

## The Slot: *Disability Discrimination Act: the wrong law*

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### Transcript

At the end of last year, the government passed its Disability Discrimination Act. It's being presented as the answer to the inequalities experienced by the 6 million disabled people in the UK. But for disabled people the Act is the wrong law.

The Disability Discrimination Act is the latest stage in a long and very painful saga. For years now, disabled people have lobbied, campaigned and protested towards equality, backing 14 Private Members' Bills. Last summer, with enormous public and parliamentary support, one of these Bills very nearly came to fruition in the shape of the Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill. But it was crushed at the last moment by the government's use of undemocratic tactics.

Since then the government has brought in its own inadequate alternative and this Act fails us.

For a start, education is excluded from the Act. It's still legal for schools and colleges to discriminate. Ten years ago, as a student, my college withdrew the access provisions it had agreed to make, and my education stopped. A decade later under this new Act and nothing will change.

Small organisations, which employ getting on for half the workforce, also fall outside the provisions of the Act. If there are fewer than 20 employees in a company, disabled people receive no protection. I applied for a job recently and was invited for interview. I phoned to confirm the building was wheelchair accessible and was told that they were based on the first floor and had no intention of installing a lift. My interview was cancelled.

On top of these exclusions, there's no reliable means of enforcing the Act - no Commissions like the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Acts, and no legal aid for complainants, so those provisions it does have still offer little or no protection. In effect the disability Discrimination Act tells most of society: go ahead, discriminate – it's legal.

And we, disabled people, want everyone to know this: if the public believe we have the legislation we campaigned for, their support of our campaigns and protests will wane. We're clear from research and the experiences of other countries that civil rights legislation is the only effective way to achieve disabled people's equality.

And when we have our civil rights, we'll give up our campaigns and we'll happily stop our protests. But until then, well, we've only just begun.