

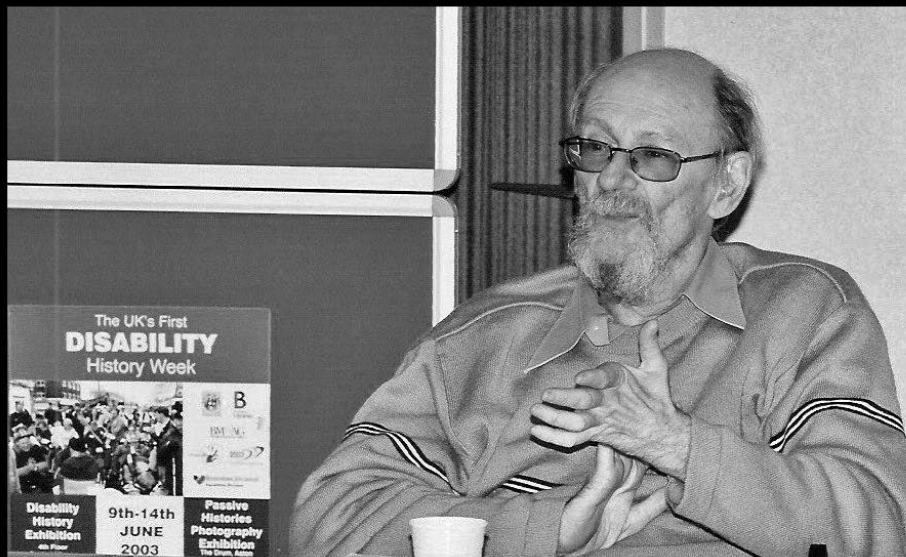
# coalition

The magazine of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People

March 2012

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# Farewell to Vic Finkelstein



**Also Inside:** Children in Need of Mainstream Education, Superheroes & Disability, An Uncertain Future for the Independent Living Fund, Poetry and much more

Coalition, the official magazine of the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People, aims to act as a forum for debate, analysis, and expression of opinion on all issues relating to disabled people.

Coalition does not knowingly publish any material which is offensive or demeaning to other oppressed groups of people.

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**coalition**  
—of disabled people—  
GMCDP

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To contribute or subscribe, please contact:

The Editor  
GMCDP  
Aked Close  
Manchester  
M12 4AN

Tel: 0161 273 5154

Email: [coalition@gmcdp.com](mailto:coalition@gmcdp.com)

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## GMCDP MAGAZINE WORKING GROUP

Lorraine Gradwell  
Angela Madeley  
Anne Rae  
Jacqui Tracey  
Neville Strowger

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Guest Editor:** Brian Hilton

**Layout:** Brian Hilton

**Additional Support:** Richard Currie  
Caron Blake, Phil Samphire

## EDITORIAL COMMENT

It was with great sorrow that I heard of the death of Vic Finkelstein, who passed away on the 25th November 2011.

Vic's contribution to the development of the Disabled People's Movement, Disability Politics and Disability Studies both in the UK and worldwide was astounding. Also, Vic's contribution to the 'Coalition' magazine, and his occasional papers, which we have published over the years, are a valuable asset to GMCDP, and are still quoted in many academic papers.

In deciding which article of Vic's to reproduce in this edition, there was much to choose from but in the end 'To Deny or Not To Deny Disability' (AKA 'A Very Crossroads') seems to fit the bill, as it is probably the single piece of work of his that people are most familiar with. The article was first published in its current form by the Open University in 1981, although its genesis dates back to a piece Vic wrote for 'Magic Carpet' in 1975. However, it is probably best known as the cartoon 'A Very Crossroads' which Vic made for television in 1985 and became an essential element for any Disability Equality Training sessions worth its salt throughout the 80's and 90's.

In addition, Mike Oliver looks back over the life and work of Vic and we have a selection of tributes that have appeared in the recently established [www.victorfinkelstein.com](http://www.victorfinkelstein.com)

Also, in this issue we have articles on education, the first of a two part exploration of how disability is portrayed within the world of Marvel and DC Comics, a look at the ongoing campaign to safeguard the future of the Independent Living Fund and much, much more.

Brian Hilton



# CHILDREN IN NEED – OF MAINSTREAM EDUCATION!

**Linda Burnip of DPAC (Disabled People Against Cuts) argues in favour of mainstream education for all, against a backdrop of cuts and the Government's intention to undo much of the progress made towards creating an inclusive education system.**

November is the time of year when all self-respecting disabled people grab the nearest plastic bucket to vomit into and we plan our Burn Pudsey parties for Children in Need night. What better time then, to talk about how the current cuts and privatisation of our education system are destroying the lives of disabled children and young disabled adults.

Disabled children as well as disabled adults should have rights and not be reliant on charitable handouts. For me inclusive education in mainstream schools should be a right for every disabled child. No-one would expect to find any other group of children such as black children or the children of traveller families being educated separately.

I accept that inclusive education would require a radical rethinking in terms of changes to curriculum, exam structure and possibly specialist units in schools, but it could be done. For me until segregation in education ends, negative attitudes towards disabled people won't change. I've also seen the difference between young people who've been educated in special schools compared to

those educated in mainstream schools, so I know inclusion works.

Which mainstream school a disabled child can go to is often restricted, as many school buildings remain inaccessible. Many local authorities have only one secondary school in each area which has been made accessible. For anyone who is deaf or blind, the only provision available often forces them to move away from their homes and families to special residential schools.



The move towards increasing numbers of Academies and Free Schools is leading to the further exclusion of disabled children from mainstream education. This coupled with a reduction in funding from local authorities for support staff in schools, is moving inclusive education rapidly backwards, to become less and less of an option available for disabled children.

Cuts to care funding for children are also rising and means that family members are expected to provide even more support. A parent seeking more support for her disabled child recently told social services, if she couldn't have more support, to take the child into care. The response she received was that her non-disabled children could be removed, thus leaving her with more time to spend caring for her disabled child.

No additional support was offered.



Aids and adaptations for children continue to be means tested. Also, if you rent in the private rented sector and need funding for an extra bedroom for your disabled child well that's tough. You can't have it until different sex children are 10 or same sex children are 16 years old.

This is an abuse of both the right to dignity for a disabled child who needs support during the night and an impossible situation for any non-disabled sibling who has to share the bedroom. However, most families will try to struggle on without adequate support.

