starting to articulate a common voice for the movement (Gonzalez, 2002).

Another central criticism of Finkesltein is that the anti-capitalist movement doesn't know what it would put in the place of capitalism. Maggie Davis echoes Finkesltein's concern here. She says:

"not that it knows what it wants to do next. Maybe if had a clearer idea of what it wanted, disabled people would see the pay-off that would include them."

Ken Davis, however, rightly responds:

"but we should be in there helping to shape what its goals should be."

This too the anti-capitalist movement has started to discuss. The forthcoming European Social Forum in Paris this autumn will involve many discussions about what a world without capitalism could be like and how we could shape its future. Influential theorists from within the movement are have begun to describe their visions for a post-capitalist society, whether it be Albert's "Parecon" (2003), George Monbiot's "Age of Consent" (2003), or Devine's "Negotiated Coordination" (Callinicos, 2003). The will also be a forum specifically focussing on disability.

One is tempted to say that it would be just like the disability movement to sit aside from the anti-capitalist movement, let it develop its own ideas about what society should be like and then

Chapter 8: Making Engagement a Reality

criticise them for not including disabled people in that vision. However it is hoped that can be avoided. We have established earlier that there is clear link between disability and capitalism, certainly within the radical social model and sections of the disability movement. Paul Brown is very clear in his support for greater engagement with the anti-capitalist movement:

"If you see the roots of disability in capitalism then it raises fundamental questions of relevance ... the organisations in the disability movement should be involved but they aren't, individual [disabled people] are however, there's no doubt."

There are two important ways that interviewees identified that engagement could benefit the disability movement. Firstly in what would have to happen if it were to engage would be of benefit to the movement itself – the process of debate and organisation. The second is the benefits the engagement itself would bring – the flow of ideas, sharing of experience and struggles. Looking at each in turn.

To effectively argue for engagement with the anti-capitalist movement would necessitate challenging the idealist conception of disability and a return to the radical social interpretation of disability. A reaffirmation of the origins of disability in the capitalist mode of production. Ken and Maggie Davis recognise this when they suggest that a pre-requisite would have to be "communication between disabled people" and a "debate" the movement about the causes of disability. Ken Davis adds with a measure of

anticipation: "that would set a few demons loose inside the system."

Anne Rae agrees:

"Being part of that is essential. Partly for our benefit. If we joined in with kind of philosophy we would all be understanding our position so much more clearly than we are in the movement now."

It would entail organising a network of radical activists within the movement who could not only argue for an anti-capitalist outlook within the movement but also create examples that others could follow – to become the new leaders of for new radical grouping. They would need to challenge the ESF organisers to make the events accessible. They would have to attend the ESF and argue for disability to be at the centre of any visioning of a future society and to involve disabled people in that process. It would involve challenging separatist strategies within the disability movement and paternalism whenever it raised its head in the anti-capitalist movement. In short to win engagement would involve dismantling those characteristics of both movements that not only prevent engagement but hold the movements back in other ways too.

The benefits that would come from the engagement itself almost speak for themselves once you approach the issue from a position of an anti-capitalist attitude to the struggle for disabled people's liberation. It would do no harm if some of the vibrancy of the anti-

capitalist movement rubbed-off onto the disability movement. As Brenda Ellis argues:

"You would be part of a broader movement. Not just 'why can't I get on a bus?' or 'are my care services being charged for?'"

It would certainly be to the benefit of disabled people if those involved in the anti-capitalist movement were won to our cause, not through our arguments but the experience of seeing us as the best fighters for all oppressed groups. It would certainly be of benefit if the politics of the anti-capitalist movement could fertilise the discussions and academic discourse in the 'disability world' in Britain.

To give the final word here to Anne Rae who sums up the imperative for engagement:

"Until we get some strong people prepared to take on these issues and fight the movement in order to be heard I don't know how fast it is going to happen. One day people will wake up and smell the coffee – if we don't take action we really are going to slip down the genetic plug hole with the help of the likes of Tom Shakespeare."

