**What to do? By Vic Finklestein**

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Vic Finkelstein had been involved with disability politics for a long time when he wrote this article.

This article is a follow up to an article he had written in 1996 for a charity newspaper.

In that first article, Vic Finkelstein said he was worried that the Disabled People’s Movement was going in the wrong direction.

He’d said that the Movement did not have a clear idea of where it was going.

Instead of **all** disabled people deciding what should happen, only **a** **few** disabled people made any decisions.

This meant that all of the things the movement was doing – like telling the government to bring in new laws – were done without most people deciding whether it was a good idea.

At the same time, some disabled people were thinking about the **social model of disability** in new ways.

The **social model of disability** says that it is the way society works which causes us to have worse lives and less freedom, not anything about our bodies or minds.

When Vic Finkelstein was writing, some disabled people said that the social model should talk more about people’s feelings.

Vic Finkelstein said that this was a mistake.

He said that when you spend lots of time thinking about your own feelings, it’s much harder to see how the world is changing around you.

He said that this wasted time and helped the government trick disabled people into supporting them.

The government had been talking very nicely to disabled people and had told them that it cared a lot about how they felt about themselves.

But at the same time, the government had done things that made most disabled people’s lives harder.

Vic Finkelstein says that him saying all this had made one important disabled person very angry.

This important person was very high up in the **British Council of Disabled People (BCODP)**

**BCODP** was this biggest organisation in the Disabled People’s Movement.

Vic Finkelstein does not tell us who this person was.

He says that this person was angry for three reasons.

**First**, the person was angry that Vic Finkelstein had said all of these things out in the open.

The person said that knocking the Disabled People’s Movement in a magazine could make the movement look weak.

They said that Vic Finkelstein makes it look like disabled people are fighting amongst themselves and can’t agree.

**Second**, the person said that Vic Finkelstein hadn’t talked about any of the good things BCODP had done.

**Third**, the person said that if Vic Finkelstein had looked closely, he would have seen that BCODP were doing the things he had complained they were not.

Vic Finkelstein had said that BCODP were not letting large numbers of disabled people get involved in their campaigns.

This person says that BCODPhad hired someone to teach more disabled people how to get important people to listen to them.

Vic Finkelstein says that this is not good enough.

He says that you must be able to speak openly if you think something is going wrong in the movement.

If you keep your worries to yourself, the problem will only get worse.

The people who are getting things wrong will just carry on and people who might have better ideas won’t be able to talk about them.

Vic says that there are disagreements about whether what BCODP has been doing is really good for disabled people.

The people at the top of BCODP think what they are doing is, but a lot of people at the bottom of BCODP do not.

Vic Finkelstein says that the things BCODP has been working on – like trying to get the government to pass new laws against discrimination – haven’t been good for many disabled people.

Disabled people were having a bad time because their support services were being stopped or changed in ways that gave them less control over the help they got.

Nothing BCODP was doing was going to deal with those problems.

Vic Finkelstein says all BCODP have done recently is make some disabled people feel very important by helping them have meetings with politicians.

When BCODP has reached out to other disabled people, it has been to teach them how to have the same kind of meetings.

Vic Finkelstein says meeting politicians and asking them for things is not the point of the Disabled People’s Movement.

A movement should be about people deciding what they want, then finding ways to do it.

What BCODP is doing means disabled people are stuck waiting for what other people decide to give them.

Vic Finkelstein looks at what BCODP has been asking the government for in more detail.

One of the things BCODP has argued for is something called **direct payments**.

**Direct Payments** are when a disabled person is given money to buy their own help, usually by paying someone to assist them to live at home.

According to BCODP, getting the government to agree to disabled people having direct payments was a big win.

They say that direct payments give disabled people much more choice over how they live their lives.

It means disabled people can buy the help they want and don’t have to put up with other people making decisions for them.

Vic Finkelstein says that things have not worked out that way.

The government did allow disabled people to buy their own help but it gave them very little money to pay for it.

This really meant that many disabled people were much worse off.

Vic Finkelstein said that this had happened to him.

He had a very small amount of money to spend and he could not buy the help he needed.