Disabled young people have been entitled to claim Incapacity Benefit from the time they left school, but 'mean lain' is going to take this away too. It's being suggested that this will not be available to anyone under the age of 20 and that families will remain responsible for a disabled child until they reach the age of 25.

Getting care and support funding for young disabled adults can be complex as it often comes from 3 separate sources with 3 separate assessments. These are Health, Social Services and although now closed to any new applicants, the Independent Living Fund too.

The funding from Health and Social Services tends to be focused on keeping you alive and clean. However, the essential bit of care and support funding that allows disabled people to be part of society is provided by ILF funding. Since this has been closed to any new applicant, young disabled people are being denied the right to go to college and university.

Deaf students are also excluded from socialising in higher education settings because although they may have BSL interpreters provided for lectures, they are not funded outside of that narrow setting.

We are one of the richest countries in the world and it is wrong to have child carers. 1 in 12 children some as young as 10 years old, have to provide personal care such as bathing and dressing for their parents.

This is no different to the use of child labour in other countries, which of course is rightly condemned. However, here in the UK our response to child carers is to say "aren't they wonderful" and to raise money through 'Children in Need' so they can have a day out occasionally.

Give their parents the care and support they should have and end enforced child labour.

Linda Burnip



# TO DENY OR NOT TO DENY DISABILITY

This seminal article by Vic Finkelstein has been hugely influential to countless numbers of both disabled and non disabled people new to the Social Model. Both simple and profound, it shows how that it is society that creates the barriers, and not our 'defective' minds and bodies, as the Medical Model would have us believe.

Disabled people have always struggled against the way they have been prevented from taking part in the normal activities of their communities. More recently, however, these struggles have taken a step forward. Disabled people have begun to organise for their emancipation and joined the growing numbers of groups struggling against social discrimination.

We are taking a deeper look at ourselves, at the way we are treated and at what is meant by disability. We have noticed that it has nearly always been others who have researched, written, analysed, examined our history, and proposed their knowing solutions for us.

More and more disabled people have had experience of 'disability experts' and increasingly we have come to recognise the humiliation this relationship may take for granted. Can it be that having others research on the lives of disabled people (rather than us expressing our own experience) has something to do with the very nature of disability? What, then is disability?

To many of us, the single factor that unites us together in our struggles is that

it is our society that discriminates against us.

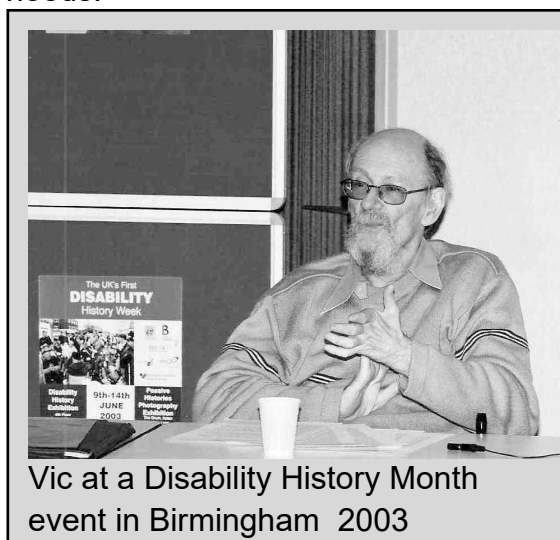
Our society disables people with different physical impairments. The cause, then, of disability is the social relationships, which take no or little account of people who have physical impairments. If this definition is correct, then it should be possible to prove that other social groups can become disabled, in an imaginary society which took no account, of their physical status. In such an imaginary society it would be possible for physically impaired people to be able-bodied.

Let us see whether we can turn the world upside-down and show that disability is a socially caused problem. An upside-down world where the 'able' become the 'disabled' and the 'disabled' become the 'able-bodied' and where we show, too, that far from adjusting and accepting disability perhaps, just perhaps, it is healthier to deny and struggle to eliminate disability?

Let us suppose that those who believe in segregation could really have their way. We will imagine a thousand or more disabled people, all wheelchair-users, collected together and settled in their own village where they had full management and democratic rights. We will suppose able-bodied people do not often visit the village and that the wheelchair-users control all aspects of their lives. They make the goods that they sell in their shops with special aids, they work the machines that clean the street, run their own educational colleges, banks, post offices, and transport system of the village, and so on. In fact, for the villager, being in a wheelchair is like 'everyone else' in their world of people that she or he meets in daily life.

They see wheelchair-users on television and hear them on radio. Able-bodied people, however, are only rarely seen and little understood.

In the course of the life of the village the wheelchair-users plan their lives according to their needs. They design their own buildings to suit their physical situation. The thing the wheelchair-user architects quickly discover in this village is that because everyone is always in wheelchairs there is no need to have ceilings at 9' 6" or door heights at 7' 2". Soon it becomes standard practice to build doors to a height of 5' and ceiling or rooms to a height of 7' 4". Naturally the building codes set out in the regulations made these heights standard. Now everyone is happy in the village; all the physical difficulties have been overcome and this little society has changed wording to the physical character of its members. At last the buildings and environment are truly in tune with their needs.



Vic at a Disability History Month event in Birmingham 2003

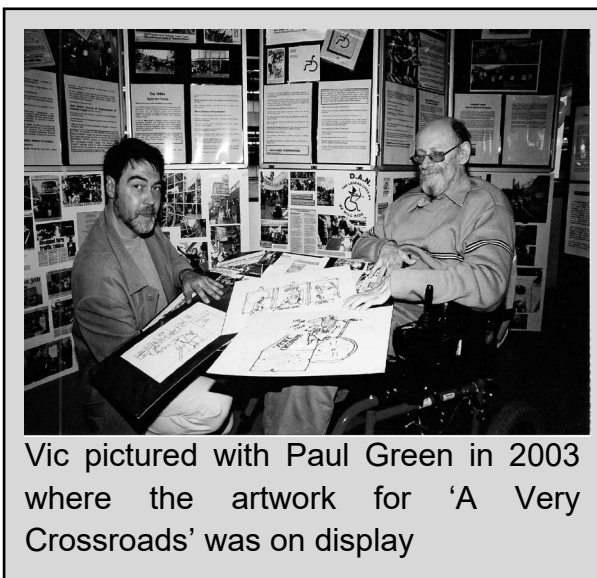
Let us say that when all the adjustments had been made and became fixed, in this wheelchair-user society, a few able-bodied had, through no choice of their own, to come and settle in this village. Naturally, one of the first things they

noticed was the heights of the doors and ceilings. They noticed this directly, by constantly knocking their heads on the door lintels. Soon all the able-bodied members of this village were also marked with the dark bruises they carried on their foreheads. Of course, they went to see the village doctors, who were, naturally, also wheelchair-users. Soon the wheelchair-user doctors, wheelchair-user psychiatrists, wheelchair-user social workers, etc., were involved in the problems of the able-bodied villagers. The doctors produced learned reports about the aches and pains of the able-bodied in society. They saw how the bruises and painful backs (from walking bent double so frequently) were caused by their physical condition. The wheelchair-user doctors analysed the problems and wrote their definitions. They said these able-bodied people suffered a loss or reduction of functional ability which resulted in a handicap. This handicap caused a 'disadvantage or restriction of activity' which made them disabled in this society.

