Disabled People's Self-organisation: a new social movement?

TOM SHAKESPEARE

University of Northumbria, Social Welfare Research Unit, Sutherland Building Annexe, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE1 8ST, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT *This article will examine the ways in which disabled people, world-wide but especially in the USA and Britain, have emerged as a coherent political force in the last 20 years. Furthermore, in looking at disability from the perspective afforded by new social movement arguments, I wish to explore the implications of this development: the fact that disabled people in the 1990s are 'doing it for themselves', and to develop comparisons between the disabled people's movement and the movements of black people, women, and gays and lesbians, for autonomy, recognition and resources. I will suggest that new social movement theory, while useful in the analysis of environmentalism, post-materialism, and some varieties of nationalism, cannot fully grasp the essence of liberation politics.*

Introduction

Recent decades have seen disability become a hotly contested issue: in the political arena, with the development of the disabled people's movement, and in academic debates. Political interventions have centred on issues of discrimination and segregation, moving beyond the traditional concerns about medical and welfare provision to focus on areas such as anti-discrimination legislation; the role of charity and cultural representation; segregation in transport and education; and innovations to increase autonomy (through centres for independent living). The academic debate has developed the concept of the social model, originally initiated within the Union of Physically Impaired against Segregation (UPIAS), and seen a conflict between the approaches of disabled and non-disabled researchers.

It is important to consider these developments as examples of praxis, the unity of theory and practice within struggle. But because of the priority afforded to achieving change, there has been little space for considering the nature of the movement itself, historically and politically, and the significance of new definitions of disability for the self-identity of disabled people. This article attempts to con-

tribute towards this type of analytical self-awareness, using existing sociological theories about new social movements.

Disability and Direct Action

There are now several empirical histories of the disabled people's movement, both internationally and in Britain (Pagel, 1988; Driedger, 1989). These are useful beginnings, but are nevertheless rather brief descriptions, with little consideration of the causal factors involved in the expanding consciousness of disabled people. Rather than repeat existing material, I will point to parallels and differences between the disability movement in Britain and North America and other liberation campaigns, before contextualising disability within new social movement theory. There are significant differences between the disability movements in Britain and the USA. Clearly, the USA has a different tradition of protest and social reform from Britain and much of western Europe. The absence of a developed welfare state; the strong emphasis on individual rights, expressed in a written constitution; the fullest development of the free market and competitive values; the virtual absence of collectivism and the organised labour movement, are all important factors in explaining the different developments of disabled people's politics.

One of the main inspirations of the movement in the USA was the example of the civil rights campaigns and women's movement of the late 1960s. Another was the widespread injury caused by the war in Vietnam, and the increase in the numbers of young disabled people. A large element of the movement in North America has stemmed from consumerism and self help: for example, in the independent living centres this emphasis plays a large part. This is a particularly US tradition, of self-reliance and of individual rights. Many writers focus on consumer involvement whereas British approaches would stress political autonomy and democratic participation, not the market. US disability campaigns focus on admitting disabled people to wider society, demanding the extension of existing social rights to them, as a group. In Britain, although this citizenship stress is an important (and developing) emphasis, there has been a radical rejection of social normality, and a structural stress on changing the system that produces disability.

In Britain, as in North America, direct action is a very important part of the disabled people's movement: for example, the Campaign for Accessible Transport (CAT) and the Campaign against Patronage (CAP). Both groups have organised highly visible and controversial actions—for example, a demonstration in London's Oxford Street, which involved wheelchair users chaining themselves to buses, and regular blockades of television fund-raising spectaculars such as Telethon and Children in Need. Such mobilisations are reminiscent of the tactics of the women's suffragists in the years before the First World War, but also of the struggles of the 1960s: there is an unsubstantiated story that New York wheelchair users enlisted the support of the Weather Underground to dynamite undropped kerbs in the early years.

