Letter to The Guardian from 1965: Pensions for disabled people

Paul Hunt wasn’t the first disabled people to start a significant organisation (or movement in his case) with a letter in The Guardian newspaper. On 22nd March 1965 Megan Du Boisson and Berit Moore made a compelling case for a disability pension which is just as relevant in 2013, suggesting that paying disabled people a state pension was more economical and morally justifiable than condemning people to institutions.

Their letter led to the successful establishment of DIG - Disablement income Group which campaigned on income issues. Having given leadership to the campaign throughout the 1960s, sadly Megan Du Boisson was killed in a road traffic accident on her way to a DIG conference just a few years later in 1969.

Dear Editor

Common sense informed the whole of Mary Stott’s article (March 15) in which she outlined the existing pockets of need and distress which the Welfare State appears to ignore; perhaps even to encourage by its insistence on the existing rules and regulations.

But we should like to talk about a particular aspect of her article: the need for provision of a disability pension for all who are disabled, the amount being in proportion to the degree of disablement. This need is more readily admitted in the case of an earning member of a family, but when the mother of the family, whose main care is the home, finds herself unable to run her home without a considerable amount of help, incurring great additional expense, then few people would support the idea of a pension for her, it
seems.

And yet those who dissent would readily agree to the children being taken into care (at great cost to the community) while the disabled woman is taken into a "home" and the husband tries to live on his own, visiting the children and his wife. The cost of this in terms of suffering for all members of the family is incalculable and we admire with all our mind and heart the work of Ann Armstrong in this connection.

A recent article in your columns on "the chronic sick" was relevant to this, for sometimes almost a lifetime can be spent in institutions, and with the expenditure of thought and the money which would otherwise be given to hospitalising the invalid it would be possible to keep families together. We would suggest the foundation of a group, to which all societies, such as those with muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, poliomyelitis, and other long term diseases would contribute their ideas and authority.

This group could be called the Disablement Income Group - or DIG. It would exist only to correlate the work of the other groups in regard solely to getting recognition for the right of disabled persons, irrespective of the reason for that disablement, to pensions from the State to enable them to live in a reasonable degree of independence and dignity in their own homes.

The principle of this idea is accepted and acted upon in other countries in Europe, such as Norway and Sweden; and possibly in others as well. At this point we declare our interest; we both have multiple sclerosis. But, taking up Mary Stott's challenge because "someone had to do it," we invite any person or society interested to write to us about DIG - the Disablement Income Group.

Yours faithfully

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