Soon special aids were designed by the wheelchair-user doctors and associated profession, for the able-bodied disabled members of the village. All the able-bodied were given special toughened helmets (provided free by the village) to wear at all times. Special braces were designed which gave support while keeping the able-bodied wearer bent at a height similar to their fellow wheelchair-user villagers. Some doctors went so far as to suggest that there was no hope for these poor sufferers unless they too used wheelchairs, and one person even went so far as to suggest amputation to bring the able-bodied down to the right height. The able-bodied disabled caused many problems. When they sought jobs no one would employ them. Special experts had



to be trained to understand these problems and new professions created for their care. When one able-bodied disabled person applied for a job as a television interviewer, a special medical examination had to be arranged to see whether he was fit for this work. In the end it was decided that he was not suitable. It was felt, the wheelchair-user doctor pointed out in the case file, that a television interviewer wearing a helmet all the time would not be acceptable. Since the cameras would only show the top of his head (because the able-bodied were always bent double by the harnesses they had to wear) he would not be



Vic pictured with Paul Green in 2003 where the artwork for 'A Very Crossroads' was on display

suitable for interviewing. It is well known, the wheelchair-user doctor wrote, how difficult it is to communicate with the able-bodied because it is not easy to see their facial expressions and meet eye-to-eye while they are bent double.

In time special provision had to be made in the village to provide a means of obtaining money for these able-bodied disabled to live. Voluntary societies were created to collect charity and many shops and pubs had an upturned helmet placed on the counter for customers to leave their small change. Painted on the helmets were the words Help the able-

bodied disabled. Sometimes a little plaster-cast model would stand in the corner of a shop, the figure bent double, in their characteristic pose, with a slotted box on the figure's back for small coins.

But one day, when the able-bodied were sitting together and discussing their problems they realised that they were never consulted by the wheelchair-users about this in the little society. In fact they realised that there may be solutions to their problems which had never occurred to the wheelchair users simply because they never looked at these in the same way as those who had them.

It occurred to these able-bodied disabled people that perhaps the cause of their problems had a social solution they suggested that the door and ceiling heights be changed. They formed a union to fight segregation. Of course some of the wheelchair-users thought the able-bodied disabled were failing to accept and adjust to their disabilities, and they had chips on their shoulders because they argued so strongly for social change and a change in attitudes by the wheelchair-users.

The able-bodied disabled even argued that perhaps, just perhaps, their disabilities could be overcome (and disappear) with changes in society.

Vic Finkelstein



# SUPERHEROES AND DISABILITY PART 1

In the following article Brett Savage explores the attitudes towards disability as portrayed in the hugely popular comics of DC

The relationship between disabled people and superheroes is a really strange one. Although there have been plenty of comic companies with their own roster of heroes and villains, for the purposes of this article, I have focused on the two major companies: DC Comics and Marvel Comics. Also, although superheroes are also now big business in Hollywood, comics are the territory where these characters have developed and I shall focus on that medium exclusively.

Some would argue that it is a positive thing for disabled people to be shown as positive role models in the media and in some respects comics are fairly unique and innovative in this field. The other side of this argument shows that a disabled superhero is someone who has 'overcome' their disability by using superhuman powers to become 'normalised', negating the need for removal of barriers in society.

You could argue further that it fuels the idea in some people's minds that disabled people could be included in society if they 'just' made that superhuman effort.

Superheroes and disability have been an uneasy pairing right from DC Comics' Action Comics no#1, where Shuster and Siegel's Superman was depicted lifting a car over his head. It was pointed out by Dr Frederic Wertham (in his famously alarmist book 'Seduction of the Innocent')

that there were clear parallels between Nietzsche's Übermenschen and Superman. Wertham accused Siegel and Shuster directly of promoting Nazi ideology to the youth of 1950's America. What he failed to notice was that both Siegel and Shuster were both sons of European Jewish immigrant families and presumably were most unlikely to champion those values. That said, it has often been commented that Superman does in some way represent a peak perfection of humanity, physically as well as intellectually and morally.

Another recognisable mainstay of DC comics is Batman. Many have commented that dressing up as a bat to avenge the death of family members, outside of the context of comics, would appear to some as a display of mental health issues. This is something that has been suggested in the stories of recent times, but it has never been seen that Batman has any social barriers as a result, and was never suggested at the outset. Interestingly, Batman's most infamous nemesis, the Joker, has multiple impairments.

The Joker's origin in 1940 only merely hinted at any kind of mental health issue (other than being a 'homicidal maniac'). Interestingly, The Joker also has a physical impairment. On one of his criminal exploits, before becoming the Joker, he fell into a vat of acid, giving him his trademark green hair, chalk white skin and red lips. So it seems disabled supervillains actually predate superheroes.

**Dr Mid-Nite:** One of the first physically impaired superheroes was Dr Mid-Nite, a DC Comics' character who first appeared in 1941. Charles McNider is a mild mannered physician, who whilst attending to an injured witness is blinded by a hand

grenade lobbed by vengeful mobsters. McNider can no longer see during the day, but now has the superhuman ability to see perfectly in the dark.

Serendipitously, an owl flies through his window, which then prompts McNider to don tights and fight crime as Dr Mid-Nite. Dr Mid-nite/McNider is an archetype of superhero whose social barriers disappear when he becomes a superhero.

