The Politics of Independent Living: Keeping the Movement Radical by Ken Davis

Ken Davis is writing before a meeting called ‘The Philosophy and Politics of Independent Living' in 1984.

This is a meeting where people talked about ideas on Independent Living and how could be carried out in Britain.

Ken Davis wanted people to know his ideas before the meeting so they could be spoken about.

He’d read articles about Independent Living in the United States of America.

Some articles said that Independent Living was an important idea and that it should change how people think about all kinds of services for disabled people.

Other articles said that Independent Living wasn’t a very important idea at all and that things should carry on as they were.

Ken Davis thinks that we should decide what we want to happen by looking at what disabled people are already doing to change society.

Disabled People in Britain are working together and setting up groups called **Coalitions**.

**Coalitions** are groups of disabled people that try to make their local area a better place for disabled people to live

They decide what’s wrong with their local area together.

Once they’ve decided what needs to happen, they work out ways to put it right.

When Ken Davis wrote this, there were Coalitions in Manchester, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire.

One thing the Coalitions do is set up **Centres for Independent Living**.

**Centres for Independent Living** are organisations run by and for disabled people, which sort out services like personal assistance, peer support, and advocacy.

Ken Davis says that these centres and services will help disabled people to control their own lives.

They will also get lots of people talking and working for Disabled People to be treated more fairly.

Non-disabled people can help by making sure disabled people can control what happens in their lives.

Ken Davis thinks that society is unfair to disabled people.

Disabled are stopped from fully joining in with other people because of **barriers**.

**Barriers** are things in the world that stop disabled people doing things that non-disabled people do.

They can be physical things like steps, or unfair rules about who gets to do what.

Barriers make it harder for disabled people to live the lives they want to live.

An example of a barrier is that many buildings have stairs, so a wheelchair user cannot use them.

Another barrier is that many disabled people do not have the right equipment to help them, like wheelchairs or hearing aids.

Another barrier is that disabled people do not have help from someone called a Personal Assistant (PA), who can work to help disabled people to live their life independently.

All over the world, disabled people are working together to get rid of those barriers.

Some of these barriers have been removed, this a good thing but it has taken a long time.

When disabled people work together, they can get rid of the barriers in real life.

It is important that everyone works together to help to create Independent Living for disabled people.

Many different types of people help out, but Ken Davis says that only disabled people can really understand the problems disabled people face.

At the moment, there are groups called “**think tanks.**”

**Think tanks** are groups of professional people who talk to the government about how the country should be run.

Some think tanks are talking about how they can make Independent Living a real thing in Britain.

One of these groups is called the Centre on Environment for the Handicapped (CEH).

This is the group that is hosting the meeting Ken Davis is writing about.

Some people think that think tanks are the best way to get independent living in Britain.

Ken Davis thinks this is not a good way at all.

Think tanks tell the government what they think is the best way to create Independent Living.

Disabled people get left out of what the think tank and government decide on what is best for care services.

Even if the think tank has the right ideas, this way of doing things can take too long.

Ken Davis says that disabled people should have a say in every discussion that is about them, and should not have to wait for the help they need from others.

Ken Davis thinks that the best way to get Independent Living is for disabled people to run the services they use.

Because there are disabled people creating coalitions in Britain, Ken Davis thinks there are more chances for disabled people to create and control Independent Living.

Ken Davis talks about how **Derbyshire County Council** are working with the Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People.

**Derbyshire County Council** are in charge of most of the services disabled people use in Derbyshire.

Derbyshire County Council has agreed to let the Coalition of Disabled People run some of the services there.

This is a new way of doing things.

Sorting things out this way gives disabled people more control over the help that they get.

This will make sure Independent Living is made for and by disabled people.

Ken Davis expects that some non-disabled people will be angry about disabled people controlling their own services.

New ideas about how society should work can sometimes cause a strong **reaction** from people.

**A Reaction** can mean two things.

**A** **reaction** can be something you do without thinking, like saying ‘ouch’ when you fall over.

When you do something without thinking about it, you don’t know if it’s the right thing to do or not.