9. Conclusion

I have attempted here to analyse a movement. It is a movement that has at its best been able to motivate thousands of disabled people into activity, to challenge society to reflect on the way it excludes and marginalises disabled people, to win reforms for the benefit of millions of disabled people. It has empowered thousands of disabled people to shed the yoke of internalised oppression and fight back. At its worst it has descended into in-fighting, recrimination and the worst kind of sectarianism. It is as diverse as any social movement, black, women, gays and lesbians, have all been inspired by the social model of disability - the concept that has bonded them together.

My analysis has involved a considerable amount of criticism of leading members of the movement – a movement of which I have been proud to have been a part. I hope to have criticised in a fraternal and constructive manner. I know that my part in the movement has been tiny as compared to those I have criticised. Nonetheless I believe that I have shown, with the insights given to me by some of the leading radical activists within the movement over the last 30 or so years, that there are serious problems faced by the movement. The question I have posed in this paper is a benchmark for the movement. The anti-capitalist movement has been a beacon for millions of oppressed people the world over, non-disabled and disabled alike. It has involved sections of almost every contemporary social movement you could name – bar one. The disability movement stands apart from a project that for the

first time in a generation poses a serious challenge to system we identify as the cause of our exclusion and oppression. Unlike the movements of the sixties or the thirties the anti-capitalist movement is truly global. It offers a global challenge to global capital.

I hope to have identified the reasons why the disability movement has failed to engage with this anti-capitalist phenomenon – ideologically, structurally or practically. I have sought to track the ideological currents within the movement that separated it off from the wider struggles in society. I noted how the idealist conceptions of the social model that have gained credence within the movement have led to a dead-end sectarianism. An attitude that all non-disabled people are our oppressors and benefit from our exclusion is palpable within the movement. Such an attitude can only lead to the conclusion that non-disabled people would be acting unnaturally and against their own interests if they were to support our cause.

However I have also criticised the separatist strategy argued for by those I would usually identify most closely with within the movement. The argument that we must first understand and articulate our own oppression and a strategy to liberate ourselves is a strong one. But I hope to to have shown that the time for that is surely now past. To continue to cut ourselves off is to miss an opportunity in a lifetime. Certainly there has not been another one like this in my lifetime. Engagement and unity with those with

which we have common cause provides us with so many more possibilities than it does risks.

But the reasons why the movement has been unable to move beyond separatism and engage with the anti-capitalist movement go deeper still, into the heart of the movement itself. Again I identify the post-modernist idealist constructions of disability as the main cause of the movement's problems. By denying the link between the capitalist mode of production and the oppression of disabled people they lose the means to win liberation. As the proponents of the radical social model have been eased out of their leadership positions and sidelined by organisations such as BCODP, this idealist conception has won through. It informs the movement's ideology, strategy and activity. No longer are activists encouraged to question the causes of oppression, only the effects. No longer are members encouraged to believe that another world is possible, only to ameliorate the effects of this one. The result is a movement that cannot explain to disabled people why despite anti-discrimination legislation they still experience discrimination every day of their lives. Nor can the movement understand why its greatest success has led to a movement that is fragmented and leaderless. Nor why it has no new layer of energised activists champing at the bit to participate in its People's Parliament. It is no wonder that such a movement has seen the anti-capitalist movement an irrelevance despite its proclamations about the social model.

I have considered how the reformist strategy has impacted upon the movement as a whole, and in particular its leadership and its grass-roots. Many of the leaders have become coopted personally into positions of authority inside the system, denuding themselves of the ability to lead a radical movement. Others have found their time and political space constrained by the demands of service provision. The anti-capitalist movement is too politically threatening for those who have been so coopted.

The blame however I have acknowledged cannot be laid firmly at the door of the disability movement's leadership. There are very real barriers to disabled people's involvement in any movement (including the disabled people's movement) let alone one which is so fluid and international in nature as the anti-capitalist movement. The lack of financial resources and internalised oppression weigh heavy on those considering tasting the atmosphere and ideas at the anti-capitalist events.