**Marvel Comics:** Frederic Wertham was a tireless campaigner against comics and went on to blame them for pretty much all of young people's antisocial behaviour. In response to the moral panic started by 'Seduction of the Innocent', the comic industry exercised a self imposed code of conduct to placate the parents of these feral youth. As DC Comics started to tone down the more gory and violent aspects of their output, sales declined sharply. Heroes now seemed to be more embroiled in tricky personal relationships, or fighting de-fanged villains that on paper wouldn't have seemed much threat to super-powered beings.

Although comic's sales were steadily declining, it was still a massively successful industry. Stan Lee who was frustrated by the insipid nature of comics, rebranded Timely Comics into the much more dynamic Marvel Comics. Lee felt that most of DC's heroes had lost their audiences not just because of the self imposed restrictions by the publishers, but also because the readers could not identify with the characters i.e. a crime fighting millionaire, or an all powerful alien from the planet Krypton. Lee credits the runaway success of Marvel comics to the fact that the heroes were just everyday people under their gaudy costumes. Where superheroes were previously invincible figures, Marvel Comic heroes

had to contend with day jobs, existential angst and moral dilemmas. In this respect, parallels with disabled people can be drawn.

The Fantastic Four's The Thing felt he was grotesque as he had turned to living rock and shunned the outside world. The Thing constantly begged Mr Fantastic to make him 'normal' again. In later comics, The Thing conducts a relationship with a blind sculptress, who is unconcerned with his appearance. Throughout the run of the comic, The Thing is prone to bouts of self loathing and often lashes out violently when mocked.

The Incredible Hulk was originally shown to be the repressed rage of Bruce Banner, which manifests itself as a large muscle-bound green (originally red) creature, and the comic chronicled his distress at no longer being able to form solid relationships with others now he had changed.



This was really quite sophisticated stuff at the time and completely revolutionised the comics industry. Sales now boomed and as a result gave DC Comics a shot in the arm as they basked in the new glory that comics had found.

**Daredevil:** Perhaps Marvel's first disabled superhero was Daredevil. As a young boy, Matt Murdock is blinded by radioactive waste which seems to give him heightened senses. Clearly having nothing better to do, Murdock hits the books and the gym to become a hotshot

lawyer (cue many laboured 'justice is blind' subheadings). After his boxer father is killed for not throwing a fight, Murdock dons a costume and avenges his father's death. Thus begins a long career in fighting crime. Murdock's career as a lawyer is an interesting facet to his character, he is not depicted as being unemployable, and later on in the series he becomes an advocate for civil rights. It is also not public knowledge that Daredevil is blind, and villains are often caught out due to his other heightened senses.

During the 1980's, an all powerful character briefly (for a few panels at least) gives Murdock back his sight, but he refuses it as he feels it is a 'deal with the devil' and takes away a characteristic that has come to define him. His superpowers were also redefined. Rather than the radioactive waste being responsible for his heightened senses, it is simply the old favourite of his other senses compensating for his loss of vision. Whether his musical ability improved as a result is never made clear.

**Doom Patrol:** In 1963, perhaps as a response to Marvel's more sophisticated approach to characterization, DC Comics published Doom Patrol. The Doom Patrol was envisioned as a team of 'super-powered misfits regarded as freaks by the public at large'. The writer, Arnold Drake, drew a line between super powers and disability more closely (although not entirely successfully) where superpowers created barriers for the heroes. He did have a somewhat offbeat approach to highlighting this.

The main characters were more explicitly disabled than any other superhero previously in the DC (or comics in general) roster. The mastermind behind the team, Dr Niles Caulder (AKA The

Chief), is a wheelchair user. Being the bitter megalomaniac that most of us disabled people turn out to be, Caulder decides to 'create' his superteam through somewhat drastic and sadistic means. The Chief's big idea is: if the team are disenfranchised enough, he will have a 'suicide squad' of superheroes at his disposal who have nothing to lose, and can be manipulated for the greater good.

The imaginatively named Robot Man is Cliff Steele, who after a race car crash (engineered by Caulder) is injured to the point where only his brain survives. His brain is then transplanted into the body of a large, muscle-bound robot. Interestingly, the focus of Robot Man's disability is not his physical impairment, but his mental health issues that arise from being in a body that cannot register touch or feel pain. This is often demonstrated in bouts of super-powered rage and moments of self loathing.



Hollywood starlet and part-time Olympic swimmer, Rita Farr is exposed to some strange vapours of The Chief's making, which gives her the ability to change shape and size at will. As her movie and Olympic careers are now in tatters, Farr becomes Elasti-Girl and joins Doom Patrol. The last of the crew is test pilot Larry Trainor, who after The Chief has rigged the guidance system, flies his experimental craft into a radioactive belt. As a result of his exposure to these strange cosmic rays, Trainor finds that he can leave his body and turn into a black



electrical field, after which he names himself Negative Man. He is also dressed from head to toe in bandages due to the burns he receives from the radiation.

The series made much of the team's social isolation and were often depicted as being chastised as 'freaks' by the general public. It also highlighted the individual anxieties of its members throughout the run. The original Doom Patrol ran for five years and was mostly remembered for its strange and offbeat qualities. Although often clumsy with its reference to disability issues, it is worth remembering the less enlightened time in which it was written. There were certainly some memorable images of oppression that might still resonate with disabled people today.

Doom Patrol made the fairly unusual step of killing off its main cast, only to be replaced by a second roster of Doom Patrol a few years later. This is generally unheard of in comic circles, as characters are generally kept alive, in cold storage, open for a re-launch or re-boot in the future. As indeed it did in 1989, when Grant Morrison revived the original cast through some contrivance or another. As with the prevailing mood within the comic industry, the characters were given more apparent realism in order to serve a perceived 'mature' audience. This did increase the references to societal barriers and the character's inherent nihilism. A few new characters were introduced to the team at this time, including the rather un-politically correctly named Crazy Jane. Crazy Jane used her multiple personalities kind of like a Swiss army knife, often using the 'right' personality and its attendant superpower for the task at hand. Another character who was introduced at this time was Rebis, who was originally a young white

man and an African American woman who had been combined by a parasitic spirit into a hermaphroditic being. This brought up lots of intersexual (and inter-racial) issues that led the character into frequent identity crises.

A common feature in the comic was the interplay between Robot Man and Rebis, who has difficulty with Rebis's new identity (especially as Robot Man was friends with the young man who was subsumed into Rebis), often refusing to accept or respect Rebis's wishes.

