



## Homage to Giovanni Berlinguer (1924-2015)

### Homenaje a Giovanni Berlinguer (1924-2015)

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Giovanni Berlinguer (Sassari 1924 – Rome 2015) was a professor of Social Medicine at *Università degli Studi di Sassari* and Occupational Health at *Università degli Studi di Roma "La Sapienza,"* where he was conferred the degree of Professor Emeritus in 2001. He was also awarded the title of Doctor *Honoris Causa* from different institutions, including the *Université de Montréal*, the *Universidade de Brasília*, and the *Fundação Oswaldo Cruz*. He was honored by the Presidency of the Italian Republic as *Cavaliere di Gran Croce Ordine al Merito della Repubblica Italiana*, and with the *Medaglia ai benemeriti della scienza e della cultura*.

Between 1972 and 1983, he was elected member of the Chamber of Deputies on several occasions and, in 1983, senator of the Italian Republic. In 2004, he became a member of the European Parliament. He was also a member of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health created by the World Health Organization, and of the International Bioethics Committee of UNESCO.

Along with Franco Basaglia, Julio Maccacaro, Laura Conti, Ivar Oddone, Mario Timio, and Gastone Marri, and many others, Giovanni Berlinguer was an essential member of the Italian health movement, which was a collective construction and mobilization formed by hundreds of organizations such as labor unions, trade unions, and social, political, and professional associations. This movement achieved the approval of a new labor law in 1970, based on the problematization of the issue of health in factories, that eight years later led to the Psychiatric Reform and the Health Reform.

This activist experience turned him into a prominent figure for the Latin American Social Medicine and Collective Health movement. His books translated into Portuguese and Spanish are required references for a social interpretation of the health-disease-care process.

Sergio Arouca considered Giovanni Berlinguer to be one of the principal intellectual mentors of the Brazilian Health Reform. The first edition of *Medicina e Política* in Portuguese, published in 1978, to the editors' surprise, sold 7,000 copies in Brazil. In the presentation of the second edition, David Capistrano Filho – editor of the collection – mentioned how the book had influenced health professionals, especially those specialized in workplace health and safety problems.

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In accordance with the concept of *health awareness* developed by Berlinguer in that book, health is a human right and it is of interest to a community in which labor union and political forces are of key importance for the enforcement of that right. This idea marked the health agenda and reminds us that it is still a task yet to be accomplished. Berlinguer's contributions to the development of such matters as the relationship between health and work and between ethics and bioethics relationships were essential. His more than 50 books and countless articles account for his commitment to the cause.

*Salud Colectiva* has gathered in this editorial a number of figures from Brazil, Mexico, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Argentina, who maintained that strong bond that joined Giovanni Berlinguer with Latin America, in order to pay homage to one of the greatest thinkers and political figures of Social Medicine and Collective Health.

## HOMAGE TO OUR REMARKABLE ITALIAN FRIEND

*Anamaria Tambellini*

Giovanni Berlinguer, a man involved in numerous activities, caretaker of bodies and souls, a citizen of the world, a determined and active communist, a fighter for health and life wherever he was and wherever he was invited to participate. He was a professor. He carried his experience, his studies, and his writings with him, and he was also a role model of integrity, dedication and fondness that he shared with everyone: he was a caring and generous human being.

I particularly remember a meeting held by the International Association of Health Policy (IAHP) in Italy in 1977 in which participants from European, Latin American, Caribbean, North American, and African countries stayed at the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL), a space that exuded an air of politics. Those were times of what is known as the "*compromesso storico*" that gathered communists, socialists and Christian democrats in a unitary political effort, and there we shared the space with Italian union members. We discussed health-related problems, views, and proposals based on the perspective of social medicine and a renewed public health. We formed a politically well-defined group that was seen as representative of the left-wing of our home countries; we were members of different groups and political parties. As expected, we had many ideological, political and theoretical battles and disputes that, coupled with the particular features of each country, resulted in strong discussions regarding the different activist strategies presented by participants.

The meeting proved to be quite fruitful: it expanded our horizons regarding the definition of problems, increased the degree of cohesion and determination of the group, and strengthened the idea of creating regional associations, which, in fact, occurred in the following years.

During the meeting, I admired the calm and friendly manner with which Berlinguer approached us and discussed, both collectively and with groups and individuals in particular, the "almost disputes" in which we were involved. I observed the deliberation and respect with which he identified and relativized the importance of the most controversial topics related to views deemed unnegotiable by their defenders. Thus, he was always able to share a reflection that, in most of the cases, led to a possible agreement among colleagues and comrades. I can testify that he acted as a perfect host and that his life experience, associated with great political shrewdness, helped him obtain the best results from the meetings; he also had our collaboration for everything to turn out well.