The civil rights movement was influential for subsequent liberation struggles

not just because of the content of demands, but also through the techniques and manner of struggle:

> When traditional legal channels have been exhausted, disabled persons have learned to employ other techniques of social protest such as demonstrations and sit-ins. (DeJong, 1983, p. 12)

This development is important not just instrumentally, in the securing of specific changes and reforms, but because direct action challenges popular perceptions of disabled people, and empowers and inspires participants. Aldon Morris's history of the early US civil rights movement suggests its importance for black people was two-fold:

> One, it was the first time that large masses of blacks directly confronted and effectively disrupted the normal functioning of groups and institutions thought to be responsible for their oppression. The hallmark of the modern civil rights movement is that these mass confrontations were widespread and sustained over a long period of time in the face of heavy repression. Two, it was the first time in American history that blacks adopted nonviolent tactics as a mass technique for bringing about social change. (Morris, 1984, p. xi)

This comment could be applied, for example, to Stop Telethon demonstrations, and to actions against inaccessible transport. The latter is a form of segregation not so divorced from the segregated buses which were one of the first targets of the civil rights movement:

> Buses became the first target of the movement because members of the black community had begun to see bus discrimination not as a private misery but as a public issue and a common enemy. (Morris, 1984, p. 48)

Morris sees the direct action orientation as emphasising the 'here and now'. This immediacy seems obvious in the urgency of contemporary disabled people's struggles, and through the impact of direct action on the streets, as non-disabled people are forced to confront their stereotypical attitudes: Jenny Morris has written of the feelings of power that collective action engenders:

> The obvious challenge that we were mounting to people's assumptions was also a source of my sense of power. Indeed, each time I had to explain to a non-disabled friend why I was going on such a demonstration, I was very conscious of the way that this issue challenges the root of our oppression and that even to explain my motivations very briefly brings people up short against the core of their own prejudice. (Morris, 1991, p. 191).

Direct action has a number of important elements. It is a way of focusing attention on the institutions and environments that create disability: the inaccessible transport, the demeaning television charity spectaculars. It is an overtly political act, showing that disability is a matter of social relations, not medical conditions. It is a chance for disabled people to 'do it for themselves', without the help or participation of non-disabled people, thus prefiguring the claims of the disability movement to

autonomy, independence and power. It is an empowering process for participants, creating a sense of solidarity, purpose, and collective strength which enhances and develops the movement.

When the CAT blockaded Oxford Street, and on other demonstrations, the police force has found it difficult to deal with wheelchair users and other mobility impaired people. Proceedings against arrested protesters at Horseferry Road Magistrates Court had to be terminated, as the building was inaccessible to disabled people. These ramifications of direct action protest illustrate the way style and method can reinforce the message and content of the campaign.

Popular opinion cannot come to terms with disabled radicalism, preferring to think disabled people are happy with their situation. In an editorial coinciding with the Oxford Street demonstrations, the *Times* leader (29 September 1990) suggested that, while everyone was sympathetic to disabled people (after all, anyone could become disabled, and it was no one's fault), the militants must be careful not to alienate public opinion:

> Militancy, unlawful demonstrations, and the disruption of city life may relieve the feelings of the disabled. But such tactics will eventually alienate the public support on which the disabled have to rely.

Of course, this fairly common opinion indicates that many people have still not understood that the basic claim of the disability movement is that disability results from social relations, not impairment, and therefore society does not merely face responsibilities towards 'the disabled' but is culpable in creating disability in the first place.

In the recent Institute of Public Policy Research (IPPR) report on *Equal Rights for Disabled People: the case for a new law*, Oliver & Barnes summarise recent developments as follows:

> The move towards self-organisation has prompted increasing numbers of disabled people to adopt a shared political identity, which in turn has helped to build a new mood of confidence. Disabled people no longer ask for change but demand it. They are prepared to use a whole range of tactics in pursuit of their demands, including direct action and civil disobedience. (Bynoe *et al.*, 1991, p. 12)

These features of the disability movement—a shared political identity, the use of direct action—indicate the importance of developing parallels with other social movements. In 1976, Safilios-Rothschild suggested,

