ARE WE OPPRESSED?

Collected contributions from early UPIAS Circulars

2018 Edition
Published on the International Day of Disabled People
Contents

Introduction to the 2018 Edition ................................. 4
Section 1: Are we oppressed? ........................................ 6
  Attitudes – a cursory survey ........................................ 9
Section 2: The psychology of disability ............................ 26
Section 3: A new psychology of disability? ...................... 32
Section 4: Should we support the right to choose oppression? ................................................................. 38
This document, *Are We Oppressed?* was written and compiled by Vic Finkelstein in 1974, about 15 months after the inception of a new organisation that was to become the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS). It was to emerge as an organisation that would have an immense impact on the lives of disabled people. It formed the basis of the Disabled People’s Movement in the UK, and influenced the organisation, Disabled People International.

The background of UPIAS is well known by many people, but for anyone who is unaware here is a quick précis.

Paul Hunt (1937–1979) published a letter in The Guardian newspaper on 20 September 1972, inviting other disabled people to unite and form a representative group to explore the issue of disability in its broadest sense. He suggested the aim should be: **to consider what changes in society are required if severe disability is either to be eradicated or become no bar to full social participation.**

In the 1960s disabled people, apart from a few, were segregated by society, incarcerated in institutional care, or reliant on the support of family members, and were thereby unable to participate in the mainstream of society. The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (1970) had barely touched the surface of the depth of deprivation disabled people found themselves in.

Response from disabled people was significant. Paul’s first aim was to initiate a discussion on the form of organisation needed to forge a way forward in solving this vast and complex situation facing disabled people, and find a solution. The discussion was then conducted through regular internal and above all confidential circulars. Circulars because of the distances and confidential because this was key, at this stage, to enable people who were vulnerable to talk openly and with confidence.

By the time *Are We Oppressed?* was produced, Paul, in discussion with others, had drafted the **Aims** and a **Policy Statement.** The plan was to organise a weekend long policy conference in London in 1974, where the final draft policy would be agreed.
Are We Oppressed? was put together by Vic Finkelstein, a leading member of the Union, who wanted to use polemical argument to draw out the key issues that were then being thrashed out in the circulars. These were:

1. The importance of establishing that impaired people were not just disadvantaged but oppressed by the way society was organised.
2. The necessity to look outwards at society, not inwards at personal feelings, to understand what disabled people were facing.
3. To get to grips with the fundamental causes of oppression and not get bogged down by arguments and discussions around social attitudes.
4. The importance of using the words Against Segregation rather than For Integration. The former being the actual situation and the latter being almost subservient.

It’s important to understand the context when reading this document. It refers to time and place in history when the members were struggling to comprehend their situation in society.

To make it easier to follow, the arguments being presented by Vic Finkelstein have each paragraph starting with VF. All personal names have been taken out and are indicated by dashes. References in brackets refer to Circular number and page number within that Circular. There are a few places where previously legible text was lost due to the deterioration and fading of the original document. But thanks to the efforts of Tony Baldwinson most has been rescued and retyped into the current format.

The authors of this introduction were both in UPIAS. We have decided to acknowledge Vic Finkelstein (1938 – 2011) by name in this probing contribution to clarify the situation.

Judy Hunt and Maggie Davis

November 2018
Section 1: Are we oppressed?

VF: In Circular 3, I said, “At the outset of starting our new organisation we must be sure and in total agreement about one thing – Disabled people are oppressed in our society. There should be no confusion about this, nor should this fact be far from our minds. It is the essence of the justification for starting our organisation and from which many ideas flow.” (V. Finkelstein, 3/10)

VF: Here I made “oppression of physically impaired people” the basic fact from which we start and not just a feeling as some members prefer to think about it. They say, “I don’t feel particularly oppressed. We seem to be assuming we are oppressed before debating it.”

VF: ---- [redacted name] says “I don’t feel oppressed. No. I still haven’t felt oppressed.” (----, 4/3) and (----, 6/8) or “I don’t feel stigmatised and oppressed.” (Anon, 7/2)

VF: In my mind this is completely wrong, the question of “oppression” is not simply whether or not you “feel” it.

VF: Those who question whether we are “oppressed” by examining their “feelings” are looking into themselves for an answer (introspecting). I, on the other hand, maintain that to see the “oppression of disabled people” you must first look at it personally (from your own experience), but look at it socially out there. For example, members have said –

“Many people have written to say that a clarification of our views is essential; this will enable a more objective viewpoint to be reached and minimise our blunders ... My argument is that we may carry introspection too far.” (----, 6/6)
VF: This is to confuse “trying to clarify our feelings” with “trying to clarify what happens in the real world.” All that is achieved by only clarifying our feelings is that we get lost in introspection. These “feelings” may be true to you, but do not necessarily take us one step forward in understanding the condition of disabled people in general in society.

VF: Nor should the fact of oppression be rejected because we get emotionally upset by the word. As some people have said –

“‘Struggling against Oppression’ is emotive rather than useful.” (----, 4/14);

or,

“I think that this is an emotive issue, and it should be thrashed out at a meeting as should the word ‘oppression’. I’m frustrated more than oppressed.” (----, 6/7).

VF: Here, we also see clearly that because the person “feels” frustrated rather than oppressed, this is blandly accepted as a good reason for saying people are not oppressed – nowhere are the facts investigated, only the introspective method is used of course, any word can be “emotive”. For example kill. But we would not avoid the word to describe someone in fact being killed simply because we were upset by the word (let alone the deed).

VF: Nor should the word “oppression” only be applied when the person who is doing the oppression, is conscious of it. As has been said.

“For me the word oppression implies an active or positive desire to oppress on the part of somebody or other” (----, 6/8); or “Oppression to me is something akin to malice aforethought – something premeditated – to prove oppression we would need to prove premeditation” (----, 8/7)

VF: We are back into the minds of people, this time in the “doer”.

VF: “Oppression” does not exist simply because it is in the “mind” of the doer as intention, nor to the “mind” of the done-to as a feeling. It is in the factual situation that exists between a “doer” and a “done-to.” If
someone was being hit in the face, we would not have to ask him whether [they] “felt” hit before we could decide that this is what was happening to him. Nor would we have to ask the hitter whether this is what he “intended” doing. **We look at the situation between the two, what is happening between them whether they admit this or not, whether they are fully aware of the facts or not, whether they are conscious of it or not. Then we decide on the reality of the situation.** If physically impaired people are oppressed we have to decide whether we agree that this is a matter of fact, in spite of the “intentions” or “feelings” of anybody.

-------------------

I think the most important points we should concentrate on are:

1) The promotion of Fokus\(^1\) type accommodation in Britain.

2) Giving the widest possible publicity to the degrading conditions of ‘life’ in the worst type of institution, This may be difficult, as those who live in them may well be afraid of reprisals if they speak out, but it is essential that the public should know about such places ... it should be stressed that even the ‘best’ institution is an unnatural place and best kept away from. (----, 4/7)

-------------------

I would like to see us with a set of firm principles and policies; otherwise we should be quite ineffectual. (----, 8/9)

-------------------

We must arrive at some sort of agreement soon for a demand to be made. For no matter when we begin, we all know the answers that will be given, the “shortage of money, workmen, staff and material” together with the usual one to pacify … “we are attending to you.” (----, 7/5)

-------------------

\(^1\) An integrated ‘housing with help’ scheme in Sweden which replaced institutions.
Attitudes – a cursory survey

[From Circular 3, VF is quoting another contributor extensively here.]

Broadly, it would seem that all attitudes are learned: they predispose a person to think, feel and/or act in a particular way to a particular situation. Towards disability, society at large holds an attitude such that the handicapped person feels himself disqualified from full social participation. Certainly his handicap alone is often sufficient to disqualify him from certain areas of participation - regardless of attitudes held either by society or by himself. This goes without saying: it is not expected that a quadriplegic will join the next Everest expedition.

Nevertheless, there are attitudes prevalent in society which prevent, or make it very difficult, for a disabled person to do certain things which the majority of people take for granted. A parent may, for instance, find it impossible to send his disabled son or daughter to an ordinary school - and may finally send the child to some segregated special school for the handicapped. In the field of employment we may discover that it has taken an Act of Parliament to enable certain employers to see that they have an obligation to satisfy the legitimate aspirations of the disabled to exercise their right to work. Other legislation has been required to bring home to certain sections of society their obligations towards the disabled, e.g., in the field of housing. The fact that such legislation exists is sufficient to indicate the extent of the attitudes prevailing which prevent the disabled enjoying the same amenities and responsibilities as do the majority of society.