**A reaction** can also mean stopping others from doing something that’s good for most people because it isn’t good for you.

If a government stops people from voting because it thinks they won’t vote for them, this is a type of reaction.

Ken Davis thinks that some non-disabled people will have both kinds of reaction

Ken Davis thinks this is a good thing.

If some people are angry about Independent Living, this means that disabled people are really changing how things are done.

This shows that disabled people are strong and that they are trying new things.

Being strong and changing society is what Ken Davis calls ‘Keeping the Movement **Radical**.’

**Being radical** means changing the things that cause problems.

This means finding a new way for society to work.

## Recognising reaction:

In the group Derbyshire Coalition of Disabled People, they talk about the Independent Living Movement and how it can help disabled people in Britain.

The Independent Living Movement was started in the United States of America.

This movement is similar to what has been happening in Britain over the last 20 years.

Something that the British movement and the American movement have in common is that they want disabled people to have control over their own lives.

Talking about ideas with each other can help disabled people understand and work on what Independent Living can look like.

Ken Davis thinks that it is selfish for professionals not to include disabled people in creating Independent Living.

Because of the many barriers like this in society, lots of disabled people are poor and sometimes unsafe.

This can make Independent Living difficult for lots of people to do.

Some people say that Independent Living can’t be very important if so many people find it difficult.

They say that professionals should keep doing what they are doing.

By doing what they are doing, professionals think that they can make disabled people less poor and more safe.

This would mean non-disabled people would decide what was best for disabled people without asking them.

When people say this way of doing things is fine it means they are not interested in changing things.

Ken Davis says that this idea ignores what disabled people are already saying about society.

Disabled people came up with the idea of the “**Social Model”** to explain and understand the world.

**The Social Model** says that the barriers in society are why disabled people get a bad deal, not their impairment or condition.

Some people say that the reason that disabled people are not included in society is that their bodies are different from non-disabled people.

This idea comes from the **World Health Organisation (WHO)**.

The WHO is an organisation that looks at worldwide health and medicine and lots of professionals work there.

Disabled people all around the world said that they do not agree with this idea.

They think the Social Model is the best way to explain why disabled people are not included.

Some people think that professionals are the only people who understand the world and that only professionals can make change in the world.

This leaves disabled people with no say over what happens to them.

## Hatchet Job

Governments and big organisations like Charities or the World Health Organisation give jobs to professionals.

Usually, they hire a few professionals and give them money to give jobs to other professionals

This means that the professionals stick together and try not to disagree.

If they want to keep getting important jobs, professionals will not blame the problems of society on the government, charities, or each other.

They get angry with disabled people who disagree with them.

They try to show that disabled people’s ideas about changing society are bad ideas, or that their ideas aren’t important.

Professionals ignore all the hard work disabled people are doing to create Independent Living.

Many professionals say that good medical treatment is still the most important way for disabled people get more independent.

This is done through things like **rehabilitation**, medication, operations and help from medical doctors.

Rehabilitation is when someone is taught to do things they used to do after they’ve got an illness or had an accident that’s changed how their body works.

Rehabilitation might be teaching someone to walk again after a car crash, or teaching someone with one hand how to cook or drive again.

In rehabilitation, it is a doctor, nurse, or other professionals who decides what someone should learn and how they should learn it.

This idea says that rehabilitation is giving people independence already.

If rehabilitation is the most important thing, then how disabled people are treated at the moment does not need to change very much.

Ken Davis does not agree and asks these questions.

If hospitals and professionals could already do what disabled people wanted, then why would disabled people set up Coalitions?

If there are not that many disabled people who want Independent Living, then why are so many disabled people saying they **do** want independent living?

The Independent Living Movement in Britain and America have already said they think the old way of doing things is wrong.

Ken Davis thinks that many professionals only pretend to care about what disabled people want.

They only really care about what is good for them.

Ken Davis thinks it is important for disabled people to have control over Independent Living.