

UNION OF THE PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED AGAINST SEGREGATION

AIMS

The Union aims to have all segregated facilities for physically impaired people replaced by arrangements for us to participate fully in society. These arrangements must include the necessary financial, medical, technical, educational and other help required from the State to enable us to gain the maximum possible independence in daily living activities, to achieve mobility, to undertake productive work, and to live where and how we choose with full control over our lives.

SUMMARY OF THE POLICY STATEMENT

Britain today has the knowledge and technological means to bring physically impaired people into the mainstream of life. But this capacity is not in fact used to tackle basic human problems like those posed by disability. So physically impaired people often remain isolated and excluded by such things as flights of stairs, inadequate public and personal transport, unsuitable housing, rigid work routines in factories and offices, and a lack of up-to-date aids and equipment. They are systematically channelled into segregated schools, workshops, homes, centres, hostels and clubs. All these segregated forms of help represented progress in times past. But since the means for integration now undoubtedly exists, confinement to segregated facilities is increasingly oppressive and dehumanising.

In recent years, the struggles of disabled people and their relatives and friends, together with advances in technology and medical science, have resulted in larger numbers of disabled people participating more fully in ordinary life. This has produced a positive shift in general attitudes. But the physically impaired remain an oppressed group in a society based on the necessity to compete in the labour market to earn a living. Their low productivity normally means that any work obtained is low paid. And they may be cast on the scrap-heap at any time, ending up on the means-tested poverty line or even in a soul-destroying institution.

Disabled people's general position as an oppressed group can be seen most clearly in residential institutions, where isolation and segregation have been carried out to extremes. Despite the efforts of some staff and volunteers, segregated institutions remain prison-like scrap-heaps of this society. The Union places great emphasis on supporting the struggles of residents in institutions for full control over their personal affairs and a democratic say in management. The building of further residential institutions is opposed, and resources should instead go to providing adequate services to people in their own homes. The Union also calls urgently for the provision of non-institutional alternatives along the lines of the Fokus scheme in Sweden, for example, for people who need extensive personal help. The eventual object is to achieve a situation where all physically impaired people have a real opportunity to participate fully in society. This will mean the phasing out of segregated institutions and facilities, including for example special schools, workshops and day centres. As long as massive resources are committed to segregated facilities, it is not possible for the necessary

arrangements to be made for everyone to participate in normal educational, work, and leisure activities. Also, the unnecessary survival of segregated facilities re-inforces out-of-date attitudes and prejudices generally, and therefore holds back those physically impaired people who do not have to use them.

The traditional way of dealing with disabled people has been for doctors and other experts to decide what should be done, and to encourage the acceptance of disability. The Union rejects their approach. Although it recognises the need for treatment and advice on medical matters, and the necessity of accepting the physical impairments, it wants to overcome the disabilities imposed on top by the way society is organised. Since the basic problem of disability is exclusion from active social participation, it follows that the efforts of experts are really constructive only when they build on and encourage the self-help and activity of disabled people themselves. And this is why the Union's main efforts will be directed towards discussion and common action with other disabled people, rather than in the vain attempt to solve their problems for them.

Disabled people everywhere are already struggling against their isolation, segregation and other forms of oppression, both individually and now increasingly together in groups. The Union takes the process of coming together a stage further. It exists to offer help to all physically impaired people in the fight to change the conditions of life which oppress them and to reach their full human potential.

As resources become available, the Union will undertake various kinds of action in support of disabled people's struggles. It intends to help in fighting bureaucratic delays and inefficiency, in pressing for the provision of suitable housing, and for ramps and lifts in public buildings, and in improving conditions in sheltered workshops and similar places. By careful discussion about these practical struggles, the Union will develop increasingly clear guide-lines for future action.

Full membership of the Union is open to all physically impaired people, who are expected to take some part in Union affairs and will be helped to do so if they have communication difficulties. Democratic control rests with all full members, with an elected Executive Committee to make day-to-day decisions on the basis of the agreed policy. Special-interest groups within the Union will consider particular aspects of disability and publish reports from time to time. An open newsletter will also be published, together with occasional leaflets.

It is fundamental to the Union's approach to seek to work with other oppressed groups, and to support their struggles to achieve a decent life. Also, the Union welcomes the support and help of able-bodied people, who may become Associate members, but may not vote or hold office. This provision is designed to ensure that full members can develop their powers of decision, organisation and action.

The Union will not register as a charity, nor appeal for funds publicly, and it regards political involvement as essential. It welcomes co-operation with other disability groups, but intends to speak out freely and act independantly when the interests of disabled people require it.