Basaglia and Law 180

A revolutionary, internationally influential Italian mental health act.

Why was it rejected in the UK?

Tom Burns
‘The man who closed the asylums’
John Foot
Franco Basaglia e Franca Ongaro, Venezia 1949
(Archivio Fondazione Franco e Franca Basaglia).
Franca Ongaro con un paziente non identificato, Gorizia, anni sessanta.
(Archivio Fondazione Franca e Franco Basaglia).
Basaglia and Psichiatria Democratica

- 1924 born in Venice
- 1944 six months in prison (anti fascist activity)
- Qualified in Padua and 10 years psychiatry and philosophy
- 1961 Gorizia
- 1968 The Institution denied
- 1971 Trieste until 1978
- Law 180 passed
- 1980 Died from brain tumour in Rome
Major precepts

• Diagnosis predominantly a political act of exclusion
• Influenced by Marx (denied), Gramsci and by Foucault
• Emarginazione
• Liberty is therapy ‘La libertà è terapeutica’
• Rejected diagnosis and therapeutic communities
• Not a model but a practice to learn from
• ‘veni vedere’
• Public engagement and ‘theatre’
Trieste graffito
Marco Cavallo being led out of the hospital
Dia da luta antimanicomial
4000 demonstrators in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2013
Law 180

• Passed by decree – threatened referendum
• No new admissions to MH from May 1978
• No readmissions to MH after three years
• Sectioning limited to 7 days (repeatable)
• Diagnosis and Cure units of 15 beds
• Outreach to be provided
• Forensic services not included until 2016
• (ECT effectively abolished)
UK Rejection

• Claims exaggerated or misleading

• Community and rehab services generally more advanced in UK – anything to learn?

• Distrust of ideology
Jones and Poletti

- 1985 – implementation paper
- 1986 - visited Trieste and centres of excellence
- ‘Ospiti’ – several wards with chronic patients, some locked,
- Dementia renamed
- Specialist mental health nurse training abandoned
- Lack of therapies
German rejection and reaction
Misunderstandings and missed opportunities

• ‘closing’ the asylum
  – Emptying versus shutting the door

• Human rights perspective vs welfare

• Engagement with society

• Failure of any monitoring or research in Trieste
Thank you for listening
Do read more about this fascinating man
OUP book due later this year........