

14.

Comments from the Floor May 27, 1989

Mr. Leli Sammut

Leli Sammut said he liked what was said about independence, though he felt that there were still many people who were still not independent. For example he questioned the system whereby parents are responsible for cashing disabled persons' cheques. He opined that people should be re-assessed, even though he was in agreement with most of those present that there were people who were seriously handicapped, but still not everyone was so.

He continued by saying that there were groups who did basket weaving, and on T.V. he saw disabled persons in wheelchairs playing tennis and basket ball. Couldn't we too indulge in more sports? Although, the speaker continued, it had been intimated that in reality there were no handicaps, he could only say that he happened to be one. When he went to register for work he had to see a professor. Perhaps he couldn't do certain things because he became all excited, and it was just too bad, but maybe, he said, he wanted to improve.

Mr. Victor Martinelli

Victor Martinelli said that integration had been well-covered. In his view "integration" had been interpreted as placing children with special needs with normal children, but not much support had been provided. In the case of children integrated in normal schools, Mr.Martinelli said that many of these were there because parents accompanied them to school. Integration meant money and there was a need for legislation about integration.

The speaker continued that sometimes it was more costly for a child to be integrated than to be placed in a special provision. This applied not just to education but in all aspects. Before legislation regarding effective integration is enacted and expenses forgotten, integration was not really going to take place. Integration did not mean "to be like others". There were various levels of integration. Some people cannot

be integrated for their own good. But Mr.Martinelli concluded that this applied only to very extreme cases.

Fr. Joe Borg Micallef

Fr. Borg Micallef, while corroborating Mr.Ripard's report, reminded the audience about the priorities as set out by that same assembly, namely :

1. the urgent need of social workers in hospital to assist parents of handicapped children so that these can be given immediate and special attention.
2. the implementation of Dr.Portelli's multidisciplinary project.
3. the involvement of students (seminarists included) in some sort of special course about the handicapped.

Mr. Godfrey Darmanin

Godfrey said that he strongly opposed the idea of separating the mentally from the physically handicapped, although he thought this policy should prevail in certain areas like education and employment. As a physically handicapped person himself, the speaker said that it was the handicapped themselves who must pave the way for this: they must first of all show altruism within their group in order to expect a generous helping hand from society in general.