> The time may be ripe for the disabled to generate a social movement patterned after the at least partially successful examples of the Black Movement and the Women's Movement. (Safilios-Rothschild, 1976, p. 45)

Each liberation struggle was the work of the subject peoples themselves, be they black, gay or women:

> Perhaps the most striking thing about feminism is the extent to which it has been a movement of women and not just for women. (Banks, 1986, p. 106)

Political change did not rely on the lobbying of professionals, or the use of electoral methods. Each of these constituencies have historically been disempowered: black people and women being disenfranchised totally, others being electorally invisible. Disabled people, too, have been disenfranchised: several writers have shown the obstacles to registration and voting, let alone effective political participation. Oliver (1990) argues that conventional party politics has failed disabled people, who have become a marginalised underclass. The solution has been grass roots campaigning activity, self-organisation, direct democracy, and direct action: inspiring struggles, relying on passion as much as logical persuasion, as Olive Banks argues for first-wave feminism:

> During this period women and men were stirred not only by the intellectual arguments put forward but even more, perhaps, by the emotional impact of the struggle itself. (Banks, 1986, p. 140)

Thus there were the civil rights marches, the Stonewall Riot, the Miss World demonstration, and more recently, Greenham Common, Telethon, Outrage. All these campaigns have implicitly worked through a wider conception of politics, classically encapsulated in the feminist slogan 'The personal is political'.

Identity and Group Consciousness

Above, I have made reference to disability identity in connection with the empowering role of direct action. Much academic work has discussed disabled people's identity, but the majority has focused more on 'identifying' disabled people, through empirical or clinical investigation, taking disability to refer to medically assessable impairment and functional limitation. I am concerned with identity in a political sense: with identifying as part of an oppressed group, with part of a cultural minority.

This process of identification seems the reverse of what William Ryan called "blaming the victim" because it is about converting private woes into public wrongs. It is about 'the victim' refusing that label, and instead focusing attention on the structural causes of victimisation. It is about the subversion of stigma: taking a negative appellation and converting it into a badge of pride.

Recent Anglo-American homosexual politics show a similar process, as gay men and women take on the word 'queer', traditional insult, and make of it a strengthening identifier, referring to the new tendency of direct action, pride and political struggle. Similarly, many disabled activists and performers would use the word 'cripple', or 'crip', in a way which they would find offensive if non-disabled people adopted it. In both these cases, the words refer to a wider development, which is the assertion of group identity in the face of oppression, constructed through a political and cultural struggle focused on pride. And this pride is about the assertion of a positive identity, personally and collectively, in the face of prejudice and discrimination.

The key to this development is that people are 'doing it for themselves'. The British Council of Organisations of Disabled People (BCODP) and similar disabled people's organisations came into being against existing charities and pressure groups

which worked *for* disabled people, on their behalf. BCODP said that this must be the action of disabled people themselves, mass action rather than élite action. This dichotomy is familiar from previous struggles. For example, the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People was a white-dominated organisation, based in the US, for much of its early history. It was the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that was formed and controlled by black people, and which subsequently took over the leadership of the struggle, itself later superseded to an extent by more radical black consciousness groups. In contemporary British gay politics there is the conflict between the political strategies of the Stonewall Group and Outrage: the former is an élite group who lobby for change at the top (tea with John Major); the latter is a radical, participatory, direct action group trying to change popular consciousness, not just laws.

I conclude firstly, that liberation struggles have to be led and controlled by the colonised group itself, and secondly, that liberation must involve the most widespread possible action and mobilisation, rather than mere changes in élites or legislation: the latter would parallel a *coup d'état*, rather than the intended revolution. Ethel Klein makes a distinction between the feminist sympathy of men (an "abstract, ideological commitment to equality") and the feminist consciousness of women (an "internalised political perspective derived from personal experience"):

> ... feminist support based on abstract commitments to social justice and equality is diffuse and has a relatively weak and short-term impact on people's political choices. In contrast, support based on personal experience and solidarity with the experiences of other women, on feminist consciousness, fosters a vigilant commitment to the pursuit of sex equality. (Klein, 1984, p. 7)

So, identifying as a member of an oppressed group and organising to effect social change are critical.