**In Part 2:** The Uncanny Xmen and the re-imagined Bat Girl.

Brett Savage

## **POETRY By Carol Batton**

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### **Untitled**

**On the Psychiatric Ward**

**She rubs it in,**

**(I'd never worked),**

**I hid and cried –**

**Twenty years later I realised –**

**that**

**“I've never been paid to Criticise”.**

### **Untitled**

**What Does a Mental Hospital Do?**

**Oh! It's there to create 'Mental Illness'.**



## **Abe Zelmanowitz by Ann Torode**

he did not go  
did not leave him to die alone  
he sat with him in solidarity  
choosing to remain with his friend  
who did not have the choice  
just as we hope we would do, if called upon  
assuming we could choose  
we tell ourselves we would stay  
if we had the choice  
we would not leave either  
we too would die, if called upon  
he could have walked away, could have gone  
taken his chances with the flames  
but Abe Zelmanowitz stayed  
not to be a hero, this was not a film.  
he would not be emerging in triumph  
from the inferno, to acclaim and accolades  
once it was all over, this was reality  
that eleventh of September, 2001,  
Ed Beyea and Abe Zelmanowitz died together  
on the twenty seventh floor

Abe Zelmanowitz chose to stay with Edward Beyea, a wheelchair user, rather than try to escape from the World Trade Centre. I wonder whether there should be a Nobel prize for Outstanding Acts of Solidarity. Ann Torode

# OBITUARY – VIC FINKELSTEIN

**Originally published in The Guardian newspaper on the 22nd December, Professor Mike Oliver looks at the life and work of Vic and his importance to the Disabled People's Movement.**

The political activist and campaigner Vic Finkelstein, who has died aged 73, was deported from South Africa for his support of the anti-apartheid movement. He was the main architect of the Fundamental Principles of Disability, published in 1975, which argued that the problems faced by disabled people were caused by society's failure to take account of their needs, not by their impairments.

Vic was born in Johannesburg of Jewish parents and later moved to Durban. In 1954 his life changed for ever when he attempted a pole-vault and broke his neck, which left him paralysed. With the help of the Jewish community in Durban, he was sent to the Stoke Mandeville hospital in Buckinghamshire for treatment and rehabilitation, and remained there for a year.

On returning to South Africa, he resumed his education and was offered a bursary at Durban University. He originally planned to study architecture but soon decided that it was not for him, and studied psychology instead at the University of Pietermaritzburg, with the intention of eventually pursuing a career in rehabilitation.

Despite the banning of the various resistance movements, Vic was a member of the Congress of Democrats, the organisation for white people in the

anti-apartheid Congress Alliance, and, with others, he provided covert support to banned groups. In 1966 the flat he shared with his cousin was raided. With no possibility of escape in his wheelchair, he was arrested and sent to prison.

During his incarceration under the 180-day detention laws, Vic endured torture, deprivation and much hardship before eventually coming to trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to 18 months, 15 of which were suspended. On discharge, he went to live with his brother in Johannesburg and completed his studies at the University of Witwatersrand. By this time, he had decided to leave South Africa and, in a final act of defiance, returned to the police offices to reclaim the precious books that had been confiscated from him, as several of his interrogators looked on in amazement.



Vic in 2001 at Disability Studies seminar, Leeds

On coming to Britain as a refugee, Vic immediately set about establishing contact with the ANC and met Elizabeth Lewin, who in 1968 became his wife. Encouraged by Liz, who worked as a physiotherapist, he soon began to meet politically active disabled people, and when in 1972 Paul Hunt wrote a now famous letter to the Guardian, calling for a radical new disability organisation to be formed, he eagerly got involved.

This organisation, the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation,

published a document called the Fundamental Principles of Disability. Not only was Vic a key participant in the discussions that produced this document, but he was the main drafter of it. He was also prominent in setting up the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People in 1981 and became its first chair. In the same year he represented Britain at the first world congress, established by Disabled Peoples' International.

Professionally, Vic worked as a psychologist within the health service before moving to the Open University when it created one of the first courses in what we now know as disability studies. He joined the course team and soon became its chair, shepherding it through two major revamps as well as promoting a range of innovative short courses. He remained at the Open University until 1994, then joined the centre for disability studies at the University of Leeds as a visiting senior research fellow, remaining active there until his retirement in 2008.

In one of his few autobiographical writings, for a book planned but never published, Vic wrote: "When I went pole-vaulting at Durban high school in 1954, I left behind one destiny and moved instead 'forward to square one' and began living another more fulfilling, more rewarding and more human lifestyle than I could ever have predicted." Already, thanks to Vic, thousands of people all over the world have more fulfilling, rewarding and more human lifestyles than they could ever have imagined.

His marriage to Liz produced two daughters, Anna and Rebecca, who survive him. Liz died of cancer in 1993.

Mike Oliver

## **MORE POETRY**

**By**

**Carol Batton**

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### **The Threat**

**The word 'anxious' from**

**A psychiatrist,**

**Makes me depressed.**

**The word 'depressed'**

**from a psychiatrist**

**makes me anxious**

**and depressed.**

---

### **Untitled**

**We Have Equality**

**We are a fair and just and equal  
society.**

**We put the value of life**

**on an equal footing**

**with the value of property.**

# THE INDEPENDENT LIVING FUND – AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE?

Last year GMCDP was contacted by one of its members with concerns over the current uncertainty of the future of the ILF (Independent Living Fund). This is what's happened since.

The issues of concern surrounding the future of the Independent Living Fund (ILF) are numerous and date back to May 2010 when the ILF was suddenly closed to new applicants, apart from those in paid employment.

For those not familiar with the ILF, it was established in 1988, to enable disabled people with high support needs to live independently in their own homes rather than being forced into residential care. The fund currently supports 21,000 disabled people across the UK.

Following the shock announcement in May 2010, another bombshell was dropped a month later when it was announced that the fund would be closed to all new applicants regardless of their employment status, until the end of the financial year. To compound the matter further, in December 2010 the Minister for Disabled People - Maria Miller MP announced that following consultation the ILF was 'unsustainable' and the fund would be permanently closed to all new applicants.

Then nothing ... no further details, no alternative proposals or guidance for either local authorities supporting potential new applicants with high support needs or for disabled people themselves.

All the Government said was that they would consult further once the Dilnot report (on the Funding of Care support). Further consultation? What consultation? I certainly wasn't consulted before these decisions were taken and I hadn't heard from anyone else who had.