It may be worthwhile to consider whether at not the attitudes held by society towards the disabled constitute PREJUDICE. This may be defined as the mental state corresponding to the practice of discrimination: a set of attitudes which causes, maintains or justifies discrimination. DISCRIMINATION can perhaps be defined as the mistreatment of people without their having done anything to merit it. It can be successfully argued, I think, that -despite all the efforts made by various sectors of (including the legislature) to improve conditions for the dis-abled physically impaired citizens still suffer discrimination, and
suffer it quite extensively. If I have my definitions right, it would follow therefore that the disabled, in common with many other minority groups, suffer prejudice.

However, I would suggest that this is not altogether a true picture of the circumstances. Certainly there exists an uncritical conformity of behaviour toward the disabled within society at large, which takes the form of discrimination in education, employment and other, social rights enjoyed by the majority of the community. A large proportion of this norm-conforming behaviour may be based on stereotypes of the physically impaired which have been formed against a background of insufficient and inaccurate information about what disability is and what it means. In other cases, attitudes may perhaps be more properly described as prejudiced, since they may be ego-defensive, rooted in insecurity and inferiority and are thus more intractable, since the disabled ore probably being used as a prop to the person’s self-esteem,

A brief look at some possible causes of (prejudiced) attitudes may now be helpful.

1. **Dislike of differences** … something about the disabled, as a group, which naturally causes the majority to think it inferior.

   It cannot be denied that physical impairment is often obvious: it world remove, therefore, one factor which would normally be a regular and accepted part of equal relationships between people I have heard it proposed that the dislike of differences is instinctive behaviour. My own experiences with young children have not led me to suppose that this is so. Indeed, a child has to achieve a conscious realisation of what constitutes ‘normality’ before it can appreciate that a disabled person may deviate from the norm.

   Once this realisation has been achieved however it would require some measure of adjustment to restore the balance through which equal relationships could proceed. It is difficult to achieve a one-to-one relationship with someone who is forever conscious of your disability. He or she has to conceive a fullness of your personality beyond the physically impaired exterior — not an easy achievement.
It is perhaps reasonable to suppose that maladjusted attitudes could arise in the face of a malfunctioning body, or on the information that society offers individuals about the physically impaired. Even for those who may not hold any developed attitudes toward the disabled, initial contact with the physically impaired can be a different experience they may not know how to behave towards the handicapped person, they may experience fear or apprehension in the face of this threat to their normal behaviour patterns. Whether all this adds up to dislike, I doubt … but the existence of this area of physical difference would seem to be a fertile breeding ground for wrong attitudes.

2. “Bad trip” … prejudice may arise as a result of some unpleasant experience at the hands of a disabled person.

In these circumstances, it is perhaps conceivable that one could remain prejudiced against the individual concerned - but it is not easy to see how this is then generalised to include all physically impaired people without considering the existence of other underlying causes.

3. Imagined fears … prejudiced attitudes may arise through the imagination of all kinds of fears about disability.

Fears of becoming similarly disabled or disfigured of being reminded of human frailty, vulnerability and imperfection, of dependence on others; of suffering ill treatment at the hands of others; of being stigmatised; of loss of privacy; of being regarded by others as being less than a ‘real’ person; of being deviant, different; of not having the courage to cope similarly afflicted; of loss of virility, sexuality, eligibility etc. etc. Again this would seem fertile ground for prejudice. It could lead to shunning, or avoidance of contemplation of the problems concomitant on disability. In reminding people of their own inadequacies (consciously or unconsciously) it could perhaps lead to displacing their private frustrations on some suitable scapegoat.

4. Scapegoating … the disabled may be used as a convenient (and innocent) substitute for the troubles, frustration and anger of others.

Certainly they would find it difficult to hit back (as the door does when it is slammed and the cat when it is kicked). Nevertheless, other
forces in society which make it necessary to try and avoid overt ill
treatment to the sick and incapacitated prevent the disabled as a group
being used as scapegoats in the classic sense as, say, are the Jews or
Negroes. An awkward situation, perhaps, for those who work with the
disabled, is that they are faced daily with ideal scape-goats which they
cannot openly use. If, therefore, they are in the ‘unfortunate situation of
having private psychological conflicts and the need of a suitable outlet
for their frustrations - they can only relieve themselves at the expense of
the disabled in their care (if they are so minded) in subtle ways which
are covert and not readily detectable. The institutional situation would
seem to be an ideal context within which this type of abuse can take
place.

5. Stereotypes ... Ignorance of the problems of the physically
impaired can create stereotypes based on false beliefs.

Perhaps it is true that stereotypes are not always derogatory: the
possibility that all cripples are supposed to be deformed and mentally
deficient to boot may be offset by the belief that they are always brave
and eternally cheerful. The social isolation which remains the lot of
many disabled today is responsible for the false beliefs upon which such
stereotypes are based. The nature of the stereotype can obviously
predispose people to behave in a certain way toward the disabled which
gives rise to discrimination,

6. Equality gap ... The situation of physical inequality can be
manipulated by the able bodied to discriminate against the disabled.

Since the physically impaired are often in a position of dependence
on others, the organisation of the help given to them may concentrate
less on restoring independence and encouraging a sense of
responsibility for the management of day to day affairs -but more on
running the organisation as smoothly and as efficiently as possible. This
is very evident in some institutions -and depends to some extent for its
success on the maintenance of a proper social distance between staff
and internees. Since dependence on staff is encouraged, the
self-respect and self-esteem of residents is gradually undermined and a
purposeless, apathetic state may set in. This unfortunate condition, to a
great extent a product of the institution itself, nevertheless justifies the
view of the staff that the disabled are helpless and incapable of
assuming ordinary responsibilities and so on. The inferior position of the
disabled vis a vis the staff is thus maintained and the stage is set for
further discrimination.

7. “Superiority complex” ... Feeling relatively superior in relation to
the disabled may give rise to prejudiced attitudes.

Another aspect worth consideration perhaps lies in the rather
curious standards of physical excellence promoted within our society
(Miss World, Miss Ryvita, Sportsman of the Year, etc). I suppose it must
be easy to feel oneself relatively closer to these paragons of physical
virtue - when one is standing beside a cripple. Religion - or at least
certain sectarian varieties - suppose disability to be the wages of sin ...
instant relative superiority to the appropriate devotee.

8. Personal gain. Material and psychological advantages may be
created for the prejudiced.

There is some evidence of economic exploitation of the disabled:
Lack of educational facilities and opportunities in open society:
employment opportunities: adequacy and range of social security
benefits; manipulation by shrewd operators (work at home/door to door
selling of goods made by the disabled). Psychological advantages
abound in the situation of dependence for those suffering from inferiority
feelings or insecurity. To have someone dependent on you may make
you feel relatively important, wanted, powerful, useful -what have you.
There is some suspicion that an unconscious recognition of these
relative psychological advantages attracts a number of people into the
caring professions who subsequently exploit their position.

Perhaps it is this type of personality which is prepared to manipulate
the situation of dependency in institutions..., and to secure the
psychological benefits they maintain dependency and, if possible,
increase it. Society at large, of course, reinforces the attitudes of those
who encourage the disabled to be dependent upon them since it
acclaims the ‘un-selfish’ help, care, devotion, Christian love, etc, they
apparently shower on their charges.
9. **Cost ignorance**. If people are unaware of the cost of prejudiced attitudes this may help perpetuate them.

If the disabled do in fact suffer prejudice - then society suffers too. The saving of state resources by the provision of more adequate means of care than the institutional care at present available is fairly obvious. Coupled with the creation of equal opportunities in education and employment, the benefits to society through the release of the often frustrated energies and talents of the disabled would be enormous. Social problems too appear to proliferate where people are held in care. More social problems mean more social workers and more money to run the social show. Lack of information about the various costs of disability sustains ignorance and maintains prejudice.

No doubt there are many more contributory causes of prejudiced attitudes indeed there are other attitudes which can only be described as good and positive - but which will not be pursued here.

In briefly considering attitude change, it can be noted that attitudes about disability have three components:

a) **Cognitive** … A person’s knowledge about disability.

Change may well be achieved here by propagating accurate and relevant information about the situation of the physically impaired to as many people as possible.

b) **Affective** … How a person feels, emotionally, about disability.

Where emotionality is relatively superficial probably rational argument can effect change ... otherwise change may prove difficult or impossible. (Personal contact may help although this hardly applies to those already working in the disability industry.)

c) **Behavioural** … How someone behaves relative to what they say they will do about disability.