In Britain, the explicitly political character of the struggle, and the extent to which it is an 'indigenous' struggle, has been recognised from the start, in the UPIAS/Disability Alliance split. In the USA, this issue was also being recognised, though perhaps more cautiously: DeJong concludes rather tentatively.

> One of the most vexing issues in the future will be the role of able-bodied persons in the movement. In some quarters, it is strongly felt that only disabled consumers should hold significant leadership positions. The issue finds a parallel in the civil rights movement, at the stage when whites were asked to relinquish their leadership roles in black advocacy organizations. (DeJong, 1983, p. 26)

Irving Zola makes the claim more strongly:

> I do not claim that no one else can help or understand us; rather, I would argue that, as with women and blacks, we have reached that point in history, where having been there is essential in determining where to go. (Zola, 1983, p. 57)

The latest British developments in this 'indigenous' tendency came at the 1992 Researching Disability Conference, when disabled people told non-disabled researchers that they had no right to be researching the disability experience, showing that even the academic study of disability has felt the politicising effects of the movement.

Is this development valid? Can only disabled people speak for other disabled people? Disability is less of a unitary concept than race and gender: the experiences of people with visual impairment, restricted growth or spinal injury will differ markedly, and factors such as the onset of the condition will also influence the experience, as well as the obvious dimensions of race, class and gender. It is important not to ignore differences between impairments, despite the tendency of writers to gloss over difference in favour of the totalising and unifying role of oppression. Clearly, all disabled people face a common exclusion, prejudice and discrimination, and the vast majority share a condition of poverty. But beyond this, there are variations. Can I, as a person with restricted growth, effectively speak for or write about someone with cerebral palsy or visual impairment? I can identify with the basic social experience, but the details can be no clearer to me than they would be to anyone else, disabled or not. If a non-disabled person cannot describe or represent my experience, then can I describe or represent the experience of someone with a different impairment? Does this undermine either the claim for disabled unity, or the denial of a role to non-disabled people? I think not, on the basis that the social oppression is the most immanent aspect of the experience, but the issue of advocacy and identity is rather more confused than has so far been suggested.

The crucial issue regarding identity is the process whereby individual people with impairment come to recognise themselves as disabled, focusing on the social oppression which is basic to that condition. People are socialised into particular ways of viewing disability, which are based on individualised and medicalised attitudes. Disability is widely seen as individual medical tragedy, by disabled people as much as by non-disabled people.

This problem parallels the experience of other subaltern groups: for example, there is a wide Marxist literature on 'false consciousness', whereby proletarians fail to recognise the true nature of the social relations which render them powerless and alienated, and seek individual explanations, or have recourse in religion, or perhaps nationalism and other divisionary ideologies. Feminist writers have used psychoanalytical concepts in the discussion of 'internalised oppression', whereby women absorb the patriarchal world view, and hold discriminatory attitudes to themselves and other women.

Here, I wish to focus on identity formation as a part of the growth of group consciousness which leads to social movements: collective political action by subaltern groups. Ethel Klein highlights the issue when she argues:

> Having a hard life and being a member of an exploited group does not in itself lead to political unrest. People often blame themselves for their difficulties. Only when they see that their problems are shared by other people like them, the group, can they attribute the source of their concerns

> to social conditions, such as discrimination, and look to political solutions.
> (Klein, 1984, p. 2)

She isolates a three stage process of political consciousness, from her study of the women's movement. First, affiliation, through a process of group membership and sharing of interests; secondly, a rejection of traditional definitions for that group's status in society; finally,

> Personal problems become political demands only when the inability to survive, or to attain a decent life, is seen as a consequence of social institutions or social inequality rather than of personal failure, and the system is blamed. (Klein, 1984, p. 3)

Clearly, these three steps are demonstrated in the development of the disabled people's movement.