Today, I believe that the credit for the success of that defining meeting, which was also a tempestuous journey and moment of collective and democratic political decision, goes to professor Berlinguer. This became obvious to me almost five years later, when I saw him at another meeting and he gave me his version of the events: during that meeting, everything – from the stay to the visits to museums and historical cities, the concerts, the group meals, the gatherings in which we talked and sang, the debates with local union members, the care and support during moments of confusion and conflict – had been

planned for a greater purpose, which was to help us feel comfortable, as if we were at home in a foreign place, to establish affection, friendship and camaraderie in a pleasant and responsible manner. He made all this effort so that we could realize the urgency of and need for the creation of a unity of purposes in the struggle for health in different aspects of life, and in a peaceful relationship with nature. He knew us better than we thought, he accepted us just the way we were, he believed in people and, above all, he was fond of us and considered us his equals.

I will always be grateful to professor Berlinguer for showing me the meaning and value of political solidarity, and for teaching me, with his example of pure generosity and trust, that affection allied with reason is the basis of our victories.

Blessings, my teacher!

## “AN ITALIAN COMMUNIST”

*Mario Testa*

Giovanni defined himself as “an Italian communist” when he wrote to me regarding how the members of the Italian Communist Party (PCI) [*Partido Comunista Italiano*] decided to abandon their historical name and created the *Partito Democratico della Sinistra* (PDS). The justification was convincing: “the average age of the party’s members is above 50 years old.”

We had always maintained friendly conversations, even when we had very differing opinions, since the night I met him at the Maiquetía Airport, where I picked him up on his first visit to Venezuela. I had read his book *Malaria Urbana* [Urban Malaria] and I invited him to attend a course that I conducted at that time (in the early 1970s) at the Center for Development Studies (CENDES) [*Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo*].

After reading one of my articles in which I mention Althusser and his concept of “ideological state apparatuses,” Berlinguer emphatically criticized me for using an idea that he believed to be completely erroneous. On another occasion, he told me about a presentation he had made at a history conference where he had said that the so-called discovery of America had been – in fact – an encounter of civilizations. I strongly disagreed with this idea arguing that – in my opinion – what had been produced since then was a lack of direction of both continents.

However, our mutual respect when we were in disagreement gave rise to – or rather, promoted – a friendship and a fruitful (to me) dialogue that was always very pleasant.

I visited him at his house in Rome, a peaceful place located on a small street surprisingly near the *Piazza di Spagna*, where he used to cook the spaghetti we ate in the company of Asia and sweet Giuliana, whom I remember with her happy in-love expression.

On several occasions and in different countries, we shared conferences and debates that enriched my knowledge. His departure saddens my heart.

## DIGNITY AND KINDNESS

*Sarah Escorel*

The way I remember him, Berlinguer always looked physically the same: slim, thin white, a slightly bent back, an attentive and penetrating gaze, a friendly smile, and delicate facial features. During the more than 20 years that I was in touch with him, the passage of time emphasized those features and age spots began to appear on a face that still had an air of a kind and well-mannered child.

I first read his work. The *Medicina e Política* collection, published in Brazil by the *Centro Brasileiro de Estudos de Saúde* (CEBES), was one of the first references I had during my training as a health activist; especially the concept of *health awareness*. During my research studies for my Master's dissertation *Reviravolta na Saúde*, his importance to the Brazilian health movement became evident in the interviewees' narratives. Although in my book published in 1999 I kept the original dedication in which I only mentioned Juan César García, in the reprinted edition published in 2009, I corrected that error and dedicated the book to both García and Berlinguer: godfathers of the health movement, as indeed they were, in different ways yet both equally crucial.

In that book I considered it was "both political and financial boldness" that the CEBES invited Berlinguer for the release of *Medicina e Política* in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo, and Bahía in the midst of a military dictatorship. I do not remember which of the interviewees provided me with this information but, after reading the passage where I wrote about his visit to Brazil in 1978, Berlinguer found the expression "financial boldness" hilarious. His reaction made me think that maybe it was not true that the CEBES had paid for Berlinguer's ticket. I even thought about taking away that reference, but finally I kept it. He liked my book and, especially, he liked the fact that someone had told the history of the movement he was connected to and he accompanied with the interest of a person who considered himself an integral part.