I have also challenged the anti-capitalist movement and the Left more generally. If they are serious about uniting all those who suffer under capitalism under the slogan "Another World Is Possible", they must make it possible. They must make their events accessible. They must make travel the extra mile to include disabled people when planning their events and planning the alternative to this world. They must shed any paternalistic attitudes they may have and listen to what disabled have to say. By doing so they will learn something new about how capitalism crushes diversity.

I also hope to have provided a few pointers to how this current deadlock can be broken. I have argued that a network of disabled people, committed to an anti-capitalist understanding of the social model of disability can change both movements. Their task would not be easy but the benefits make it worthwhile. They need to organise for a serious intervention by disabled people into the European Social Forum in Paris. The need to ensure that the event delivers on its commitment to be accessible and inclusive. It must argue within the movement for an anti-capitalist perspective and involve the grass-roots not only in activity but also in articulating how they would want a post-capitalist society to be organised. This can be the beginnings of building a new cadre of radical disabled activists and in time possibly a radical revitalised disability movement as well.

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Appendix A: Interview Request Letter

Jules Horsler
55 St Martin's Road
Leeds
LS7 3LU

0113 262 0608
julesnina@ntlworld.com

3rd March 2003

Dear _____,

Subject: Request for Research Interview

I am a postgraduate at Leeds University studying for an MA in Disability Studies. My dissertation supervisor, Prof. Colin Barnes, has suggested that I contact you both in the hope that you will be able to assist me with my dissertation by agreeing to be interviewed (in person or by post / email).

For my dissertation I am investigating why the 'Disabled People's Movement' (DPM) has been so little involved in the Anti-Capitalist / Anti-Globalisation Movement (ACM). By the DPM I am referring to the 'radical' social model-motivated organisations and disabled individuals. And by the ACM I refer to the protest movements that have sprung up around the globe to protest against organisations such as the WTO, IMF, G8 etc.

The radical DPM is founded on ideas that either clearly posit the origins of disability within capitalism itself or at least cite capitalism as a modern day catalyst and means for systematic disability oppression. Given this, my central concern is how a movement such as the ACM that has brought so many other movements and struggles together against a 'common enemy' could have so singularly passed the DPM by. What is the reason for this? Is it ideological, structural, cultural, practical or just accidental? Can it be turned around? Should it be turned around?

Appendix A: Interview Request Letter

I am a disabled person who has been active in the DPM for several years, and more recently an activist within the Anti-Capitalist Movement. I have noticed that the two movements have very little overlap or common membership, let alone common debates or interaction. My intention for the research is to identify the reasons, the barriers if you like, to greater engagement by the DPM within the ACM, and thereby to hope to change the reality. [I would also like to study the problem the other way round from the ACM perspective, but the confines of an MA dissertation won't allow for this.]

In the last few weeks we have seen disabled people active in the DPM join the anti-war protests and set up their own anti-war groups. This I believe is a reason for hope that the DPM will increasingly interact with other struggles with which its interests so clearly lie.

I am intending to investigate the problem through a series of interviews (probably five) with 'key informants': leading theorists and activists within the radical DPM. If you agree, in principle, to be interviewed I would preferably arrange to meet with you, but if that is not possible I could conduct the interview by post / email. Either way I would send you my main interview questions in advance along with my research outline which would detail how I would intend to conduct and use the research. I intend to conduct the interviews themselves around May and June, but would of course be as flexible as possible to fit with your preferences and availability. I anticipate that the interviews (in person) would take about an hour and a half and I would be happy to travel to a place / venue of your choice (given wheelchair access).

I hope you will be able to assist me with my research. The experiences and perspectives of those who have been central to building the DPM through the 1970's, 1980's and more recently, both organisationally and ideologically, I believe will be crucial to understanding what needs to change.

I look forward to hearing you.