UPIAS can stand firmly behind all who are the victims of discriminatory practices. People so suffering should be encouraged to resist ... if penalisation occurs - this should be publicised.
All three components are closely interrelated. Changing any one should hopefully have an effect on the other two. (----, 3/7)

If discrimination covers oppression, then the severely disabled are oppressed when it comes to travelling. Because I am in a long wheelchair, flying is out of the question unless I’m prepared to pay four times the normal fare! This came to my notice five years ago when planning a holiday in Jersey. Despite, the fact that I was going out of season, the airlines insisted they would lose money if I wasn’t so penalised. Letters to the press, a question asked in Parliament, and a visit from the airlines’ PRO man still brought no concession. But the matter would be looked into, they promised. So it was with a slight hope that I approached the airlines recently, as I’m going to Jersey again later this year. Only to be told I should still have to pay four fares! This is a matter I intend bringing to the attention of Alf Morris MP. (----, 8/6)

It would seem to me that the much discussed problems of attitudes towards physically impaired people, resulting in staring etc., would be nearer solution if physically impaired and non-impaired children had all grown up together from their earliest social experiences. (----, 3/7)

The worst thing that can happen is when we, ourselves, come sometimes to accept this curtailment of potentiality with an accompanying loss of confidence and vitality. (----, 4/6)

If any member of the Union wishes to feel nauseated, please apply for a photocopy of the Thurrock Gazette from me. I will just finish off the quote that ---- put in, “… a tree of happiness … appropriately symbolising a feeling that radiates from this house within a hospital.” ---- has only mentioned a few of the incidences that have occurred here, little wonder that I get discouraged and I cannot really blame the other residents, they don’t even know what I’m fighting for. Such is the insidious process of institutionalisation. (----, 7/11)
“With regard to your newsletter, I was impressed by the number of replies that you were able to publish from people with direct experience of life in institutions. This is, I agree, perhaps the greatest and most depressing problem facing the disabled as a group. And in my experience the aspect which depresses me the most is the large number of people who become, or so it appears, completely institutionalised even at a relatively early age; who accept the status quo and see no point, and no hope, in seeking improvements. For this reason, therefore it might be more fruitful to try to concentrate on seeking to educate the younger disabled into expecting far more from present day society. (----, 3/2)

“Many thanks for the recent Circular. Vastly interesting, and although I’ve read and re-read it several times, in the end I am left with the strong feeling that I have a great deal to learn from those people who have experienced some form of ‘institutional’ life.” (----, 3/5)

-------------------------

It seems to me too on this question of equipment, the delays are so lengthy in getting it - months can go by while bureaucracy bumbles on, tying itself into knots with red tape. It would really be infinitely more sensible if, once one had been assessed by the various doctors, one could be given a warrant to get the equipment oneself. In my experience the equipment is usually there in the factories, ready. When once I had trouble with my wheelchair, I simply could not get the Ministry to get a move on. I had lost the use of my right arm, all my equipment was useless and needed left hand controls. I was driven to a state of sheer despair through struggling with the old wheelchair.

Eventually I was so exhausted I was practically bedridden. In the end I got the money together and wrote to the factory which made the epic chair that the man from the Ministry had assured me I could have -and they said it was absolute nonsense to say the wheelchairs weren’t ready. They were there in the factory ready for dispatch, but they had to wait for the Ministry forms to come through. If they could simply issue a warrant so you could order direct from the factory, you could get hold of...
the equipment and get on with life in half the time, and not be half the trouble to the State. I would like to think we could do something along these lines. It would save an awful lot of wasted work, and an awful lot of officials dictating letters and passing the buck one to the other. (----, 4[?] / 9)

---------------------

In response to Circular 6 I agree with ---- that the attitude of society ‘must be changed. Society has been brainwashed by the media for donkey’s years as to what’s acceptable in human shape. I think more effort should be made to get the handicapped out into the streets, not shut away - then I don’t think the reaction of society to someone who has not the accepted shape would be so noticeable. I don’t think people look upon us as people with magnificent courage. So often they don’t even understand what is wrong with us. We are all under one heading - cripples - and that’s it! Handicapped and disabled are new words to society. I agree all disabled people should be given freedom of choice in the choosing of accommodation, mobility, education and employment. (----, 7/4)

---------------------

Having read one explanation of the term physically impaired, we are ready to accept this unconditionally as not just being a fancy name for what we are. We are glad of the clarification anyway.

However, we do still feel that FOR INTEGRATION is as acceptable, if not more so, than AGAINST SEGREGATION. We feel more strongly on this, after reading the argument. Our position, surely, is to educate the public into our way of thinking, and like all educational methods, the pupils are more receptive, and more willing to learn, when the domineering attitude is avoided. We often take sociology students from all ranges of matrons, superintendents, nurses, midwives, universities, home helps, adult training groups etc, into our home, to explain how it all happened for us, and each time we’ve heard from the tutors themselves afterwards, it’s been our diplomatic understanding of their pre-conceived ideas that has probably done more to set them thinking along more progressive lines than before.
We can’t help but know how they feel at first, because it’s all a throwback from their past. When failures occur in a family with a handicapped child, the child is often compelled to leave home for many reasons, the only alternatives available are chronic sick wards, or Part III accommodation, i.e., the only alternatives up to now. No matter how hard we try, we won’t be able to change all that in one fell swoop overnight! While radical change may be very desirable, it just isn’t practical, honestly speaking.

Therefore, “reform” is obviously the way to approach the subject. Even if the NHS were prepared to discharge all young disabled from chronic sick wards tomorrow, the “victims” themselves could not stand the sudden change! Over years of being in care, they’ve become conditioned into believing that they are incapable of any other existence, the frustrating thing about all this is, that it’s really nobody’s fault, simply because there was no other ways out of the problem when they first “went in”. What we need to prevent, where possible, is the disabled going there in the first place, and with the provision of more domiciliary services, this is more feasible proposition these days. Hospitals should refuse to admit disabled people henceforth, other than ‘those requiring medical attention, as anyone might be, from time to time who was admitted in this way, “to give the family a rest”, and months turned into years, after which there was no returning to the domestic scene at all’. It was true, the family could not cope with him, especially when another younger child was also found to have Muscular Dystrophy. There was no alternative but to send him away. Parents were often persuaded that it was better for the child! This is the kind of thing which needs to be avoided in the future. Society may have failed us in the past, but it could rest upon us to change “the system” for future disabled.

The Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act (CSDPA) has passed resolutions to the desired effect, but no real pressures are brought to bear on local authorities to implement the Act. Commendable efforts are being made by some, like Norwich of course, but too many are shelving their responsibilities in this field. There always seems some legitimate loophole somewhere!
It’s the same story when it comes to firms being obliged to employ a certain percentage of disabled people. A man carrying a green card for walking with a slight limp, and that’s all the proof an employer needs. Whereas the [person] may be physically impaired, as you say, they are not, in this instance, handicapped.

Coming back to the point of the phrasing AGAINST SEGREGATION could we suggest that all our UPI members vote one way or the other? We would appreciate knowing if, in their experience, they have found, like that being antagonistic is the only way to win. In our case, it’s always been the reverse, but if our case is exceptional, we are happy to be proved incorrect, and will therefore accept the phrasing. The logical conclusions of the group as a whole are accepted by us, and it would be advantageous for all our members to take a similar line. Frank discussion is always essential but in the final analysis, personal viewpoints must be relinquished in favour of mutual settlement.

We support the view that physically impaired persons only should join our Union, one reason being that we would then make more impact by showing our own capabilities (which, according to many, are few or non-existent’). We also feel compliant to the wishes that [the work of] publishing Circulars should be shared, but request that no compulsion is made, since in our case, it would be virtually impossible with all our other secretarial commitments.

If Circulars are confidential, how then are other interested physically impaired members enlisted? We have a couple of these friends who may like to be contacted, Shall we introduce them ourselves, or merely send their names and addresses to you, whoever is secretary?

---- has a point in the idea of ‘cells’ for each specific issue, but our lack of numbers so far would limit this severely.

We wholeheartedly reiterate the remarks of in [their] article Special Education, since we have already written a 4000 words essay on this subject ourselves. In our opinion, the following aims to be achieved at the earliest opportunity once the UPI feel competent enough, are to persuade the medical profession that we only need them in times of illness, and NOT through our physical impairment; to convince
education authorities that special schools are ‘out’; and to encourage local authority to put money into domiciliary services, rather than Part III accommodation, resulting one would hope, in helping to empty the chronic sick units.

These might well be the aims, but what in the opinion of the Union, are the best means of approach? Bombarding the various local MPs or social services departments - or what? Might we have some suggestions in the next Circular please? (----, 4 / 6-7)

---------------------

It is vital that we should try to ensure that all disabled people have real freedom of choice as to how they should live. Though the vast majority would opt for independence, we must recognise that for some disabled people, the security, and freedom from domestic chores and worries that an institution provides outweighs the drawbacks. However, as people in institutions are most vulnerable, being at the mercy of others, it is certainly our duty to be deeply concerned about them. Though “Homes” will be reduced in number gradually as demand for them falls, yet we must fight against the type shown on the recent ‘Man Alive’ [TV] programme. (----, 8 / 5)

---------------------

[VF now analyses these various contributions.]