However, it may be more difficult for people with impairment to identify as disabled, as socially oppressed, than it is for women, blacks, or gays. The oppression is couched in terms of paternalistic support and charity. The dominance of professionals is well-nigh total. The very real element of physical impairment restricts activity, and reinforces 'natural' explanations of disability. The possibilities of people with various impairments coming together in a political struggle are reduced by the tendency of medicine and welfare to arbitrarily divide up the constituency: to separate the old from the young, to segregate people with different physical conditions, who nevertheless share similar social experiences.

And the down-side of the disability movement, made more understandable by factors such as those just enumerated, is that it does not reach out to the total constituency of disabled people. It has proved less successful in developing positive identity and group consciousness beyond the relatively active, relatively young, middle-class elements. It is rare for this to be specifically acknowledged: because critics are always eager to undermine the movement, it has become difficult to make such criticisms from within it. In the USA, there has been more openness:

> Notably absent from the movement's constituency are older persons with severe physical impairments resulting from strokes or other degenerative conditions. While the movement's philosophy may have direct relevance to older disabled persons, the movement has focused its concern elsewhere. (DeJong, 1983, p.6)

While the movement in Britain is far more representative, there are some similar tendencies. Age-wise, it has tended to be skewed towards younger people, whereas the distribution of impairment in the population is overwhelmingly towards older people, especially women. Only recently have women's voices been explicitly recognised within the movement, or those of black and Asian disabled people.

Part of the reason for the difficulties the British movement has had in reaching beyond its core group, has been the tendency to downplay the role of impairment, of the physical condition. Given that the majority of unpoliticised disabled people identify first and foremost via their particular physical impairment, it is an obstacle to their development if this is ignored by the theoreticians of the struggle. Recent

work has begun to rectify this gap (Morris, 1991; Crow, 1992; French, 1993). In order to reach out and foster collective identity, the disabled people's movement will have to work out new ways of dealing with the issue of impairment, and of developing conscienticization among the wide majority of disabled people. Central to this will be cultural and artistic representations by disabled people themselves, because only through challenging images, and depicting the contradictions, will progressive conceptions emerge.

New Social Movements

Alan Scott's study of this phenomenon, most recent fixation of sociologists, defines the term as follows:

> A social movement is a collective actor constituted by individuals who understand themselves to have common interests and, for at least some significant part of their social existence, a common identity. Social movements are distinguished from other collective actors, such as political parties and pressure groups, in that they have mass mobilization, or the threat of mobilization, as their prime source of social sanction, and hence of power. They are further distinguished from other collectivities, such as voluntary associations or clubs, in being chiefly concerned to defend or change society, or the relative position of the group in society. (Scott, 1990, p. 6)

He goes on to discuss race, gender, sexuality, peace and environment groups, but not disability. In fact, none of the major theorists mention disability. However, Michael Oliver (1990) has argued that the disabled people's movement is a new social movement in that it has the following features: marginalisation from traditional politics: the link of the personal with the political; a critical evaluation of society; and post-materialism.

To a certain extent, the important qualifier in the equation is 'new': these movements are very much seen in distinction to previous political forces, chiefly the working-class and socialist movements. There is a tendency to downplay all elements of continuity, and to stress instead the rupture existing between these traditional forms of protest, and these 'new' developments. All these 'new social movements' do share some basic features (including the disability movement). They have arisen since the Second World War, mainly since the 1960s: however, this fact must not be allowed to obscure earlier forerunners such as the suffragists of the early twentieth century (or the National League of the Blind and Disabled). They are outside conventional party politics or trade union/corporate activity. Partly as a result of this second factor, they have recourse to 'unconventional' tactics and forms of political mobilisation: popular protest taking new forms such as the march, demonstration, blockade, boycott, sit-in etc. But these techniques are perhaps not so very new: mass action has been a feature of popular uprising for centuries. Moreover, in the absence of strike action as a potential weapon, these are the obvious alternatives. Perhaps an important aspect is the self-consciousness and preparation

involved in mounting such activities: rarely spontaneous, often carefully planned to influence opinion-formers, the media etc.