We were together on many occasions; we shared conferences and presentations in which I always admired his integrity, the fact that he never succumbed to the "modernisms" of vocabulary or concepts that, deep down, covered up an inequitable and unfair social reality, like what he called "monetarist fundamentalism" during the the Latin American Association of Social Medicine (ALAMES) [*Asociación Latinoamericana de Medicina Social*] conference and the International Association of Health Policy (IAHP) conference held in Guadalajara in 1994.

At the seminar organized by the *Núcleo de Estudos Político-Sociais em Saúde* (NUPES) in 1987 on the Brazilian and Italian Health Reform, Berlinguer coined an expression that I repeatedly cited: "the people's health is the true revolutionary character of the Health Reform". Thus, he focused his attention on human beings rather than on mechanisms, instruments, and instances of management and financing.

I remember that I felt represented by him when, during the closing ceremony of the IAHP conference in Canada in 1996, Berlinguer stood up and stormed out of the auditorium: he was outraged at the idea the World Bank representative was defending, of health as a commercial good. I felt so emotionally moved during his conference at the *Associação Brasileira de Saúde Coletiva* (ABRASCO) conference in 2006 when, once again, he emphasized the ethical values that guided his conduct and thinking. And I remember him so fondly at a table in the ALAMES conference held in La Habana, Cuba, in 2000, suggesting into the microphone that it was not necessary for the lecturer to yell as we could all hear him perfectly.

Berlinguer did not impose his ideals: he explained them calmly and with soundness, as if he were not there to convince anyone, but to express his ideas. He did not distort nor criticize directly anything he considered foolish or an ideological trap.

I remember the hug he gave me at Sergio Arouca's funeral in 2003; he was back from the ABRASCO conference in Brasília. I also remember the dinner eating Bahian food in Ipanema along with his wife and daughters in 1996; and the last time we saw each other, in London in November 2008 at the seminar presenting the report of Commission on the Social Determinants of Health. When I approached him, he seemed not to recognize me. Maybe he had a different picture in mind. Maybe he was already losing his memory. However, he immediately gave me a warm hug, as usual, and told me that he was very happy with his new generation of grandchildren, almost 20 years after the first generation, and told me about all the funny things the kids said and did.

Berlinguer was and will always be one of my principal ethical and theoretical references. He was a charming person. It was a privilege to share those moments with him.

## TRIBUTE TO THE MASTER

*Francisco Rojas Ochoa*

We have lost Giovanni's physical presence, but his memory and activist spirit for the peoples' health will always live among those of us who met him and learned so much from him.

He was long loyal to the ideological principles that he embraced in his youth, influenced by his father, and that made him an activist of the Italian Communist Party until its dissolution. He was active in politics, he was elected as deputy three times, as senator twice, and once as member of the European Parliament.

He received countless awards. I enjoyed his speech when he accepted the Doctor *Honoris Causa* degree from the *Université de Montréal* in 1996 during a conference held by the International Associate of Health Policy (IAHP), which he founded.

I met him in another conference in Mexico City. It was always on these occasions that we met, at the IAHP and the ALAMES conferences: Buenos Aires 1997, Perugia 1998, La Habana 2000, and Palma de Mallorca 2002. Each time, he exercised his didactic mastery with particular profoundness and simplicity, convincing and winning over his audience.

Apart from presentations and debates at conferences, it was in small (face to face) groups that I was able to appreciate his wisdom, which was sharper when orally expressed, passionate but without wild gestures, devoted, never roundabout, and without "hidden cards." Each encounter meant a deprivation of sleep that nobody missed. During these autonomous social gatherings with the conferences, I would observe, in careful silence, occasional questions. The reason: the importance of some of the interlocutors, such as Vicente Navarro and Hans Ulrich-Deppe, among others.

I had the honor of giving him the diploma that made him an Honorary Member of the Cuban Society of Public Health. His acceptance speech moved all those who heard him.

I also had a privilege that turned into a complete History and Politics lesson. This lesson took place when I brought together Giovanni and an important Cuban intellectual, Alfredo Guevara, and listened to their long conversation. They had met while representing their countries' university students at the International Union of Students in Prague (1949-1953). They began talking about the old days, then, about Alfredo's stay in Rome and after that, about "the human and the divine," remembering the many tasks they shared as incurable Marxists.

Giovanni said that Alfredo would say goodbye to everyone on the last day of the conference, but that he would stay in La Habana a few more days to explore it and "enjoy what you describe." And so he did. My final contribution was to book a room in a hotel in La Habana Vieja. Several days later, I received a friendly letter that said, "the exploration was successful."

In his professorship, his articles, conferences, or any relevant place and time, Berlinguer was a tenacious defender of the Cuban Revolution, as well as a prudent critic of certain aspects related to our health system, a trait that was appreciated as much as his compliments.