VF: There are two basic ways that “oppression” can be examined. Firstly, by looking inward (into the “minds” of the oppressors or oppressed), and all the arguments, so far produced, against saying, “disabled people are oppressed”, have looked at it this way. Secondly, you can look outward at the relationship between the oppressors and oppressed.

VF: As ---- has said -

to know with complete certainty that disabled people are oppressed, we have to look not inward at our personal feelings, but outward at the
‘facts of our situation as a group in society” (----, 6/10).

VF: As an example of what needs to be, looked at to explain oppression in this society [they] mention:

“the 15% (plus) unemployment rate amongst disabled people”, “the low rates of pay for those who are working”, “the widespread poverty bad housing social isolation, segregation into special schools, clubs, Homes and Centres ... lack of entry into further and higher education” while at the same time “this society has the wealth and the technical means to bring physically impaired people into the mainstream of life” (----, 6/10).

VF: This way of looking at oppression is the very opposite on introspection. Others too have seen this distinction,

“After undergoing many of the typical forms of oppression of the disabled ... I saw the need for the disabled to participate in their own rehabilitation” (Anon. 2/2).

VF: Of course if oppression amounted to only a “feeling” then overcoming it would logically involve only psychotherapy or counselling.

“If oppression is out-there in society, then you have to concern yourself with changing the out-there, the society. I agree that our task is to encourage “physically Impaired people to take up their struggle against their oppression” (Anon, 2/3).

VF: Here is another example in which doer does not approach the problem from introspection,

“Are we oppressed? Yes! ... We must attack the very roots of our oppression... why and how are we oppressed? ... who are the agents of this oppression ...”

VF: and [they] then goes on to suggest we look at oppression

“1) within the institution, 2) within employment... 3) within society... and 4) agents of oppression (----, 4/11).

VF: This is quite the opposite of trying to prove oppression through
“intentions” or arguing about the “meaning” of words. As ---- puts it, simply and to the point,

“I think that physically impaired people are oppressed in Britain” (----, 8/10);

VF: and, I might add, not in their heads. ---- has grasped the point we are making.

“I think that socio-political view of disability - that is, it is the nature of society that makes our physical condition so ‘dis-abling’ - is a very tenable one” (----, 7/9).

VF: However, this is not just a view of disability (that can be “tenable”, or believed); but a statement that physically impaired people are disabled by society as a fact. [They see] there are implications in this. What are these? Precisely that it gives a basis from which to begin to really struggle against the oppression out-there, not in our heads but in reality. It lends to practical solutions and real action.

VF: If the question of oppression is seen from personal feelings attitudes mental consciousness. etc., then the answers are logically also in mental states and involve endless discussions and many points of view, as ---- says,

“Meanings of words such as oppression are all very well, but they should not become means in themselves” (----, 7/6); ---- says, we can end up with “39 different Unions which are visualised amongst the 39 different members” (----, 6/2).

VF: Referring to my definitions of impairment handicap and disability ---- says,

“Someone raised the matter of meanings of words... kind of thing is very interesting and good to discuss among ourselves” (VF: why?) “you could talk half the night about the meanings of words, talk and talk...” (----, 6/8).

VF: But I hope I have shown that the meanings I gave those words were in reality, and not merely abstract “meanings”. I believe that ----
concludes that I was only concerned with “meanings” precisely because [this person] is caught in the trap of looking inwards.

VF: When oppression is seen as a “state of mind”, either in the doer or done-to, then oppression itself is merely another state (or attitude) of mind. Thus it follows that to find out whether people are oppressed we have to carry out an attitude survey. This is the logic of why people who unconsciously accept oppression as an attitude of mind conclude. For example,

“I still don’t feel actually oppressed and, in my opinion, the majority of disabled people would agree with me. You are using the wrong (i.e. too strong a) word” (----, 8/4) or, “My understanding of the phrase ‘social realities of physical disability’ is the distillation of common experience to arrive at fundamental truths resulting from society’s reaction to physical impairment. For such truths to be seen to be valid will require a large sample of the physically impaired population to provide these experiences” (----, 6/4).

VF: No, this is not the way to find out about oppression, by conducting opinion polls. The matter needs to be dealt with factually - i.e. the fact that physically impaired people live in segregated institutions in the 1970s is already, in reality, an example of the way in which disabled people are oppressed. That people could, rightly, be afraid to say this, is part of the institutional oppression ---- has made this point for us; [this person] says we should give publicity:

“to the degrading conditions of ‘life’ in the worst type of institution. This may be difficult, as those who live in them may well be afraid of reprisals if they speak out ... it should be stressed that even the ‘best' institution is an unnatural place and best kept away from” (----, 4/7) - fear of “reprisals” indicates an oppressive situation.

VF: It is no accident that it is precisely those who start from introspection, when considering oppression, who end there by projecting introspection into my argument. The very criticism they make of my position is appropriately applied to themselves. This is the confusion I set out to clarify: The question is, does the distinctions I made help to change our attitude from making personal struggles into
making a social one? Does it help us to look in the right direction to where the changes need to be made? Does it help us avoid the traps, false starts and "red herrings" that an oppressive society produces to seduce people away from the real issues into false ones? It is confusion that allows this to happen.

VF: It is this confusion which makes it so necessary to write long articles to help people get away from introspection and despair. It helps to move on to a clearer vision of what practical struggles have to be taken up to overcome the oppression of physically impaired people. And, I hope, it helps us to get our principles straight. For example, as ---- says,

“I would like to see us with a set of firm principles and policies; otherwise we should be quite ineffectual” (----, 8/9).

VF: Seeing ‘physical disability’ is a social situation, is important in this way of getting our principles straight.

VF: Here are three examples, from different oppressed groups and different parts of the world. They all see “disability” as a social situation: The [1935 Government of India Act] in mentioning the caste of Untouchability makes it clear that their disability is a social occurrence which can be eliminated, “The enforcement of any disability arising out of Untouchability shall be an offence: punishable in accordance with law”. Untouchables are, of course, an oppressed caste: Replacing the word “untouchability” with “physical impairment” we get this very useful goal, “The enforcement of any disability arising out of physical impairment shall be an offence punishable in accordance with law”. In my second example, Nelson Mandela, a leader of the oppressed black South African people said this in court, “Above all we want equal political rights, because without them our disabilities, will be permanent”. Similarly, in my third example Lucretia Mott, writing in 1849, said this about the oppression of women:

“... She has so long been subject to the disabilities and restrictions with which her progress has been embarrassed, that she has become enervated, her mind to some extent paralyzed; and like those still more degraded by personal bondage, she hugs her chains” (Voices from
Women’s Liberation, page 51).

VF: In the last sentence she is referring to slavery - this is the same point I make about the right to choose oppression, in Section 4. I have also argued about the “social nature of physical disability” more fully in an article which I hope will be published in the [ … ] journal.”
Section 2: The psychology of disability

VF: Or, the psychology of the oppression of the physically impaired.

VF: When people are oppressed, both the oppressors and the oppressed have attitudes and experience feelings (emotions) about this - i.e. oppression is always connected with feelings of some sort. Writing about these feelings has become very fashionable under the title of the “psychology of disability”. Socially, this serves the function of diverting attention away from real and practical (social) problems and into the personal mental (introspective) suffering that oppression causes. While these attitudes can be accurately collected and described, they in their way explain why physically impaired people are oppressed. They only confuse people as to the real causes, ----’s survey (----, 3/7) of attitudes is misleading in exactly this way.

VF: [This person] says, “attitudes are learned”. This is true, but the question is, “from where?” Wherever the causes of these attitudes lies is exactly where we need to place all our energies. [This person says they] will “look at some possible causes of (prejudiced) attitudes”. Let us see where this leads - inwards or outwards. “1) dislike of difference... naturally causes...” Here, clearly since it is natural, it is not learned; it is in you. How do we change this then?

VF: [This person] goes on, “I have heard it proposed that the dislike of difference is instinctive behaviour”. “Instinctive” is the very opposite of “learned”. This is a misleading explanation. For example all outstanding athletes are different to us ordinary mortals. Do we “instinctively” dislike them because they are different: of course not. In 2) [they say] the prejudiced attitude “may arise as a result of some unpleasant experience”.

VF: Although this appears to be saying something important, this is no more than a re-wording of the original obvious statement that attitudes are learned. What we want to know is, learned from what? To say that a bad attitude (i.e. a prejudice) in learned from a bad experience is as wise as saying good attitudes are learned from good
experiences. What we need to know is, what is a bad experience. That is, exactly what is happening between the “doer” and “done-to”; and who says it is a bad experience? As the point is made, it is a muddle.

VF: On to point (3) “Prejudiced attitudes may arise through the imagination of ...” In other words “attitudes” (an inward state of mind) comes from “imagination” (another inward state of mind). If attitudes are learned, then this point suggests that they are learned from other states of mind - very curious.