However, while all these groups look superficially similar in terms of tactics— many of which are adopted from each other to suit the particular instance (in this context, note the Scottish nationalist movement's borrowing of tactics pioneered by the 'Outrage' gay and lesbian campaign in the 1990s), beyond this there are significant reasons to question the catch-all description of 'new social movement'. It is my contention that this term obscures important differences between two types of contemporary popular struggle: the 'post-materialist' tendency, on the one hand, and the 'liberation' movements on the other. While they may share tactics and overlapping constituencies of support, there are fundamental distinctions between the two approaches.

Take the idea, reiterated by Oliver, that new social movements, including the disabled people's movement, are characterised by a shift in values to post-material-ism. This originates with authors such as Inglehart, who have contrasted the historical trend of social movements, for example the workers' movement, with new developments. A simple opposition is drawn between the traditional claim for more resources, the materialist position, and the modern post-materialist value consensus:

> The presence of materialist or post-materialist values proves to be the most important single influence on whether a given individual will support new social movements (Inglehart, 1990, p. 64)

The survey evidence for this 'value switch' is simplistically designed, the results weak, and the case is certainly overstated.

Most of the struggles mentioned above *are* about resource allocation: women, black people and disabled people are crucially concerned with their economic exploitation and poverty. Within feminism there is a central concern with equal pay, with gender inequality in the market-place, with discriminatory benefit systems etc. The whole thrust of the British disability movement is for more resources to be channelled towards disabled people, and challenges the distributive logic of capital-ism. It would be more accurate to suggest that new social movements are often concerned with the interrelations of the market and the welfare state: perhaps there is relevance in Offe's (1987) stress on those groups which occupy a marginal labour market role, such as women domestic workers, older people, migrant workers, disabled people, the 'decommodified or peripheral groups'.

A second criticism of new social movement theory is the tendency, for example in the work of Melucci (1989), to suggest that these struggles are not concerned with politics or the political process, are centred on civil society, and the control of information, not production. The latter point was refuted above. The former suggestion neglects the struggle to establish citizenship rights: political rights to vote, legal rights (for example, the age of consent, custody of children), and above all, social rights. The most relevant of these is the growing campaign in Britain for anti-discrimination legislation. Claus Offe seems to highlight the crucial issue:

> The opposition is primarily not between old and new values but between

conflicting views of the extent to which different elements of modern values are satisfied. (Offe, 1987, p. 88)

The movements of women, black people and disabled people have shown that these constituencies have not benefited from the post-war developments in both living standards and social rights, and demonstrated the continuing inequalities in access to both political and economic power. So Brand, quoting Klandermans, is fundamentally incorrect to argue that:

> . . . new social movements are not concerned with questions of distribution, economic power, or political power. (Brand, 1990), p. 25)

Part of the important challenge of the liberation movements has been to widen the concept of the political: to suggest that personal, domestic and social relations are as political as voting and democratic representation. This is clearly not the same as a lack of concern with politics. Moreover, as such constituencies are marginalised from the political process, unrepresented either by political parties or corporate interests, there is often little choice but to operate in this way.

Another supposed difference between the old and the new social movements relates to the question of interests. Connected with the lack of concern for resource allocation has been the argument that new movements are not protesting at their own economic situation out of personal grievances, but as a result of their value orientation. Dalton *et al.* (1990) have argued:

> Activists in new social movements often hold intense feelings about their cause, but these sentiments fall short of the primordial frustration-aggression emotions that spawned food riots and tax revolts in the eighteenth century and the revolutionary movements of the nineteenth. Moreover, student protestors and environmental activists are not primarily drawn from the ranks of the socially deprived. (Dalton *et al.*, 1990, p. 7)

Now this may or may not be accurate in terms of the 'post-materialist' wing of the new social movements: the anti-nuclear, green and peace campaigns. But it seems less relevant with regard to liberation struggles. Women, black people, gays and disabled people are very clearly mobilising in defence of their objective interests: social being and social consciousness have the potential to come together in a manner directly paralleling the marxist conception of the proletariat. Dalton *et al.* are wrong to suggest that the distinguishing feature of new social movements is that.