In July 2010 the Dilnot report was published and GMCDP took the opportunity to write to the Government to ask when the planned 'wider consultation' would take place, who they had consulted with initially and what exactly were their plans for the future of ILF and those disabled people with high support needs. At the same time GMCDP also wrote to all 27 Greater Manchester MP's and the ILF itself.

The response from our local MP's was mixed, disappointingly only 14 MP's bothered replying, although the ones who did reply were quite proactive and many wrote to the Government seeking clarification on the various issues we had raised. Unsurprisingly, the Government's response was bland and non-committal, assuring us that the promised consultation would take place shortly. ILF also responded but could not add much more than had already been publicly stated.

It is now over a year since the Minister for Disabled People announced the fund was

'unsustainable', but there has still been no date set for the promised 'wider consultation' on the future on the fund. Without any clear indication from the Government, we are left to speculate on the potential impact for current and potential future recipients of ILF.

With the recent troubles at Southern Cross and the Winterbourne Care Home scandal, surely the Government isn't advocating a return to the costly and inappropriate institutional 'warehousing' of disabled people? If cost is the Government's primary concern, residential care is unlikely to save money and will undoubtedly end up costing more in the long term. If residential care is not the Government's preferred solution, in the current financial climate it seems unlikely that Local Authorities will have the resources to pick up the funding shortfall.

Although no date has been announced, the Government did release a statement in December which said that the consultation had been put back until the spring. DPAC (Disabled People Against Cuts) has now also written to the Government outlining its concerns. The letter has been signed by over 60 Disabled People's Organisations and sets out some key demands which include:

- The ILF must be retained and reopened to new applicants with adequate funding for this.
- The ILF should not be restricted to only those in employment.
- ILF funding must NOT be given to local authorities (LA's will use the funding as they wish, it will not be ring fenced, and we suspect it will not be directed appropriately for

the particular disabled people it is meant for).

- Disabled people should have input into the design of the consultation process.
- Review the arbitrary decision to close the ILF without assessing the impact this will have on current and potential users, and without consultation, violates the Human Rights of disabled people who depend on ILF to live.

Only time will tell what if any notice the Government will take of the growing concern and anger being expressed by disabled people, not only around ILF, but also over the increasing cuts in social care and benefits. However, it's important that our voice is heard and it's up to all of us to get involved, whether that's writing a letter, signing a petition, attending a rally or attending a meeting.

Brian Hilton





# TRIBUTES TO A COMRADE

**Vic was a unique individual and critical thinker in the development of the Disabled People's Movement. However, as the following edited extracts from victorfinkelstein.com demonstrate, he didn't work in isolation. Vic believed in collective action and much of what he achieved, he did so shoulder to shoulder with others. Vic was loved, respected and will be sadly missed.**

**Baroness Jane Campbell:** His work laid the foundations and provided the bricks of knowledge and understanding that informed my entire career, and will go on to do so until I stop thinking!

**David Ernst:** For a friend I did know, but a long time ago. What can one say about Victor? Brave, committed, dedicated. He had a special, critical mind, incisive and difficult to elude.

**Mike Oliver:** By the late 1970s a new organisation was beginning to emerge along the lines suggested by Vic and in 1981 BCODP was formed. We had no money, few resources and didn't completely trust each other but Vic became the first chair and somehow held us all together.

**Beverley Naidoo:** I've never forgotten Vic saying one day words to the effect, 'You know, you able-bodied people are incredibly wasteful. If people in wheelchairs were to design houses, we'd use far less material. We could make door frames half the height and then you would have to bend down to get through and it is you who would be disabled!' It

was a tremendously powerful image that I've often quoted.

**Ronnie Kasrils** (former South African government minister): I first knew Vic Finkelstein in the tense period 1961-63 when he was member of a semi-secret unit of the ANC-aligned Congress of Democrats. When I was on the run from the police in 1963 he unhesitatingly put me up at his student digs for a couple of days. He was calm and unflappable and clearly wished he could do more.

**Pallo Jordan** (former South African Government Minister): Vic and Liz were personally responsible for organising Disabled People Against Apartheid, a tiny lobby that protested the continued participation of apartheid South Africa in Sport for the Disabled during the 1980s. After two widely publicised demonstrations, apartheid South Africa was excluded in conformity with the world-wide boycott of racism in sport.

**Gerry Zarb:** Vic's passing is one that really kicks you in the stomach. When I first met Vic in the 1980s I was both curious and excited - he was and probably always will be the intellectual touchstone for the disability movement.

**Anne Plumb:** Some memories of Vic; at a UPIAS meeting in Derbyshire, not in the heat of the debate but minding the creche; at a talk given in Manchester when Vic reminded people that there was nothing special about aids or adaptations, that humans had made use of these from the earliest of times.

**Phil Friend:** I never had the pleasure of actually meeting Vic Finkelstein but I hugely admired his work. He was without question one of the most influential contributors to the emancipation of disabled people. Like so many of us I was

liberated by his assertion that the system was the problem not us!

**Joe Camilleri** (Chairman, Kummissjoni Nazzjonali Persuni b'Dizabilita): Just as he did in so many other countries Vic inspired many of us here in Malta. I was lucky enough to meet Vic very briefly about eight years ago when he was invited to our island to speak about disability issues. What he had to say was so inspiring to us disability-activists, because it was so obvious that he spoke with the moral authority of someone who had actually 'been there' and 'done it'.

**Frances Hasler:** Vic's voice got softer over the years but his ideas stayed sharp. His life touched so many people because he was an original thinker and also a profoundly engaged and humane person. I am so pleased to have known him. He will be missed - and fondly remembered.

**Bree Robbins** (Former Central Co-ordinator Disabled People Against Apartheid): It was over 30 years ago we first met, when I joined UPIAS, but it seems like yesterday. I will always remember the work we did together within UPIAS, BCODP and Disabled People Against Apartheid (DPAA). I remember the woolly bobble hat that you always wore on DPAA demos and how you fidgeted with that hat whenever the disabled racist apartheid team came out to confront our demonstrators.

**Anne Rae:** I loved and admired Vic so much. His meeting with Paul Hunt, with whom he founded the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation was the catalyst which changed me, my life and the lives of thousands of other disabled people in the UK forever. His integrity and steadfastness in carrying forward the UPIAS philosophy in spite of

the attempts by some self promoting folk to undermine him was awesome.