VF: In 4) [This person] says, a person’s (scapegoating) attitude may arise when the “disabled” are used “as a convenient ... substitute for his troubles, frustration ...” Here again, the mental state (scapegoating) results from another mental state (what [they] “think” [their] troubles are, or frustration) - we are lost in the mind.

VF: In 5) “ignorance” (a mental state) “can create stereotypes ...” (another mental state). Just how hopeless professional psychology is, is beautifully illustrated by the last point. The mind is actually said to create the prejudice -the world has disappeared!

VF: The same misleading argument continues in the explanations of all the so-called “causes” of prejudice, that [this person] surveys. Nothing real is discovered; we wander in the fog bumping into isolated attitudes and invent connections between them. [This person] says, “prejudice ... may be defined as the mental state ... which causes, maintains or justifies discrimination”. There is a fundamental error in this definition. It is quite simple really, though the subtle confusion that professional psychology weaves makes it difficult to unscramble. It is not prejudice but people who cause, maintain and justify discrimination!

VF: And it is these people (no matter their intentions) who benefit from turning oppressed groups away from the real causes of their suffering, into harmless introspection, and time-consuming efforts at analysing the many attitudes connected with oppression. As long as we are trying to change the mental world, not much effort is needed in the real world. However, when we come right out and say we want to rid the real world of disability then, of course, we are demanding real social changes. It is no great difficulty to say, “I am for integration” because no
practice is obviously required.

VF: But to say, “I’m against segregation” involves looking the real world honestly in the face, by already admitting that it is oppressive. Indeed, it is part of oppression that the oppressed should have a false consciousness, and that people should be diverted from the social and practical, into “feelings”, “attitudes” and the “psychological”.

VF: What is really sad about seeing these views put forward at this time is that some professional psychologists are increasingly recognising the faultiness and hopelessness of explaining human behaviour in this way (that is, from attitudes). Ideas such as, “norm-conforming behaviour may be based on stereotypes” and “attitudes may be ego-defensive, rooted in insecurity and inferiority” have long been suspect and we should be wary of being involved in the shop-worn concepts. Professional psychologists are at present involved in violent disagreements about the various theories of human behaviour and are divided into definite schools of thought. Each school produces arguments that prove the other schools wrong! Let us concentrate on changing the real world.

VF: I do not wish to give the impression that I think attitudes aren’t important; on the contrary. When people cause, maintain and justify discrimination then they have an attitude towards physically impaired people. Likewise those who are discriminated against have their attitudes. In looking at the attitudes it is possible to judge whether the persons involved are for, or against anti-segregation. For us this is important. We, for example, would not want members who support oppression of others. It is also important to know whether people are defeated or fighting the oppression. Attitudes tell us a great deal in this way. It is the relationship between people that results in certain attitudes, and not the other way about. Here are a few examples, which show attitudes arise in definite situations. It is these situations that are being ‘judged’.

VF: [This person] mentions how reasons are invented to justify the lack of solutions to our problems, here the overall attitude is part-of maintaining our oppression instead of fighting it, “For no matter when we
begin, we all know the answers that will be given, the ‘shortage of money, workmen, staff and material’ together with the usual one to pacify... ‘we are attending to you’ " (----, 7/5). [This person] complains about this situation, “Because I am in a long wheelchair, flying is out of the question unless I am prepared to pay four times the normal fare!” (----, 8/6).

VF: [This person] does not just complain about the attitudes of the authorities, which are part of the situation. Since attitudes are part of real situation and do not simply cause them, struggling to change a bad situation is the most effective method of influencing attitudes. [This person] has put this point in this way.

“It would seem to me that the much discussed problems of attitudes towards physically impaired people, resulting in staring etc, would be nearer a solution if physically impaired and non-impaired children had all grown up together from their earliest social experiences.” (----, 3/7).

VF: Returning to [this person’s] survey of attitudes, I would like to use an example [they] give, to show how the limits in [their] survey is part of [their] own attitude towards physically impaired people. [This person] says, “Certainly [their] handicap alone is sufficient to disqualify [this person] from certain areas of participation ... this goes without saying: It is not expected that a quadriplegic will join the next Everest expedition”. (----,3/7)

VF: Why not? Is this so certain? Should I try to explain this prejudice as caused by “stereotyping”, or from “imagined fears”, or some other deep psychological motivation? No, I would immediately get away from the real issue, which is that his attitude is wrong here, because [this person] fails to understand that participation is a practical problem in the real world with real solutions. Certainly we can say a quadriplegic will not get onto Everest by trying to participate in the expedition as if [they] were not physically impaired. However the moment we start from [their] true physical condition and solve the technical details [they] can participate according to the rules of the physically impaired.

VF: To do this is to change the social rules of participation. The quadriplegic could participate in an Everest expedition in a specially
adapted helicopter, for example. Here is another example, which shows that human beings do solve the technical problems of their own physical reality and thus do things that would otherwise be impossible; Man cannot fly, but when [they take] account of his physical condition and solves the technical problems, [they do] fly. [They do] this in the human (not bird) way - by aeroplane.

VF: Another spectacular example has been the success of “earthbound” mankind ‘walking’ on the moon. In fact, the whole history of human beings is the story of how we overcome the limits of nature by inventing new solutions. The point is, that in the 1970s society has already reached the stage where the technological solutions are at hand for full integration of physically impaired members of society. The fact that this is not done is because of the oppressive nature of the society (in the way it is organised).

VF: It matters little if [this person] in his “certain” example, of how a handicapdisqualifies a quadriplegic, said this because [this person] was stereotyping or scapegoating physically impaired people. [They are] wrong because [they] did not consider changing the rules. Instead of thinking about how to change reality [they] accepted it as fixed. It would be wrong to argue with [them] by referring to [their] attitude and saying, you are using “the disabled ... as a convenient (and innocent) substitute for “your” troubles, frustration and anger”.

VF: [They] would rightly immediately argue with me about whether this is what [they were] doing. We would soon forget the quadriplegic and [their] practical problem and get lost in the fog of meanings of words (and attitudes). In this way no person in a wheelchair would ever get to the top of Everest. We should refer to attitudes when they are part of accepting reality as fixed instead of looking how to change it so that we can participate, We must not set our sights too low,

“The worst thing that can happen to us is when we, ourselves, come sometimes to accept ... curtailment of potentiality with an accompanying loss of confidence and vitality” (----, 4/6).

VF: But [they are their] own best critic, for [they have] written an excellent article illustrating something of the nature of the oppressive
situation in the chronic sick unit at ---- House. [This person] dismisses [their] own earlier **inward-looking** chronic sick unit article with these words,

“No need to spend time searching for the philosophy (if any) on which these places rest. … But whatever we think or feel about them, the disconcerting reality is...”

VF: [This person] puts “think” and “feel” absolutely correctly into second place and writes about the fundamental problem, “reality”. [They give] a very good description of an oppressive institution. This could have been written as well even if [they] had never read one word of his previous article on attitudes. How then, has the survey on attitudes helped in developing our struggles in reality?

VF: There is constant pressure on physically impaired people to talk about their feelings, their personal experiences, and their innermost thoughts. When we complain about the **things** that are wrong (that lead to feelings of frustration, depression, etc.), then we are said to have “chips on our shoulders”, to be “paranoid”, to have “the wrong attitude”, and so on. If we take this up, soon we are no longer talking about what is wrong, but whether our attitudes have been wrong. How many times have we gone to complain about something and come away wondering how on earth we lost the argument! When we argue about attitudes **before** real problems, then we are being “conned”.
Section 3: A new psychology of disability?

VF: Before leaving psychology I want to briefly say what I think is the way we should look for the real causes of prejudiced attitudes. We must look outward. Our society is based upon the rules of competition and profit motive. In this situation people have to compete in the labour market for jobs in order to earn a living. When the person hires labour [they do] not want to buy labour that is physically impaired, or at least, [they are] not going to pay the same amount for an imperfect purchase. This is a fact regardless of his “intentions” or “feelings”. When the rules of earning a living are fixed in this way then, in reality, physically impaired people are discriminated against. Consequently, we can’t get jobs, or are paid less for our work, or end up in the poorer paid, less desirable jobs. In all these cases we end up with less income and/or the quality of life is inferior. We are also deprived of choice in where we work, where we live, and so on. When people are thus deprived, compared with other sections of the population, then they struggle to bring themselves up to the level of the average citizen (i.e., to make their lives “normal”).

VF: It is in this state of discrimination that the physically impaired person experiences both a situation against which [they have] to struggle, and one in which [this person] feels unable to change. The persons who unwittingly force the discriminatory rules on others, experience their side of the oppression. They may struggle against the situation which discriminates against other human beings; or they may take advantage of the situation which enables them to better their own conditions of life at the expense of others. Here, we see the real situation in society in which all the possible attitudes can occur.