During the last years of his career, he became more devoted to bioethics, which led him to be President of the Italian *Comitato Nazionale per la Bioetica* and a member of the UNESCO International Bioethics Committee. Below, I will cite here Giovanni's words, as I have done on several occasions when discussing this subject:

There is much being said about health ethics, and that is fine. However, I believe that the principal ethical problem is that we now have most of the knowledge and technologies to achieve "the health we could have," and we do not achieve it at the local, national or global levels. [Own translation]

A moral imperative brings those of us who have learned so much from Giovanni together: let us take care of his legacy and pass it to the young generations of public health professionals.

## A COMMITMENT TO LIFE AND HEALTH

*Maria Cecília de Souza Minayo*

To Collective Health activists in Brazil, the name Berlinguer is that of a colleague and a member of the pantheon of founders of Health Reform thought. By justifying his studies using theoretical bases of political science applied to the health field, the dual role of intellectual and politician led him to deepen and give larger importance to the findings of his research studies by orienting them toward social transformation. He applied this both when debating the Italian Health Reform and when supporting the Brazilian Reform process.

I want to pay tribute to him by copying two fragments of the book *Reforma Sanitaria: Italia e Brasil*, written by him along with Sonia Fleury and Gastão Wagner de Sousa Campos: "My malicious readers insinuate that since 1959, when I published *La medicina è malate* with Severino Delogu, I have been rewriting the same book every year". With irony, Berlinguer justified this repetition: there was nothing new to show, except politicians' permanent faintheartedness regarding certain interests that interfered with the voting of the Italian Health Reform. It would take nearly 20 years of struggle before it was finally passed in 1978. In the same text, the author foresaw the quarrels and difficulties that would take place after the law was passed: "In the future, it is likely that conservatives will not attribute care deficiencies and operational malfunctions, which will inevitably arise, to the heavy heritage of the past, but to the Health Reform Law and to the idea itself that public health can be reformed". Berlinguer also warned us about the macrosocial context: the welfare system crisis in Europe became worse while the Italian Reform was being implemented, which was still influencing hegemonic political thinking during the era of the Health Reform in Brazil.

By bringing to this homage the actual voice of the author loved so much by those activists of the Collective Health movement, I highlight two aspects that I consider relevant.

The first aspect is his commitment to a type of scientific production aimed at transformation, which is the purpose of science itself, as Bertolt Brecht poignantly highlighted when he dramatized Galileo Galilei's play *Discourses on Two New Sciences*. In his play, Brecht interrogated the audience regarding the climate of omission or collaboration of many intellectuals during the Nazi Regime: "Are we scientists if we do not care about people? [...] I uphold that the only purpose of science is to relieve the suffering of human existence".

The second aspect I would like to highlight is his view on the efforts required for the reform process, both in Brazil and Italy, which implies transiting hostile and controversial paths in order to obtain structural and cultural changes in a system marked by a hospital-centric and centralizing logic, whose interests align to discredit the new proposal.

This is the case of the Unified Health System (SUS) [*Sistema Único de Salud*], formulated with Berlinguer's collaboration, which continues to experience the always unstable and provisional dynamic of its successes and deficiencies, maintaining an uncertain balance and facing huge privatizing interests that force this system to adapt, change directions, include new issues, and establish adequate management techniques to be effective. However, the SUS cannot lose its purpose, which is to satisfy Brazilian people's needs: its only immovable goal.

To conclude, as I have no space to talk about his contribution to many other areas, I would like to celebrate his commitment to health and life, since they are the most important of Berlinguer's legacies.

## AN UPRIGHT MAN

*Asa Cristina Laurell*

News of Giovanni Berlinguer's death has brought to mind, with deep respect and affection, this Teacher, this organic intellectual, political leader, deputy, senator, creator of the Health Reform, physician, writer,



professor, researcher, and ever-present partner of the talented, clever, and generous Giuliana. Moreover, as if that were not enough, he was a sailor, a cyclist, a carpenter, and he got by in the kitchen, but curiously enough, I never saw him dancing.

He embodied all the virtues that we would like politicians to have today. He was a typical activist of those times: faithful to his principles and to the people, a scholar and learned man, never a squanderer, and an archenemy of corruption. He would never make a scene just to show his power. He was simple and thoughtful toward everyone. He never had to raise his voice during an argument. His authority came from his demonstrated wisdom and his unbeatable integrity.

Giovanni can be fully understood as a politician and activist in the setting of the Italian Communist Party of the second postwar until the late 1990s, when the name of the party was changed. It was a party of the masses, formed by tens of thousands of communist cells where activists freely discussed every subject with soundness and information: from labor union strategies, to culture, to issues of international politics. He also had a critical, creative and innovative intellect. In that party, he earned his leadership for his attributes, not for his connections.