**Nancy Hansen** (Disability Studies University of Manitoba Canada): I will never forget reading Vic's writing for the first time. It had a profound impact on my life and in many ways set the course for what I do today. Thank you so very much for the leadership, strength and conviction, a fine legacy and profound loss.

**James Elder-Woodward:** Vic's death has been very sad news. It was a real honour and privilege to have known and worked with Vic. He, and my ex-boss Ken Davis, were both stalwarts of the movement. I really admired Vic, and was so pleased when he agreed to come up to Glasgow in 1986 to help me start and train a new group - the Strathclyde Equality Awareness Trainers in Disability.

**Maggie Davis [nee Hines]:** Vic had been in my and Ken's life for so long when we set up UPIAS with other members. What an exciting time that was, full of discussion; arguments and all manner of feelings to try and forge ahead to find where our place was in society, if we had one at all. It was the beginning of so much and I was also totally in awe of Vic intellectually. He did not suffer fools gladly, and if I didn't understand a word, he would tell me to go and look it up!

**Bob Williams-Findlay:** It's true that over many years we had differences of opinion in terms of theory and politics, but the majority of these wouldn't have existed if Vic hadn't provided the material to debate in the first place. The foundation of my thinking around disability comes either from Vic's work or has been reinforced by it. I can honestly say I wouldn't be the person I am today without the invention of comrade Vic Finkelstein.

**Neville Strowger:** Fondest memories working together with myself and Dorothy Whitaker. One event, at Greater Manchester County Hall, debating with the Transport Planners issues around the Metro Tram pushing it to be fully accessible. Without Vic I think the battle would have been lost.

**Judy Hunt:** It is hard to find words to express what an enormous impact Vic has had on my life. The meeting between Vic and Liz, Paul and myself in 1971 could not have been more significant. How little we knew of where it would lead us. It changed all our lives and brought us into a mammoth struggle for the liberation of disabled people. In our struggles along with others against an oppressive and patronising culture we looked forwards with excitement to a life of endless opportunity.

**Dave Barkham:** Victor Finkelstein was a comrade and friend of great integrity and strength of character. Never one to indulge in self promotion, his was the quiet dedication and commitment that subverted the granite monolith of the apartheid regime.

**Mark Priestley:** It was encountering Vic's writing that first gave me the connection between disability and politics in the 1980s, and revealed the links we shared with involvement in the anti-apartheid movement. It was Vic who grasped the potential of the Internet to transform and democratise academic and activist knowledge, when others were still suspicious, and who gave me that copy of the 'little red book' to become the first document scanned electronically in what would later become the disability archive.

**Jenny Morris:** I wrote to Vic last year to give him an illustration of how his work was enduring - my daughter had posted one of his early articles on her Facebook page saying that everyone should read it. She had used his work in an extended essay she wrote (in her third year of a degree in Development Studies) and spent many months enthusing about it, and continues to believe (as do I) that his influence and importance will endure.

**Rhian Davis:** Vic's ideas influenced and inspired a generation of disabled activists and gave rise to the development of the Disabled People's Movement through the formation of Centres for Independent Living, Coalitions of Disabled People and disability arts groups. His work also inspired the creation of Disability Equality Training, Direct Payments and the campaign for civil rights legislation.

**Anita Ghai (India):** Vic's loss is a loss for every person who is connected to the disability issues. I had read about him and my first opportunity of meeting him was in the Re-Thinking conference in Oslo.

**Mpho Ndebele:** I did my disability studies in UCT and I was introduced to Vic and all other scholars of disability studies...it is really sad to learn of Vic's passing.

**Staffan Sanden (Sweden):** I remember visiting his house in London, being friendly invited and making my interview with him. I can also remember other occasions in Leeds, listening to him at conferences, and when we have sat down for discussions and having meals together.

**Victoria Richards:** He made a major contribution to our movement.

**Nancy Hanson** (Canada): He was a true pioneer and his work had a profound impact on me and my work as a scholar, researcher and activist. He will be greatly missed and always remembered.

**Alan Roulstone:** Very sad news. Vic was an inspiration to so many people

**Best Nagase** (Osamu - Tokyo): It is with great sadness that I have learnt that Vic Finkelstein has passed away with your posting. In 1995, when I visited London from the Hague, where I was working on my masters, I met Vic, who was kind enough to meet me at a tube station. He gave me a number of "Fundamental Principles of Disability". He said he had many under his bed.

**Frank Hall-Bentick** (Australia): First met him in mid 1980's at DPI World Assembly he was at its formation in 1981. Always on for good argument on the rights of disabled people and breaking the strangle hold of the medical model.

**Peter Beresford:** I am really sad to hear. I hope that there will be some visibility for Vic and his contribution also in the mainstream media.

**Larry Arnold:** Shock at the suddenness and sadness of this news, and awe of all that Vic has contributed to the understanding of disabled people's oppression and the ways to combat it. I too offer my condolences. Vic is a hard act to follow, but someone has to, let us all unite in ensuring that we do.

**Theo Blakemore:** I first met Vic in the late 1990s at a conference in Cornwall, UK. A very humble, quiet man, with much to say and a voice to say it.

**Sue Porter:** His determination and preparedness to challenge, as well as his

theorising, has informed my practice ever since.