VF: Because we are born into an existing society in which the segregating rules of social organisation are already present, this fact is unconscious, un-questioned and automatically accepted by the individuals. This is so because childhood involves the process of establishing the rules of social relationship, and this is carried out mainly unconsciously. The rules are established in the basic nature of the society (e.g.. in the process of competition; for jobs, housing, school
achievement, etc.), **outside** of the minds and feelings of people. The society's citizens are then conditioned to follow them. For those who are oppressed, by these rules, the struggle against the situation becomes a daily fact of life - a lifestyle (i.e., their personalities, the oppressed groups also have their life styles - the psychology of women; the psychology of physically impaired people, etc).

VF: Because these struggles are at first instinctive, unconscious and individual, they take place **within** the oppressive rules. This means that the struggles are at first not necessarily directed against the source of oppression, and the explanations offered us as to why physically impaired people are disabled (or women, for example) tend to be misleading.

VF: Firstly, our suffering and Inferior status is said to be "caused" by the physical impairment (the **medical** or **physical** "cause"). Similarly, the inferior status of women was said to be due to their weaker bodies!); later the “cause” is found in prejudiced attitudes (the **psychological** “causes”).

VF: Similarly, the status of women was said to be due to being feminine in their mental make-up). However, I suggest that the real reason for our oppression (as for all other oppressed groups) is in the way society is organised (the socio-political causes). Our struggle, therefore, is with this system of rules. When we struggle against this, we also struggle against all those who defend and administer them. In coming to see the basis for the real nature of our oppression we become aware that, for example, stereotyping does not explain why physically impaired people are discriminated against. On the contrary, we see that stereotyping, for example, is one of the possible attitudes a person holds in carrying out these discriminatory rules of a competitive society.

VF: In facing the reality of oppression, the physically impaired person has no choice but to struggle. This struggle takes many forms and we can learn a great deal about its progress from peoples' attitudes. When we find people are apathetic, depressed, choosing security in institutions (because they cannot get security in society), and so on, this is not because of their personalities, not because they want to be
segregated, etc. It is because this is the level they have reached in their struggles against the oppression.

VF: Writing about the battles at ---- House, [this person] says,

[they have] only mentioned a few of the incidences that have occurred here, little wonder that I get discouraged and I cannot really blame the other residents, they don’t even know what I’m fighting for. Such is the insidious process of institutionalisation” (----, 7/11).

VF: Similarly, [this person] says, “the aspect which depresses me the most is the large number of people who become, or so it appears, completely institutionalised even at a relatively early age; who accept the status quo and see no hope, in seeking improvements.” (----, 3/2).

VF: Instead of dismissing and ignoring those who have been overwhelmed by the struggles, we must learn to see their attitudes are part of a constant struggle. We need to learn the lessons from the battles in the institutions of both those who are institutionalised as well as those who fight back. As ---- so rightly says, “I am left with the strong feeling that I have a great deal to learn from those people who have experienced some form of ‘institutional’ life” (----, 3/5).

VF: The point is, that personal struggles which involve, for example, stubborn refusal to co-operate with oppressors by withdrawal into depression, will not succeed in getting rid of the oppression. Our task is to re-direct their ongoing struggles into real and effective paths. We are not required to create struggles out of nothing. But we must not see the personal struggles, the defeats, etc., as indicating that people don’t want to oppose oppression, or that they agree with it. Our major task is to raise this struggle into higher levels. The fact that physically impaired people are largely unconscious of the real nature of their battles accounts, in part, for the failures. We need to constantly try and help turn the unconscious into conscious struggles (and this is what I’m attempting here).

VF: However, attitudes have begun to change; what are the reasons? Again we must look for answers out-there, in society. When society has not yet achieved the technical ability to solve the practical
problems (of integrating physically impaired people), so that we can compete, for example, for jobs, then prejudiced attitudes tend to remain unchanged over a period of time. However, in the 1970s we have already the “know-how” and technology to solve these problems. Consequently, a few physically impaired people have successfully integrated into society – they have got well paid jobs, adapted houses, their own families, cars, etc. In practice, people seeing and mixing with these integrated physically impaired people find their attitudes changing. But, it is only rich people that get the full benefit of society’s technology. What is required is that these practical aids are provided by society to all that need them. In this respect our society denies us what is available and ignores what are perfectly reasonable requests. It is this that makes us so angry and frustrated.

VF: For example, [this person] describes the effects of a delay in meeting [their] reasonable request, “when I once had trouble with my wheelchair, I simply could not get the Ministry to get a move on. I had lost the use of my right arm, all my equipment was useless and needed left hand controls. I was driven to a state of sheer despair through struggling with the old wheelchair” (----, 6/9).

VF: Similarly, [their] article on ---- House, mentioned earlier, is an excellent record of the frustrating experiences of the residents in the institution. All the requests they made were perfectly reasonable.

VF: We know, too, from simple mechanical devices like hoists (to help lifting), electric lifts (to replace steps), to more complicated aids and social help arrangements (like the Fokus housing scheme), that a great deal more is possible for solving practical problems than is provided. However, despite the lesson of the “man on the moon” programme, people still set their sights too low in their expectations for mankind to deal with the problems of physical impairment. Similarly, the assistance given to Hilary Pole2 (said to be the most physically impaired person in Britain) also shows a little of how much is possible. But development in the electronics field (which has only just started) has already given us aids that radically change the whole possibility of eliminating the

2 Hilary Pole was one of the first ‘responauts’ on an iron lung (ventilator) to be discharged from hospital into the community aided by personal support.
disablement of physically impaired people.

VF: I need only mention **Possum**\(^3\), as an example to make the point. However, here are a few more: recent experiments in implanting electrodes in the brain which can be connected to photoelectric cells, have shown that it **is** possible for certain types of blind people (those who have no eyes, but undamaged ‘visual’ part of the brain) to “see”. Recently a “descrambler” device was demonstrated which can help make unintelligible speech ... more clear.

VF: Experiments have been carried out in driving a motor car using only one finger - with the aid of computerised controls. There are several early designs for stair-climbing wheelchairs (one of which has been built); aids which can fold wheelchairs and put them into motor cars have been built; and so on. There is no end to human ingenuity, but what **is** required is that energy is spent looking for solutions, whereas at the moment this technology is used elsewhere in more profitable areas (Concorde\(^4\), for example). The whole research field involving aids for physically impaired people has only just started to develop.

VF: At present, only a few people do get all the aids they need. However, as technology provides more variety of aids and they become cheaper (through mass production techniques), then more physically impaired people will be able to solve their practical problems. This will allow more physically impaired people to integrate. Therefore, more and more people will increasingly come into contact with us and so see the possibility of greater participation by us. But, this is dependent upon the fact that physically impaired people are **provided** with these aids, etc., and this is somewhat at odds with the basic nature of our competitive society (where things are not normally given freely away). The result is that the provision of aids is never thorough and consistent - it has its ups and downs, and we are at the mercy of economic developments.

VF: Changes in the provision of aids can also be expected to go along with changes in attitudes - up and down (that is: for or against

\(^3\) POSSUM - Patient (sic) Operated Selector System.

\(^4\) Concord was a very advanced supersonic passenger jet plane in commercial use.
integrating physically impaired people). In economic crises, when competition is increased, we are amongst the first to suffer (together with the other oppressed groups). This means the struggle against the competitive rules of our society has to continue until these are changed. We therefore, need to try to get our struggles more consistent.

VF: I suggested that the mental state of the individual is not created by his personal physical condition, but by the connection between [their] personal struggle with the socially oppressive forces (rules). This involves struggling for real changes in society so that more and more physically impaired people are integrated.

VF: Changing prejudiced attitudes will be achieved mainly through practical examples, “I think more effort should be made to get the handicapped out into the streets, not shut away -then I don’t think the reaction of society to someone who has not the accepted shape would be so noticeable” (----, 7/4).

VF: These attitudes will not be overcome by writing more articles in the established psychology of disability, nor by merely trying to out-argue the opposition. In fact it will be necessary, in our struggle against oppression (as already done by some other oppressed groups), to criticise and expose the falseness of established psychological theory and practice. In so doing we will produce our own new psychology of disability which comes from our side of the experience and not from the other able-bodied side of “experts”.

37
Section 4: Should we support the right to choose oppression?

VF: Many members show their confusion about oppression when they support the right of physically impaired people to choose to live in institutions. I have argued that the existence of institutions is the result of social oppression. What I mean, is that the rules of social participation are so arranged that they discriminate against physically impaired people. This makes us depend upon charity. One way of organising charity (and easing the strain on families) is to collect physically impaired people into one place – the institutions.