Giovanni's vast experience in specific political action, in which important decisions are made in crucial moments, is reflected in the wide range of his concerns. He was deeply engaged in matters like health, work, science, education, culture, ethics, and youth, and in each of these fields he promoted and achieved conceptual and practical changes. After deciding not to run for the Senate for the third time, he sent us, his friends, a letter explaining that he wanted to give room to new generations.

I had the privilege of discussing many and very diverse topics with him. While eating in his kitchen, he explained to me that the "Historical Commitment" was adopted after seeing that the grassroots worker's committees brought together communists, socialists, and Christian democrats, and it seemed that political parties should do the same, but he admitted that this had been a mistake. We reflected upon the epistemology of the Italian Labor Model. He had materialist views. He argued that working experience is a source of knowledge, but as it is related to real facts, there should be other means to acquire this knowledge. Another subject we discussed was the Italian Health Reform and the problems it entailed; an issue very much relevant today.

Having no idea how premonitory it would be, he explained to me that the Sicilian mafia could only be faced in the midst of a popular movement. Another topic he was concerned about was corruption in Italian politics. Upon the dissolution of the other parties due to this reason, he told me with pride that the PCI came out unscathed. During one of our last conversations, he expressed his sorrow at the breakdown of Italian politics through Berlusconi, and his surprise at the advance of "unified thinking."

In every discussion, he showed a deep, informed, critical and self-critical view. He acknowledged other people's problems as well as his own, and attempted to solve them. His thought has deeply influenced left-wing Latin American public health, and will continue to do so because of its relevance and method.

Human beings like Giovanni do not die; they remain alive through their legacy and example.

## ESSENTIAL AND BELOVED

*Saúl Franco*

I believe that five concepts summarize the ABCs of the life and legacy of our dear teacher and friend Giovanni Berlinguer: science, health, ethics, politics, and friendship.

He was a scientist, a social scientist. From the day he graduated as a physician from the University of Rome in 1958, until his brilliant mind began to fade into the implacable shadows of old age, he was constantly looking for explanations. He was a researcher who always had smart questions and a permanent capacity for amazement. He researched regarding disease, work physiology, urban pathologies, health dynamics and determinants within society, history and the meaning of bioethics. He was a

professor and a researcher; and he performed these tasks in his country as well as in many other countries throughout the world, showing a particular preference for Latin America, where we received him on many occasions – lucky us! – from the late 1970s onward. And if humor is the clear proof of intelligence, he was a wise man, because he had plenty of it, and with a sharpness and irony that turned the bitterest debates into laughs.

Health was his habitat, the subject of his research studies, and his field of activism. When it came to health, he was like a fish in the sea. He always explored first its correlate, disease, to which he dedicated most of his writings. He admitted that there were a lot of definitions and very few certainties about disease. He began to define it as suffering, difference, danger, sign, and stimulus. He taught us to relate health with work, politics, ethics, globalization; and to see it as an inseparable reality always attached to life. He warned that pathogens travelled throughout the world without a passport or visa, and he gave us an early warning about the pathogenic characteristics of capitalism. In defense of life, he wrote the text of the act that legalized abortion in Italy. In defense of a broad view on health, he was a member of the Commission on Social Determinants of Health formed by the Health World Organization at the beginning of this century.

He brought ethics closer to everyday life and enlightened with his ideas “borderline” ethical debates regarding current society, about topics such as human testing, reproduction, euthanasia, organ transplant, and medical ethics.

Politics was in his DNA: he was leader of a student movement; an activist of the Italian Communist Party and then, of the European Socialist Party; a deputy and senator in Italy; the eldest and most respected member of the European parliament starting in 2009; and a tireless internationalist. Always a pluralist. Always democratic. Always tolerant.

A Colombian philosopher – Fernando González – used to say that friends are not those with whom you share business, but those with whom you share secrets. Giovanni was a true friend. A confidant. Discreet. Warm-hearted. He always wore the same smile he had when he arriving at the Italian Senate riding his classic bike, with a mixture of malice and innocence in his calm expression. I keep his handwritten notes and warm dedications in his books as a treasure because, just like me, he belonged to the era of paper. I will never forget his grandfather-like smile when my youngest son, a child back then, gave him a spanking in the apartment in Rio de Janeiro. He was an outstanding human being. That is why I feel such a deep pain at his death. However, I feel this certainty that just a part of him has gone, that his legacy is a mine that we have barely started to explore and enjoy, and that his friendship now transcends time, as in the past transcended distance.

