

Christian Pross

Revolution and Madness

The Case of a radical anti-psychiatric Group in West-Germany in the 1970ies

Colloquium

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In 1970 a group of patients emerged at the psychiatric clinic of the University of Heidelberg calling themselves "Socialist Patients' Collective" (SPK). They believed the only consequent way to fight mental illness was the "overthrow of the pathogenic capitalist patriarchal society". The patient was to "turn illness into a weapon" and convert his "unconscious unhappyness" into an "unhappy consciousness" realizing the causes of his misery. The doctor-patient relationship as an expression of the "object role" of the patient was to be repealed and instead "every patient become a therapist of himself and other patients." Following an escalating and violent conflict with hospital and state authorities the SPK dissolved in July 1971 and its leaders ended up in jail.

Christian Pross is a professor emeritus at Charité University Medical Center in Berlin and former director of the Berlin Center for the Treatment of Torture Survivors. Apart from his publications on trauma, medicine and human rights he has written on Nazi medical abuses and the after-effects of repression by the communist regime in East Germany.