“When failures occur in a family with a handicapped child, the child is often compelled to leave home for many reasons, the only alternatives available are chronic sick wards, or Part III accommodation, i.e., the only alternatives up to now (----, 4 / 6-7).

VF: That this was so “up to now” is very important in our struggle to change peoples’ attitudes to institutionalising physically impaired people today.

VF: Look at it this way; if society provided all the human assistance, financial help, gadgetry, etc., we would not need to be institutionalised (as the example of Fokus so clearly proves). When the technology had not yet been developed to provide this gadgetry, then there could be some argument about integration. However, in the 1970s no such argument is any longer a reason. It is for this reason that all the last arguments of the segregationists have been defeated. Because I try to keep the fact that we are oppressed clearly in my mind while looking outward at the real technological developments of society, I try not to get confused by the people who argue for the right to choose institutionalisation. If oppression was only a question of “feelings” then, of course, it follows that if you do not “feel” oppressed in an institution, then it is all right for you to stay there.

VF: To explain my argument against the right to choose oppression in institutions let us look at the great struggles against slavery today. We
would agree (I hope) that slaves were oppressed, regardless of what people felt about it at the time! No one would support slavery today. Yet at the time, it was a hard battle to abolish this social condition. Certainly some people argued that the slaves preferred their condition, that they would not know what to do with themselves if they were freed, that it would be cruel to free them because they were not capable of running their own lives, and so on. We can be sure that some slaves were produced to say the same thing, how they liked their masters and wanted to remain where they were secure, etc — (the so-called “Uncle Toms”). (Compare this with, “for some disabled people, the security, and freedom from domestic chores and worries that an institution provides outweighs the drawbacks (----, 8/5).

VF: Yet the anti-slavery battle continued. It continued because society had developed new technologies and new rules for social participation which made slavery no longer historically necessary. Looking back on the anti-slavery struggles we can see clearly which people supported oppression and which people helped society to move forward. For us, we are in the middle of a similar struggle. The future will look back on the anti-institution struggles of today, as we look back on the anti-slavery struggles. For us, then, it is a question of coming out, firmly against oppressive institutions and leaving those who support oppression to speak for themselves.

VF: Finally, we must remember that the struggle against institutions is fundamentally connected with the development of the technology that has already solved the basic problems of physical impairment, and that the struggle is against the rules of social participation (or at least to change these). Those who say we want to throw people out of institutions into the cruel world with no help are twisting our argument. We are saying you cannot close down the institutions without the human, financial, and technological help -but that society has produced the capability of providing this. We are, therefore being deprived of something that is available and perfectly reasonable to request.

VF: No person should be allowed to choose to be a slave and we should support the struggle against the right to choose a similar oppression of institutionalisation. As long as people turn to institutions
for security, or because a family can no longer cope, etc., so all physically impaired people will remain insecure. In my view the struggle against institutions involves the struggle for a more secure and humane society - it cannot be otherwise. Those who support the right to choose living in institutions are also, unknowingly, supporting the rules that segregate all physically impaired people. Our Union must get its principles straight, which is being against segregation.

-------------------

I don’t want to be involved in all other oppressed groups’ activities. As for me, as someone physically impaired, I don’t feel particularly oppressed, so why bother? We seem to be assuming we are oppressed before debating it. I’m worried a little as to our situation - I mean how radical are we going to be? Are we to sit in the streets waving placards, chanting thereby attracting publicity as a curiosity value - a freak show? Demos in our case ought to be out.

We are not going to convince the general public that to be disabled doesn’t mean mental backwardness if we exhibit ourselves in an undignified manner. It may arouse a sympathetic response but it would be the wrong kind of sympathy. Democratic means are the proper path to an integrated society. Meeting people, putting forward a point of view that they probably have never seriously considered. (----, 4/3)

-------------------

Another point which aroused a certain opposition in me was the rather free use of the word oppression. To me the word oppression implies an active or positive desire to oppress on the part of somebody or other, and I honestly don’t think that this is the intention of the NHS or other official bodies. I don’t think they intend to oppress or set out to oppress us. I think we are neglected, forgotten, and wrongly treated often enough, but I don’t think it is deliberate oppression. I don’t feel oppressed, though I don’t think anybody could have had more fights with officialdom than I have down the years, and been more dreadfully upset by them from time to time. No - I still haven’t felt oppressed.

I’ve felt they’ve fallen sadly short in their duty very often, and also in
their understanding and the choice of persons they employ to carry out the wishes of the State and various organisations can be very poor indeed. Yet again, I have still never felt that they have set out to oppress me. I have felt terribly depressed by their efforts and lack of efforts. And I have felt often enough that they were trying to pressurise me into doing what they thought was good for me, rather than trying to find out what really was good for me, or what I would like. But I think that a lot of all this kind of thing arises from a complete misunderstanding of what disability is. (----, 6/8)

-------------

From a man who is severely disabled and studying at University:

“I realise the dangers of generalising from limited personal experience, but I feel sure that many, if not most, disabled people living in permanent residential accommodation, like living that way. They would doubtless favour changes and improvements but would be very wary of suggestions that they should live any other way. Apart from the security of shelter and nursing care, many people seem to find the company of other disabled people a comfort.

I am inclined to think that ‘segregated leisure’ is a matter for the individual. I am as distressed by the sight of the disabled gathering to shoot arrows or play games as I am by able-bodied men beating hell out of each other in a boxing ring or chasing a leather ball, but I am reluctantly forced to conclude that while they are not harming others they should be left to themselves.

I don’t feel ‘stigmatised and oppressed’. Engels had this trouble with the English proletariat a hundred years ago. There are difficulties in arousing the reformist fervour of those whose position is improving anyway.

The exclusiveness and confidentiality you insist on do not seem to be the best of weapons for an organisation whose approach will presumably be peaceful.” (Anon, 7/2)

------------------
Many people have written to say that a clarification of our views is essential as this will enable a more objective viewpoint to be reached and minimise our blunders. I feel this can be carried too far, if we are so concerned about our image, how strong is our faith in our cause and in ourselves? My argument is that we may carry introspection too far. A small membership should not take too long to sort itself out. The suggestion that an address list should be circularised is a good one, enabling contact between individual members and a speedier flow of information thereby. Then we must look to our actions.

We must press for disabled representatives on all committees which concern the disabled. Our members themselves should seek these places. The ‘Oppressors’ should not be able to ride roughshod over us because of our own apathy, never should they be able to say that the disabled are happy with their lot without our collective and individual voice being raised. (-----, 6/6)

The following letter has been received from the ----, Yorkshire, dated 24th July, 1973,

Dear Sir,

On reading of the formation of a Union of the Physically Impaired in the Central Council for the Disabled, Bulletin No.9, I was rather disconcerted to read its aims and objectives.

You state that the Union of the Physically Impaired is being started to oppose all forms of segregation and oppression of the disabled. The Union intends to fight the isolation and segregation of the physically impaired in residential institutions, in special education, and in sheltered workshops day centres and clubs. All such segregated institutions need replacing by arrangements for the disabled to participate fully in society. You then go on to state that you are supporting segregation by limiting membership to the physically impaired only. This to my mind is an anomaly I would respectfully suggest that all disabled people are people with individual needs, and therefore, to create or alternatively destroy something without respect for individual needs almost amounts to
vandalism. It has taken many years to alter the climate of opinion towards disabled people, and I would suggest that the term “Struggling against Oppression” is emotive rather than useful. The lack of support for the cause of the disabled generally stems from apathy and lack of knowledge, and in such cases, surely education and enlightenment is the answer.

I am opposed to all forms of segregation and firmly believe that integration is the only answer will be glad of your comments, if any.

`Yours sincerely, (signed ----) (----, 4/14)

-------------------

I’m in agreement with the [this person’s] ‘cell’ idea provided that the ‘cell’ has the ability to keep within the UPI and I think that of anything, I am more pro ‘integration’ than anti ‘segregation’. I think this is an emotive issue, [and it] should be thrashed out at [a] meeting as should the word ‘oppression’ I’m frustrated more than oppressed. (----, 6/?)

-------------------

Oppression to me is something akin to malice aforethought. Something premeditated. To prove oppression we would need to prove premeditation. Our problems stem from disunity and lack of coherent voice. Our need is to put across our feelings, opinions. We know, others assume. Our lives should and must be within our control. (----, 8/7)

-------------------

I disagree very strongly with [this person] when [they say] “why bother” to work with other oppressed groups because [this person] doesn’t feel particularly oppressed. It seems to me that [this person’s] feelings about his personal situation are not the right way of deciding whether physically impaired people as a group in our society are oppressed or not.

[This person] may not feel oppressed (despite these steps that exclude [them] and those people at the office who can’t bring themselves to address [them] direct). But then perhaps there were
children in the coal-mines in the last century who didn’t feel particularly oppressed. To know with complete certainty that disabled people are oppressed, we have to look not inward at our personal feelings, but outward at the facts of our situation as a group in this society.