## A HUMANIST AND AN ACTIVIST OF LIFE

*Sonia Fleury*

What does the Berlinguer of books such as *A Saúde nas Fábricas*, *Medicina e Política*, *Reforma Sanitária Itália e Brasil* have in common with the Berlinguer of his most recent work, *O mercado humano* co-written with Vonei Garrafa? In the first book, Berlinguer analyzes the demands of workers and labor unions that created incipient bodies for the people’s control of health. In the second book, he argues how health demands gave rise to health awareness among the social forces that came together to constitutionalize the universal right to health care. The third book teaches us that, after twenty years of struggle for the approval of the National Health System, the struggle for Health Reform had barely started. In the last book, he analyzes the buying and selling of body parts from a bioethical perspective.

I think the thread that runs through these works is, on the one hand, his deep humanism, which rejects the domination of human beings and their submission to exploitation, which brings him closer to Christian humanists. On the other hand, the unshakable conviction that health, life, and human bodies



cannot be treated as goods, even when capitalism treats them as such, which puts him in the field of class struggle of Marxism.

Walking between humanist values and the insurgent values of class struggle made him an original scientist and a transnational activist in search of democracy, who left an indelible mark in the construction of collective health in Latin America. It is with him that we learned to address health awareness as a scientific category connected to the struggle for hegemony, which enabled him to see the monetarization of health defended by labor unions in collective bargaining agreements in Italy as a phase to be overcome, and not as an adversary in the political struggle for universalizing access to health. He also taught us that the quest for health is part of the struggle for democracy, and that it will only be achieved through universalizing rights and building national public systems.

In times when organizations for international cooperation favor commercial interests, replacing the defense of the universal right to health with a corrupt system called *universal health coverage*, there is nothing more relevant than reading Giovanni Berlinguer's works. Here we can see that this proposal is nothing but a new way to frame the dispute over the preservation of hegemony of the capitalist sector of health, turning the conquest of the banner of the universal system, which guarantees equal access to health, into a proposal to reaffirm inequalities, where everyone has the "universal" coverage that corresponds to them based on their purchase power in a commercialized health.

The impossibility of turning life into a commodity and of reducing health to a demand for care that neglects the social determinants of the production and reproduction of classes will always be revolutionary, because it establishes the contradiction that enables the emergence of political subjects, the deepening of health awareness, and the organized collective efforts in support of universal and solidarity-based systems of health prevention, regulation and care.

Beyond the understanding of health-disease processes and the struggle for the right to health that Berlinguer's works reflect, it is important to highlight his role as a political activist who decisively influenced the new generation of Latin American health care professionals. How is it possible to have such clarity on the impact of capitalist accumulation in the field of health and be able to debate with all those involved, create broad coalitions without losing political direction, and keep political and intellectual clarity? In a region such as ours where sectarianism makes us treat those who have a different view as enemies, the soft presence of Berlinguer reminds us of the motto of another leader who taught us to "harden without ever losing tenderness."

## GIOVANNI AND HIS BOUQUET OF FLOWERS

*Hugo Mercer*

Starting in the early 1970s, in various Latin American countries, a new way of understanding and working in the field of Public Health was emerging. In some countries, that name was still in use but, in some others, to stress the existence of an approach focused on the social sciences, the use of names such as Social Medicine or Collective Health was preferred. Several events that sparked the creation of postgraduate studies, associations, and conferences granted the opportunity to meet and exchange with exceptional people as regards their capacity, values, and honesty. Giovanni Berlinguer, among many, was undoubtedly one of the greatest.

In those days, there was a very limited number of accessible texts devoted to analyzing the way in which power works in the field of health, social inequality in healthcare access, the determination of disease and death, and the weight of prejudice and ideological obstacles for health in different social groups. In Giovanni's works we find a role model with whom we can alleviate this shortage. Along with him, other Italian, French, North American, and British authors came to cover the needs that the creation of master's degree programs generated at the *Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro* (UERJ), and at

the *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana-Xochimilco* (UAMX) in Mexico City, which later articulated with initiatives already developed at other universities.

In 1976 we invited Giovanni and Vicente Navarro to an event in Costa Rica that we later called (with the irresponsible conviction that we were discovering a new field) the First International Seminar of Social Medicine. Giovanni accepted our invitation and we enjoyed that first encounter. I am not exaggerating when I say that we were dazzled by his capacity and personal warmth. The way he spoke, the way he linked ideas together, and how he summed up an explanation with examples filled with jokes and irony made him approachable and easier to understand. There was no steadfastness or dogmatism in his explanations, and he did not need to raise his voice to convince anybody. It was his values that moved us.