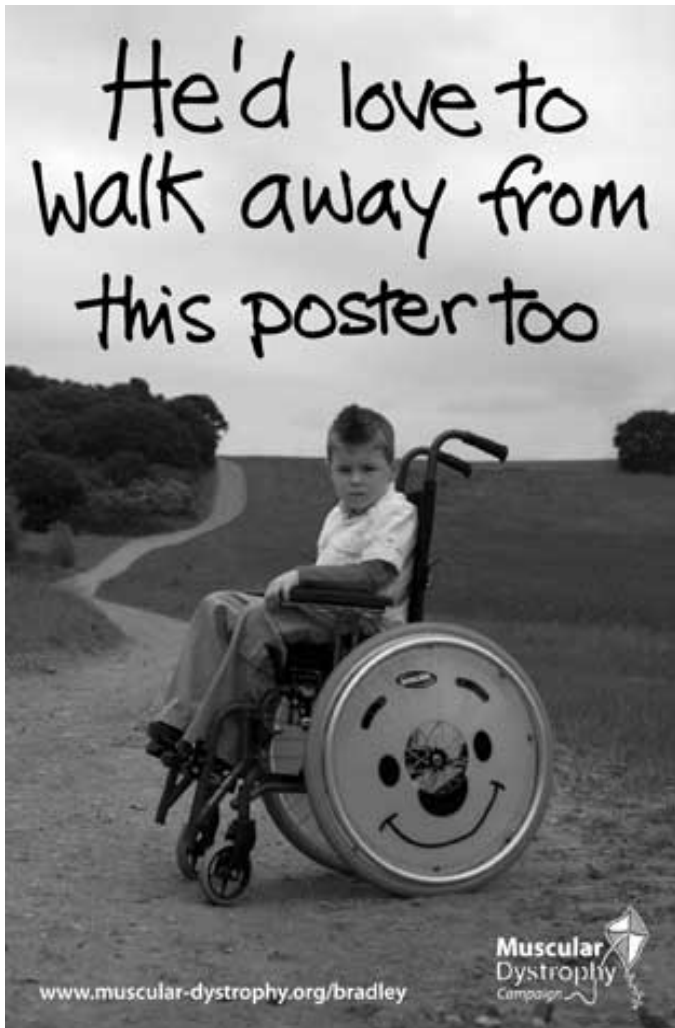
**Gordon Cardona (Malta):** I believe the only way we can truly honour the man and continue the legacy he left behind is to strengthen our resolve to dismantle the forces that create disability and work together - disabled people and our non-disabled allies - to achieve equality for all.

Thanks to [www.victorfinkelstein.com](http://www.victorfinkelstein.com) for allowing us to reproduce extracts from the website, which readers are encouraged to visit and view the many and varied tributes to Vic in their entirety





## Wish We Wouldn't See....



Just when you thought attitudes were really beginning to change, along comes another big disability charity to turn the clock back 30 years. Yes, 'Muscular Dystrophy Campaign' has reproduced an almost identical version of their 1977 charity poster. Originally photographed by Lord Snowdon, the black and white image shows a forlorn looking child sitting in a wheelchair. Accompanying the image are the words "He'd love to walk away from this poster to".

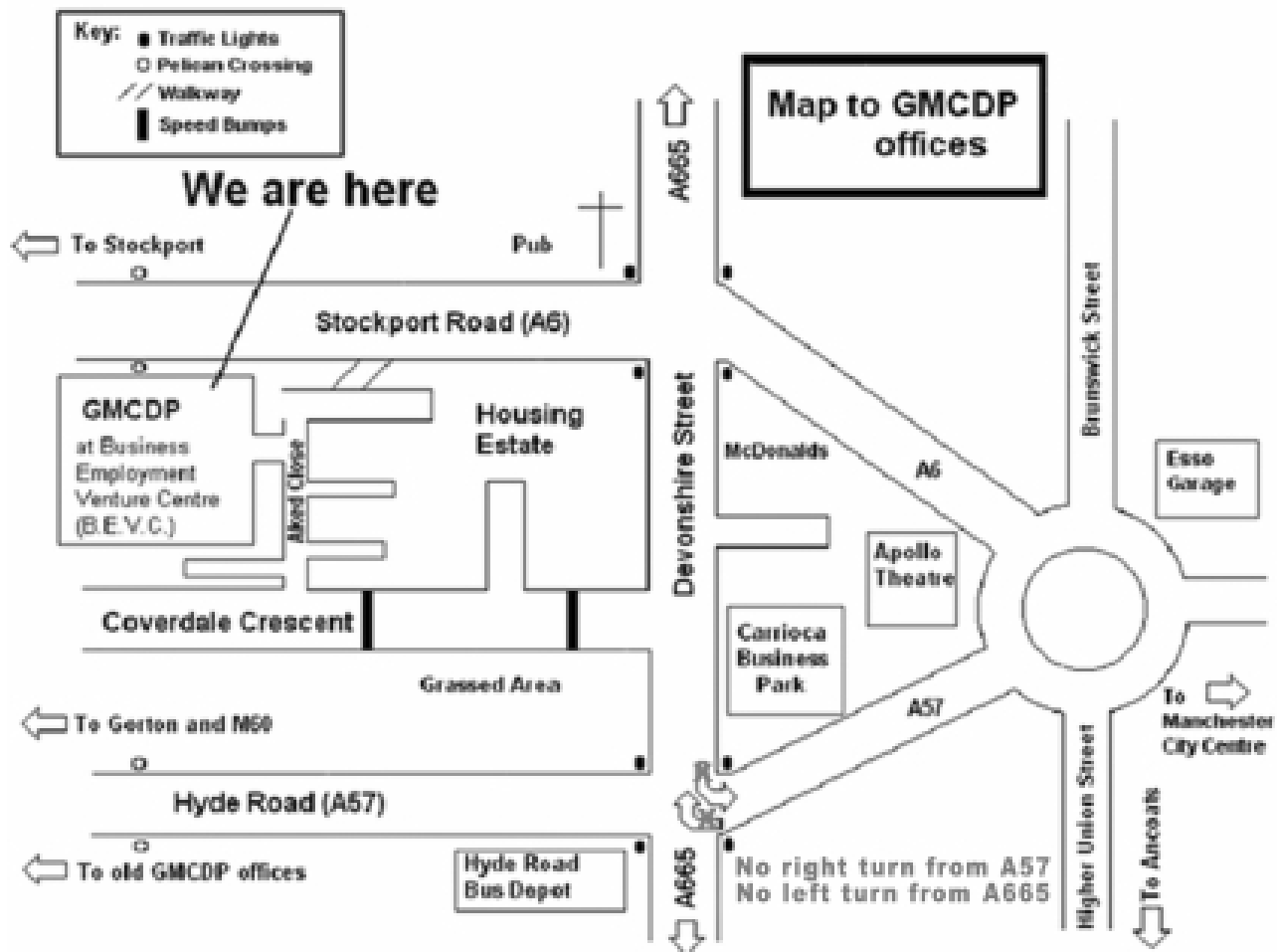


**Above:** 2012 Poster Campaign

**To the Right:** 1977 Poster Campaign



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**GMCDP, BEVC, Aked Close,  
Ardwick, Manchester, M12 4AN  
Voice & Text: 0161 273 5154  
Fax: 0161 273 4164  
E-mail: [info@gmcdp.com](mailto:info@gmcdp.com)**

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