> . . . they lack the narrow special interest appeal to any one social grouping. New social movements are not drawn from the socio-economically disadvantaged or from repressed minorities. (Dalton *et al.*, 1990, p. 12)

The term 'interest group' has an ambiguity which might usefully focus the distinction here—on the one hand, those who are 'interested in' a cause—who have a value commitment, and on the other, those who 'have interests' in the sense of a real stake in the outcome. Everyone has interests in world peace, global environmental survival and so forth. However, there is a significant difference between these comprehensive benefits and the more localised and personally specific benefits

arising from progressive social relations in terms of gender, race, etc. Thus there is a real distinction to be drawn between interests as subjective preference, and interests as an objective social category.

Alan Cawson distinguishes welfare pressure groups with traditional interest groups such as trade unions and employers' organisations. The latter owe their existence to their common position in relation to capital, their role in the division of labour. As a result of this they have economic power and influence. As well as a dual economy, between competitive and monopoly capital, there is a dual politics, between such corporate interests and the pluralistic world of competing interest groups:

> The competitive group is formed by voluntary interaction: the corporate group consists of individuals having a common location in the socioeconomic structure of society. (Cawson, 1982, p. 38)

Thus, social pressure groups (such as Shelter, Child Poverty Action Group (CPAG)), representing the interests of welfare state clients, do not have the power of corporate interests:

> They do not possess socio-economic leverage—they have no clout—because the clients they represent are not among the economically productive whose co-operation is a pre-requisite of successful policy. (Cawson, 1982, p. 43)

My suggestion is that this dichotomy needs to be enlarged to include the distinction I have made above between the two forms of competitive interest groups: within the field of disability, Disability Income Group (DIG) or Disability Alliance (DA) would be distinguished from BCODP. Both are competitive interest groups, but the former are not indigenous or representative. However they do gain considerable funding and have a measure of consultative input into government policy:

> . . . many of these organisations, which for many years have acted as both charities and disability pressure-groups, have built up close working relationships with official policy-makers, which gives them a degree of credibility but relatively little power. (Barnes, 1991, p. 218)

In contrast to this role, the excluded, but representative, pressure groups who are interest groups in the true sense, straddle the corporate and competitive sectors and have resorted to new social movement tactics in order to achieve political and social change.

Frank Wilson distinguishes corporatist and pluralist forms of politics, in a distinction similar to that between DIG/DA/RADAR and BCODP above:

> The established groups seek to perpetuate their monopolies by coopting or vigorously opposing new groups claiming to represent the same interests . . . The government often subsidizes the privileged groups and denies such funding to unofficial bodies. (Wilson, 1990, p. 69)

Oliver has pointed out that organisations for disabled people outnumber organisations of disabled people by about 100 to one, and receive far higher levels of funding.

Moreover, Wilson goes on to discuss the role that 'official' groups have in formulating and administering government policy, which echoes the role of DIG in administering the independent living fund. By contrast, those groups outside the process are left in a situation of 'residual pluralism':

> Frustrated by their inability to gain a hearing for their concerns by the policy-makers, outside groups resort to unconventional methods such as demonstrations, boycotts, political strikes, sit-ins and even violence to draw the attentions of the public or the policy-makers to their concerns. (Wilson, 1990, p. 71)

Now I wish to move from criticising new social movement theory to discussing those elements that have clear relevance to the disabled people's movement. Alan Scott has suggested that a key feature of new social movements is the stress on autonomy, at the level of the personal (the focus on consciousness, personal power etc); in the challenge of restrictions on freedom, and in what he calls the "autonomy of struggle":

> . . . the insistence that the movement and those it represents be allowed to fight their own corner without interference from other movements, and without subordinating their demands to other external priorities. (Scott, 1990, p. 20)

In focusing on autonomy, there is a parallel with the recent work of David Held (1987), who suggests that this concept has the potential to bring together new left and new right positions in a new, radical democracy. Carl Boggs makes similar claims:

> What emerges from the experience of local movements are the broad outlines of a radical democracy that rests upon a deeper conception of political involvement. (Boggs, 1986, p. 49)

Certainly the disabled people's movement exemplifies the notion of autonomy that Scott has described. Colin Barnes echoes both Scott and perhaps Held:

> . . . throughout the 1980s BCODP and its member organisations produced a wealth of policy initiatives which, when implemented, will benefit not only them but the disabled population generally. Furthermore, these strategies owe as much to the political ideologies of the right as they do to those of the left. These include enabling disabled people to free themselves from unnecessary and costly bureaucratic regulation; to earn a living rather than live off the state; to achieve a degree of personal autonomy comparable to that of their non-disabled peers; and to expand their role as consumers. (Barnes, 1991, p. 224)

The central values of the disabled people's movement are autonomy, integration, and independence. Features such as the US consumer perspective, the independent living movement, and the indigenous disability culture have a libertarian and grass

roots emphasis that reflects, to an extent, this comment by the new social movement theorist, Brand:

> New social movements insist not only on the expansion of direct demo-cratic forms of political participation but also on the widening of opportunities for social self-organisation. The cultural pluralism of the movements and their emphasis on autonomy also suggest a more reflexive way of political integration which is more responsive to different cultural norms and varying lifestyles. (Brand, 1990, p. 27)

In this struggle, the form of the organisation and the campaign have significance:

> The organizational forms of movement are not just 'instrumental' for their goals, they are a goal in themselves. Since collective action is focussed on cultural codes, the form of the movement is itself a message, a symbolic challenge to the dominant codes. (Melucci, 1989, p. 60)

While not overstressing the semiotic component, it is clear that disabled people's self-organisation challenges the myth of passivity and the objectification of disabled people. Disabled people, like children, are meant to be seen and not heard: they are meant to be grateful, not angry, they are meant to be humble, not proud. In challenging all these preconceptions and discriminatory ideologies, the movement is making progress every day, even before attaining the central political objectives. To quote Melucci:

> The actors mobilize to regain control of their own action. They try to reclaim the right to define themselves against the criteria of identification determined by an anonymous power and systems of regulation that pene-trate the area of 'internal nature'. (Melucci, 1989, p. 61)

The British focus on terminology and the social model parallels this claim by Melucci: the rejection of medical identifications of disability in favour of the new structural analysis.

A third feature of the disability movement which echoes Melucci's analysis is the exposure of underlying oppressive ideologies and social relations: what had seemed to be altruistic benevolence is shown to be paternalistic domination. Chari-ties are identified as being promoters of oppressive ideologies, health and welfare professionals are exposed as being insensitive, overbearing, patronising. Penetrating the mask of concern and care, the real power struggles have been revealed:

> The function of contemporary conflicts is to render visible the power that hides behind the rationality of administrative or organizational procedures or the 'show business' aspects of politics. (Melucci, 1989, p. 76)

In this way, it is both the central structures and institutions that are being chal-lenged, but also the 'molecular' level of daily life and relationships.

Returning to the prefigurative nature of much new social movement politics—Melucci quotes McLuhan, 'the medium is the message'—a parallel might be drawn with Lenin's concept of consciousness. People's understanding of their social being

increased and developed as they participated in mass action and mobilisation. As in Maoism, the revolution is an educative process.

Conclusion

The mobilisation around disability as a social movement is important for disabled people themselves, but also for the conceptualisation of disability. Self-organisation and direct action challenge prevailing stereotypes of powerlessness and objectification. This is important in the formation of disabled people's own identity, just as it is in breaking down patterns of prejudice and discrimination. In making 'personal troubles' into 'public issues', disabled people are affirming the validity and importance of their own identity, rejecting both the victimising tendencies of society at large, and their own socialisation. In short, the issue is he development of individualisation, through the solidarity that the mass movement brings. New social movement theory, in combining divergent political phenomena, and overstressing the novelty of these developments, fails usefully to theorise this process.

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