After that seminar, he offered the premises of the *Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro* (CGIL) located in Ariccia, near Rome, to hold the second conference of the International Association of Health Policy (IAHP). There, the participants came from several countries and Giovanni was a magnificent host and his ideas resounded internationally, a position that he maintained and improved over time, until he was invited to become one of the members of the Committee on Social Determinants of Health that prepared the report for the World Health Organization.

I saw him again several times over these nearly forty years and I always found his constant gesture of concern for others genuine. Nevertheless, I would like to remember him with a particular image in mind: in 1980, when the 3<sup>rd</sup> IAHP Conference was held in Mexico, I invited him to my house, and he gave Alice, my wife, a bouquet of flowers, which since then has been for us the model of a beautiful bouquet. We remember him now calling at our door, with a warm and affectionate smile. That is the image of Giovanni I choose.

## MESSENGER FROM THE FUTURE

*Ligia Bahia*

Those who were present and carefully listened to the many conferences of Giovanni Berlinguer in Brazil will vividly remember the authenticity of his personality and the radical nature of his ideas about the world we live in. The combination of tact and political commitment was in itself a novelty for our senses numbed by speeches and actions of the leaden years of the military regime. The learned and communist man was concerned about details. He paid careful attention to the translation of his words, which were pronounced in Spanish yet with a strong Italian accent. He did not want to convey a generic message, an articulated set of instructions; he wanted to learn with us. When he thought, listened to us, and spoke, he shaped a future in which efforts from each and every one of us would be demanded to understand reality and thus change it.

The essay model, which adequately accounted for the width of Berlinguer's thought, encouraged an understanding of democracy with enough sharpness to question social patterns, and understand distribution agreements, avoiding the arguments that set out a supposed economic rationality against political irrationality. The crossing of disciplinary boundaries broke the deadlock in the debate, helped dissipate and accept ideas to rethink and recreate public health, based on systematic criticism of natural scientism and reflection on the values underlying categories like normal and pathological.

Collective health, which emerges as a project in which health practices are organized within a social tissue whose norms that constantly vary, reflected ideas about the nature and purpose of narrative and scientific knowledge summarized in ways of life that do not silence historical and symbolic orders and consider social specific features. The act of emphasizing the collective aspect and denying the monopoly of biological discourse in the field of health had its unfoldings: the State was no longer considered the exclusive center of the regulation of life and death, and the instituting power of social life started to be

acknowledged; health opened to the acceptance of differences, to multidisciplinary approaches; and health practices started to be understood as potential measurements of complex relationships between nature and society.

Berlinguer helped delimit the health field with new coordinates. The objects of collective health started to consider values and differences produced at the political and symbolic levels. The end of authoritarianism, the loss of the power of attraction of political action, and the contained enthusiasm for structural changes in administrative reforms did not affect the domain of public health, but rather encouraged a disciplinary pattern for the creation of knowledge. There is a comeback of “modeling,” regulatory frameworks, and prescriptions to comply with and imitate, as exclusive expressions of scientific knowledge. The difficulties of imagining solutions for discomfort and inequality through the implementation of libertarian projects from the previous centuries and of responding to the demands of identity groups eventually shaped subspecializations within collective health.

As professor Berlinguer taught us, the translation and correction of concepts are essential to science. Paying tribute to him means taking up the essay he started, defending the extended notion of health, economy, politics, democracy, and the conception of a non-State-centered society. It means keeping on and providing an answer to a modern challenge, summarized in the opposition between the individual and the citizen, in the hierarchical organization and the contrast established in the pain and suffering of groups and minorities and the injustice and discrimination of huge marginalized populations. Agreeing to coexist with human diversity is not incompatible with indignation and the formulation of alternatives to overcome an unequal social order.

## READINGS AND MEMORIES

*José Carlos Escudero*

Giovanni Berlinguer's death drives us to the melancholic task of rereading his works and remembering him. When reading his works, we are impressed by his vast knowledge, which enabled him to be subtle and exhaustive when criticizing the devastating consequences of capitalism on health, without falling into empty slogans or vague abstractions. We recall his clear prose, the clarity of his arguments that did not conspire against the forcefulness of his conclusions. In the field of Collective Health, there is too much darkness in many texts, perhaps driven by the desire of the authors to seem profound, without actually being it. Berlinguer was both profound and easy to understand.