Many thanks and best wishes,

Jules Horsler

Appendix B: Interview Outline

<p>Disability Politics and Anti-Capitalism – Bridging the Divide?</p>
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**A dissertation research project for an MA in Disability
Studies by Julian Horsler**
Spring / Summer 2003

Interview Outline

INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

The interview will be semi-structured in that the questions listed below will direct the discussion. However I would also like to be able explore issues raised by the interviewees. I anticipate that interviewees will have their own ideas and suggestions to make and would want to give as much scope for that as possible, given the constraints of time and the research aims.

I intend for the interviews to take approximately one and a half hours (although I haven't been able to test the questions in a real interview scenario). The interview will be recorded onto minidisc and then summarised onto computer file. Audio cassette copies of the interviews will be sent to interviewees for comment / alteration prior to analysis. I will also be making short notes as an aid to memory. These will not be used other than to assist me in the interview and when reviewing the recording.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Brief Biography

- What has your involvement in the Disability Movement been?

- What organisations, events, campaigns, publications have you been involved in or contributed towards? In what positions? When was this?

2. The Disability Movement

- What do you consider to be the Disability Movement?
- What is your view of the movement?
- How important is the social model of disability to the Disability Movement?
- What are the strengths of the Disability Movement?
- What are the weaknesses of the Disability Movement?
- How has it changed? Why has it changed? What are the external factors?
- What are the prospects for the movement? How do you see it changing? What do you think it will be like, what will it be doing? What can it achieve?

3. Disability and Capitalism

- What in your view is the relationship between disability and capitalism?
(Will there always be disability under capitalism?)
- What is the view of the Disability Movement about this relationship?
 - Its activists / organisations / leadership?

4. Disability and Anti-Capitalism?

- What is your opinion of the Anti-Capitalist Movement? Its events? Its methods? Its organisations and structures? Its aims? Its prospects?
- What relevance do you think the Anti-Capitalist Movement has to the Disability Movement?
- What relevance do you think the Disability Movement has to the Anti-Capitalist Movement?
- Has the Anti-Capitalist Movement reached out to disabled people in your view? Has it involved them?
- Has the Anti-Capitalist Movement been discussed within the Disability Movement? Has any part of Disability Movement **engaged** with the Anti-Capitalist Movement? If so how and why?

- Why has the Disability Movement not been more **engaged** with the anti-capitalist movement? What are the barriers? What are the incentives?

5. The Anti-War Movement

- What did you think about the anti-war movement?
- Did the Disability Movement discuss it? What was its response to it? Did it **engage** with it?
- What were the barriers to **engagement**? What were the incentives?

Appendix C: Biographies

Victor Finkelstein

A political refugee from South Africa, Victor Finkelstein came to the UK in 1968. He soon found that his freedom was severely restricted as it was under Apartheid, only this time in a disabling 'free' liberal democracy. Disillusioned by the pressure group politics of the Disablement Income Group and Disability Alliance, Finkelstein linked with other disabled activists, notably Paul and Judy Hunt, and helped to found the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). Members of UPIAS spent several years debating and articulating a social interpretation of disability which Finkelstein outlined in the "Fundamental Principles of Disability" (1976). This later formed the basis for Mike Oliver's "social model of disability" which is today the defining concept of the disability movement. In subsequent years Finkelstein was central to the moves to establish a national umbrella network of disabled people's organisations, what became the British Council of Disabled People. He served on the national committee of BCODP throughout the 1980's until his resignation as Chairperson. Finkelstein has worked with Anne Rae and others to approach the Arts Board for funding and helped to found the London Disability Arts Forum. Finkelstein continues to intervene in the central debates within the movement, warning against the focus given to civil rights and the revision of the social model. He is a regular contributor to publications such as Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People's house magazine "Coalition".

Anne Rae

An activist in the Disability Movement for over 35 years, Anne Rae was soon radicalised by her own experience and those around her. She found that her politics did not fit with the Disabled Drivers Association nor the Spastics Society, but found an ideological home in UPIAS with the likes of Vic Finkelstein, Paul and Judy Hunt, Ken and Maggie Davis. She has been a long-time leading member of BCODP, serving in a number of roles including secretary. When Anne Rae moved to London she linked with Vic Finkelstein and Sian Vasey to secure the funding for the London Disability Arts Board. She was a grass-roots activist with Greenwich Association of Disabled People, establishing a Womens Group, before moving to Manchester and throwing herself into the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People where she delivered Disability Action Training and wrote Coalition News. A strong critic of the current leadership of the disability movement and revisionism of the social model, Anne Rae continues to play an influential role as "commentator on disability issues".