He had to decide whether to stop eating food he liked and not have his house repaired or stay in bed more because he had no help to get up.

Vic says that BCODP has been ignoring problems like these, even though they are what many disabled people care about.

Other things BCODP had been working on were problems called **Eugenics** and **Euthanasia**.

**Eugenics** is the idea that you can make humans perfect by not letting babies be born with conditions you think are bad.

**Euthanasia** is the idea that for some people it is better to die than be alive.

People who support euthanasia believe doctors should be allowed to kill some disabled people for their own good.

BCODP realised that both eugenics and euthanasia were bad news for disabled people.

BCODP leaders were very worried that some doctors and politicians believed these ideas.

So BCODP started making statements about how bad these ideas were.

Vic Finkelstein agrees these are bad things, but he thinks that BCODP have gone about dealing with them in the wrong way.

Vic says that the problem is not that a few doctors and politicians think eugenics and euthanasia are good ideas.

The real problem is that other people could be convinced that these ideas are a good thing.

Vic thinks that people are treated differently depending on if they can make money.

Some people think disabled people are a burden because many disabled people cannot work or make lots of money.

This means that there could be some people who would like to get rid of those disabled people.

Vic Finkelstein says this isn’t just a problem for disabled people.

A lot of people are worried about how society works.

Vic Finkelstein says that if disabled people work with those people, then disabled people will be much stronger

Then they would be able to make real change.

BCODP have not done this.

Instead, they’ve treated eugenics and euthanasia as only problems for disabled people and doctors, instead of problems for lots of people.

Vic Finkelstein says that BCODP’s mistakes on direct payments and eugenics are quite common mistakes.

Vic thinks that the people who work for BCODP think more about themselves than about how the world works and how it can be changed.

Vic says that in the Disabled People’s Movement, this has meant that some people have forced the movement to talk about their feelings, rather than how society works.

In the rest of society, other people have also found it hard to think seriously about anything which is not directly about them or their feelings.

Vic Finkelstein says that you can see this happening when you look at what’s on television, or at what the Government was doing at the time.

Vic says that programs on television have become silly and boring. They had stopped talking about interesting things that happen in the world.

The government at the time had also put lots of money into big silly projects which did not change anyone’s life.

The example Vic Finkelstein gives is the **Millennium Dome**.

The **Millennium Dome** was a big round building in London that was built to celebrate the year 2000.

It cost millions of pounds, but nobody really knew what it was for.

Vic Finkelstein thinks the Millennium Domewas about convincing people that they lived in a rich and powerful country.

But Vic thinks because the government built the Dome, they had no proper ideas about how to get people to get together to make the country better.

Vic Finkelstein thinks that a lot of disabled people will get fed up with how empty and selfish life has become.

He doesn’t think they will be alone, as a lot of other people will get fed up too.

One example Vic uses is Teachers, as they might get angry that they are not teaching young people to think about serious issues.

Some professionals like social workers and occupational therapists might get angry about things.

These workers are now expected to solve disabled people’s problems one at a time, rather than try to find ways to solve lots of problems at once.

Their bosses also give them lots of rules to follow.

This stops them from thinking creatively or working directly with disabled people to find new solutions.

This means that they are stopped from doing their job well and their disabled clients have a hard time.

It doesn’t help that both teachers and social workers were being paid less than they were before.

This made it very likely that they might get angry.

Vic Finkelstein says that the Disabled People’s Movement must find new ways of working with these people.

This is so disabled people can get what they want and need.

He says the Movement has made a mistake before by being too nervous to push for real changes with angry workers.

He says the Movement has already tried to make little bits of social work and education better.

This is instead of trying to change the way social work and education are run in big ways.

But if workers want big changes, this means the Movement can convince them.

Vic Finkelstein says that the Movement should join in with angry workers and try to make new kinds of jobs that would make everyone happier.

These jobs would be about getting disabled people involved in every decision about what happens in the community.

Workers would have to listen to disabled people as a whole, not the bosses they have at the moment.

They would have the chance to find new ways of solving problems in the community.

These jobs could hire both disabled and non-disabled people and they could share ideas and skills.

Vic Finkelstein says talking about things like this can get more people involved in the Movement and make it work better.