

At the August's London regional meeting Judy and I raised for discussion the role of associate members within UPIAS. The interpretation of Union policy in relation to associate members has been a largely individual responsibility, and it is important that our position is clarified, principally by full members, and in the context of the current struggle of the Union and physically impaired people generally.

The ambiguity of being an able-bodied member of an autonomous organisation of physically impaired people is problematic, (UPIAS being a mixed organisation fighting segregation in as much as the AAM opposes apartheid) mainly in relation to how and in what ways we can become actively involved in Union work.

It is necessary first to review whether it is still an appropriate decision for able-bodied people to be members of the Union. In what way does our membership within the organisation help in advancing the position of physically impaired people that is not possible by working outside of, but with the Union, as able-bodied sympathisers and professionals? This is perhaps now a more realistic possibility with the development of the open newsletter.

If it is still considered appropriate to involve an able-bodied membership, then how we apply our policy statement within the organisation needs defining. The two extracts below from the policy statement do seemingly propose a contradiction -

'.... the efforts of professionals and other able-bodied people are therefore really constructive only when they build on and encourage the self-help and activity of disabled people.'

'.... associate members may take part in meetings, discussions and other events.'

(The constitutional safeguards are clear - associate members are not entitled to vote on Union affairs, nor may they hold any Union office.)

Does 'take part in meetings, discussions and other events' mean being able to volunteer for, or initiate activity etc. or should we mainly be 'supportive' to the activity of full members?

What are the implications of an able-bodied member representing UPIAS at seminars, workshops etc.? - when seen in terms of a man representing a Union of women against sexism, this position becomes a lot clearer. I think we need to look at the reasons underlying this being a possible decision, and the ways of overcoming them - allocation of Union resources, priorities, transport problems etc.

Perhaps as well as clarifying the position of associate members, the Union should also now be demanding that not only should able-bodied people 'encourage the self-help and activity of disabled people' but that they should actively challenge/oppose disabling attitudes/practices in their personal and working lives.