Ken Davis

Ken Davis first became involved in disability politics in the 1960's with the Disablement Income Group but quickly found he had major differences of opinion with their politics and attitude towards disabled people. His experience of living in institutionalised residential setting was exacerbated when he met his future partner, Maggie. Whilst struggling to find finding suitable accommodation where they could leave an independent life together they responded to Paul Hunt's letter in the Guardian and joined the fledgling UPIAS. He became radicalised and politicised through the internal debates of UPIAS. He helped establish the first Disability Information Advice Line (in a cloakroom with a phone and a photocopier), which he later developed into a national network of DIAL's up and down the country. With other UPIAS members he helped to establish the BCODP (serving on the national committee in its early years) and locally founded the Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People. Having articulated the "Seven Needs", he later was critical to winning the funding to develop the Derbyshire Centre for Independent Living which adopted the "Seven Needs" as a practical means of implementing the Social Model.

Maggie Davis

After becoming disabled Maggie Davis found herself in Stoke Mandeville hospital where she found all her aspirations were constrained by its regime. She quickly made a name herself by standing up for people and "getting into trouble". It was whilst at Stoke Mandeville that she responded to Paul Hunt's letter in the Guardian, noting that it was "like someone holding out a hand to save me", the realisation that she was not alone in experiencing oppression and prejudice. She joined UPIAS and contributed to the internal circulars that she would not have been allowed to see in hospital if they were not secret. Her first demonstration was against disabled South African athletes at Stoke Mandeville. Maggie was instrumental in winning the building of the Grove Road flats and helped to establish the country's first DIAL, and the Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People. She then began to get heavily involved in the local Community Health Council, campaigning to prevent the building of more young chronic sick units and to raise awareness of the social model of disability.

Brenda Ellis

After a long history in the Women's Movement, Brenda Ellis joined Greater London Action on Disability in 1993 as Women's Officer, later becoming their Head of Policy and currently is the Director of Policy and Projects. She also became involved in Disability Action Lambeth. She quickly involved herself in grass-roots activity and direct action, in particular campaigning for the

establishment of a Centre for Integrated Living, lobbying Tesco's for access improvements, storming Lambeth Council demanding the ringfencing of social services budgets for disabled people and campaigning to defend the travel "Freedom Pass" for mental health service users / survivors. She was also involved in a Women's discussion group with Lois Keith and Jenny Morris, and regularly contributes to Boadecia (a unique national disabled women's newsletter). She has been an active socialist and anti-imperialist, supporting the anti-war movement.

Paul Brown

A former student of the Blind School in Edinburgh, Paul Brown has always been heavily involved in radical political activism. He became politicised with the Miners Strike and the campaign against Apartheid in the 1980's, fighting for solidarity with both causes from an early age. The fact that the ANC recognised the rights of disabled people in its constitution was not lost on Paul. At Dundee University he developed his disability activism; establishing a disabled students group, campaigning for improved facilities for disabled students, leading disability debates at NUS conference and being elected as the NUS Equalities Officer. He did not neglect his other political commitments however and helped build the protests against the poll tax. He was arrested on the anti-poll tax march from Glasgow to London and experienced the disabling attitudes of the Police at first hand. His politics radicalised, both generally and specifically in relation to disability, with his experiences of both the Labour Party and later Militant who he found to have paternalistic attitudes to disability. He is now a member of the Socialist Worker Platform within the Scottish Socialist Party and successfully redrafted its disability manifesto for the recent Parliamentary elections to reflect the aspirations of the radical disability movement. He is a member of the Association of University Teachers and the National League of the Blind and Disabled.