We must look, for example, at the 15% (plus) unemployment rate amongst disabled people. We must look at the low rates of pay for those who are working, and at their lack of promotion opportunities. We must look at the widespread poverty, bad housing, social isolation, segregation into special schools, clubs, Homes and Centres, at the lack of entry into further higher education... All those are objective facts, not feelings. We know also as a fact that this society has the wealth and the technical means to bring physically impaired people into the mainstream of life. It is precisely the glaring contrast between this real possibility of integration, and the present grim reality of what actually happens to so many of us, which is the basis for saying we are oppressed and must unite to bring about change in society. And since as a small oppressed, minority group, physically impaired people are not in a position to bring about radical change on our own, we need to work with other oppressed groups which also have an interest in changing things. (----, 6/10)

"After undergoing many of the typical forms of oppression I saw the need for disabled people to participate in their own rehabilitation" (Anon, 2/2)

"... the most important task (versus urgent) is to encourage physically impaired people to take up their own struggle against their oppression ... It should be made clear (over and over) that no outside person can solve the problems of the disabled, nor can we, even if we are disabled, solve the problems of other disabled people...physically impaired people themselves, each participating in the collective struggle, are the only ones can consistently face, and not become deceived about, the condition of the physically disabled in society...In the first in-stances...the issue around which we can most effectively
struggle is the one of being socially segregated.” (Anon, 2/3)

------------------------

Points for discussion – re Circular 7: Despite views to the contrary expressed by some members of the Union I think that physically impaired people are oppressed in Britain today. For it to be overcome attitudes have got to be changed, so the disabled must make their presence felt. We need an adequate financial allowance to start with. Integration into the community at the earliest age possible. Easier access and mobility; and more opportunities in all walks of life. (----, 8/16)

------------------------

I think that this socio-political, view of disability - that is, it is the nature of society that makes our physical condition so disabling - is a very tenable one, and could prove a useful rationale for reform. But I say it is radical because of the clear implications when it is developed politically. If it is society which disables the physically impaired, and places us firmly at the bottom of the heap, then the nature of society must be changed if we are to become integrated members. This feeling, it seems to me, is much in evidence within our Union. As examples, for the severely incapacitated to have full employment rights, the maximum-profit motive of employers must be transcended; and for prospective disablement pensioners to be properly provided for, all pensioners as a group must be raised from their position on society’s lowest rung. (----, 7 / 5)

------------------------

[This is a long extract from Circular 4.]

Someone said, amongst other things, “We should avoid becoming political...” IMPOSSIBLE!

If you agree, like most of us do, that the disabled are oppressed, then it follows that the question of oppression has a political tone. If then you avoid becoming political you automatically avoid answering or debating the question to its fullness.
The question of oppression in all its forms amongst the disabled will, of course, be one of the longest and hardest questions to be examined by UPIAS. Because of the different areas of oppression that concern members it will lead to conflict and political debates; I see no reason to avoid such happenings.

The question of oppression of any minority group must be examined too. We cannot work in the dark nor can we pretend to be an isolated question of oppression and segregation. Because we are not, in fact isolated, it is vital to-see the importance of working with other oppressed grix.ps It is clear, for example, that many members of UPIAS have a false concept of Women’s Liberation, the whole thing about burning bras is as stupid as “Rent-a-Crowd”. I have worked with WL for two years and can tell you that many of our demands are like those of Women’s Lib. Therefore, I see policy nine as a must.

“... the movement is now increasingly aware of the need to intervene as a political force: not only to change the position of women in society but to overthrow the system as a whole.” I wonder if we will ever say anything like this? I hope so. I am a member of DIG, I fear that so much effort has been channelled along too many twisting courses. I liked the comment by someone who said: “... any organisation in this field should be able to justify its existence by results; even to the point of being prepared to be rather more militant etc.” That’s it!

Are we oppressed? Yes! Do we want to rid ourselves of this oppression? Yes! When do we want it to stop? AS SOON AS POSSIBLE: We, and DIG can force the various governments to pass this and that reform, but will that automatically bring about the end of our oppression? NO’. We must attack the very roots of our oppression. Oh it’s OK for Sir K.J. [Keith Joseph] to say, “It is better now than it was etc.” It’s like a doctor asking if the pain hurts less than it did before. It might hurt less, but, IT IS STILL BLOODY PAINFUL!

What is needed most of all by UPIAS is a well thought out/worked out strategic line. Only when this has been done can we hope to move forward. Before this, however, the group must concern itself with the ground work that is needed to build a line. The obvious questions like
why and how are we oppressed? What forms does this oppression take? There are also the not so obvious ones, such as who are the agents of this oppression and how can they be attacked and destroyed. I was impressed by the articles of ---- and ----. But, I think they would agree many of the points must be expanded; perhaps through discussion.

The beginning of paragraph 3 in Circular 3 by ---- is perfectly true. I would from this like to suggest a programme:

**The Question of Oppression:**

1) Within the institution, (i.e. special schools, hospital units, workshops)

2) Within employment,

3) Within society.

4) Agents of oppression - also the role of charities such as The Spastics Society (in my opinion this is an agent because of its policies etc). Should be examined perhaps? Also employers’ attitudes, social security, etc.

The idea is to make a debate easier on the question of oppression by dividing the question into fields. Some of us will have a better knowledge on one area than another etc. Hopefully the outcome will be an overall picture of the situation. (There is a fifth area that I personally wish to look into. That is the role of the State. Of course, this is a “political” approach to the question. As a Marxist I intend to follow a Marxist’s line, however, any ideas, etc, would be welcomed.) From this we could give a full and written statement on our strategic line in regard to oppression of the physically impaired. (----, 4/11)

Discussion about meanings of words such as oppression are all very well, but they should not become means in themselves. Members will want to see progress, otherwise, I am certain, they will start drifting away disillusioned by all the fine words. (----, 7/6)
Which brings me to another point. In Circular 3 in a very well written and well worked out article, someone (forgive me for not remembering names but I’m blind and it was only read to me once) raised the matter of the meanings of the words impairment, disability, and handicap. Well, that kind of thing is very interesting, and good to discuss among ourselves (the sort of thing one did when I was much younger, you could talk half the night about the meanings of words, and talk and talk; and how goodly talk was, and still is - I still enjoy a really good talk). But I think if our purpose is to get the public with us, we shall be wasting our time if we talk to them in these terms. They can only understand simple words and simple things. To them a disabled person is a disabled person is a disabled person …

I think what we really need to put over to them is that we are people just the same as themselves, just as ordinary, or normal, or whatever these terms mean - we could discuss for a long time what we mean by ‘normal’ or ‘average’ or ‘ordinary’. But all will understand what I mean generally - that we are persons like themselves, who merely happen to be disabled. I think it’s our normality, our likeness to them, that we need to get over, so that we can gain their empathy, their understanding and support.

Then when we say we want freedom to choose how we will live, and how we will conduct our lives they will know that we want the same things as they do. If they want to go away on a holiday, they don’t expect to be told by some authority where they must go, they choose. And if they want to do a certain job, move house, get married, or go and live with friends, or in a self-contained flat, they don’t expect (and they would resist) to be told what they may or may not do by some authority.

They wish to choose, as far as they can, within their limits of money, intelligence, strength, family ties and so on. I think what we need to emphasise is that we too are exactly like that. We meet on the ground of our common humanity. We are persons as they are persons. We want to be free to choose, just as they are free to choose within their limits. (----, 6/8)
Points for discussion 1, regarding Circular 7

I still don’t feel actually feel oppressed and, in my opinion, the majority of disabled people would agree with me. You are using the wrong (i.e. to strong a) word. As disabled people we have perhaps to fight a little harder for our rights, pay more to enjoy a reasonable standard of life. Put up with what ‘normal’ folk would sometimes feel are impossible conditions. But the human body is adaptable and can adjust to at least make life tolerable.

For instance in my case not being strong enough to lift this, tall enough to reach that, the impossibility of negotiating steep steps, gravel paths, gradients and crowds. OK so it’s a nuisance and anything we can do to get over mine and other people’s problems, I’m for. But I don’t let it prey on my mind. Oppressed never. When I feel weighed down with impossible burdens, tyrannically severed and harshly dominated then I may agree. (----, 8/4)

------------------------

My understanding of the phrase “social realities of physical disability” is the distillation of common experience to arrive at fundamental truths resulting from society’s reaction to physical impairment. For such truths to be seen to be valid will require a large sample of the physically impaired population to provide those experiences. Our greatest need would seem to be a way of communicating effectively and rapidly with large numbers of physically disabled people. This costs money and at present we have only a limited amount. (----, 6/4)