

Why We Need Alternatives to Psychiatry

Introduction

Psychiatry has been continuously developed and reformed right from its beginnings. The quality of psychiatric training is improving, better psychiatric drugs are being developed as well as electroshock and more precise diagnostic systems; more modern facilities are being set up, the planning and coordination of services are being optimized, more money is being spent, more jobs created – and everything is going to be fine. You can see in contemporary psychiatry where the reforms of recent years have led.

The current power distribution hardly gives hope that real alternatives beyond psychiatry can develop in a bigger scope. The dominance of psychiatry seems unbroken. Even if the necessity of a paradigm shift is being discussed, its implementation seems far from reality.

Considering these circumstances, would it not be more sensible to put our energy into the reform of psychiatry rather than trying against all the odds to develop an alternative to psychiatry under such difficult conditions? But is a qualitative reform possible at all without a switch of paradigms and without giving up the idea that mental problems which are largely of a social nature can be solved by bio-medical methods? Assuming this, what might an alternative system of psychosocial support actually look like?

Translated from the German by Mary Murphy