What stands out most of the memory of Berlinguer's character is his kindness, his irony, his wit, and his gentle sense of humor, all of which are virtues that hid his strict working discipline; an amazing productivity, a strict fulfillment of commitments assumed. In his trips to Argentina, he always accepted taking on new and unscheduled tasks, no matter how many hours these would add to his already demanding original plans. As a person, some of his interests appeared and showed the richness and complexity of his life: sailing, cycling, the academic study of fleas and bees, gourmet cuisine, carpentry, music (he was a passionate Wagnerian, which was strange in such a Latin character). The complete Berlinguer was more than the sum of all of these parts, but each of these parts received his committed attention.

I will include a personal note here. I met Berlinguer during my exile, but our relationship deepened when he started to travel to Argentina after the return of democracy, with the beginning of our national recovery after years of genocide and hegemonic reactionary intellectual cruelty in the field of Public Health. In the preparation for these trips, the Movement for a Comprehensive Health System (MOSIS) [*Movimiento por un Sistema Integral de Salud*] run by Horacio Barri played a pivotal role. Berlinguer and I started to exchange texts of our own authorship and to make occasional visits to one another's house. An unfair exchange for Berlinguer, who received an insignificant production from me compared to his, and because it was him, not me, the constant host in the house of Via San Giacomo, with its splendid

location and library. Berlinguer was a bibliophile, who always dismissed the concern of his architect friends about the weight of so many books on the medieval architecture of the building, which eventually would not bear such a load.

With his sense of humor, which included not taking himself very seriously – a virtue that many famous people fail to have – Berlinguer used to say that his critics complained about the fact that he was always writing the same book. An analysis of his published works shows that he dealt with the history of health and epidemiology, bioethics, occupational health, scientific politics, the environment, parasitology, the way in which diseases act and the reaction they generate; all of which are analyzed with exceptional intelligence and knowledge. Moreover, Berlinguer defined himself as a politician and someone who wished to change the world. With his grandfather's history as an activist, his father's involvement in the parliament, and as an activist himself in the Italian Communist Party, where his brother Enrico was Secretary General, Berlinguer devoted much of his time to the spreading of his ideas in the mass media, as shown by the hundreds of articles on health that he published.

Giovanni Berlinguer's death comes in an ill-omened moment for progressive Europeans. His country, the same as Garibaldi, Cavour, Gramsci, and Togliatti, was also Berlusconi's for many years. The European Welfare State is being dismantled while national sovereignties, and particularly progressive demands, are being neutralized by the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and private banking. At the same time, the European NATO bombards or destabilizes countries with dark-skinned populations and wrong ideologies.

## THE BUILDER

*Pedro Luis Castellanos*

Although I am not completely sure, I think the first person who I heard talking about Giovanni as a scholar and as a social activist was Sergio Arouca. It was probably in the mid-1970s, when the Brazilian health movement was struggling to reconquer democratic liberties, which resulted in the constitutional reform of 1988 and the ensuing health reform.

Through Juan César García, Miguel Márquez and Mario Testa, we heard about the struggles of the movement of Italian workers for the health system reform in the 1960s and 1970s, under Berlinguer's inspirational ideas of a "reform in health." We had seen some of Berlinguer's texts and speeches on this reform, on workers' health, and on his understanding of health, clearly connected to living and working conditions. Those were the years when the trend known as "Eurocommunism" emerged – views shared by Berlinguer – and the debates on democracy, pluralism, strategies of counter-hegemony in developed capitalist countries, and the transition to socialism were the focus of attention and proliferated at the core of social movements and, in many other cases, sparked division and confrontation.

I met Giovanni Berlinguer in person in 1979, when the IAHP conference was held in Arichia, Italy. There was friction between the delegations that represented Latin America and those representing European countries. The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua and the strong commitment of everyone present in support of the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) [*Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional*] shaped a favorable environment. However, Berlinguer's experience and political capacity, along with his personal traits, were decisive to strengthen the union and later development of this diverse and pluralistic movement of Social Medicine in both continents.

From that moment onward, we became more interested in his contribution. Since his presence in Latin American events of Social Medicine became more commonplace, we had several opportunities to discuss the health system in our countries and the social movements that advocated for the right to health and more fair and democratic societies.

We got to know a considerable number of his written works: *Medicina y Política*, *Malaria Urbana*, *La reforma sanitaria*, *Ética de la salud*, *La enfermedad*, and other recent works concerning social

determinants of health, bioethics and ethics in daily life. Only a few topics of social interest escaped his comments and contribution but, personally, I was always impressed by his constant willingness to have respectful and sincere conversations, and to build unity from diverse experiences and points of view among the progressive sectors of health.

Giovanni Berlinguer combined the strict discipline of a scholar, the commitment of a political activist connected to the labor movement, and the conviction and capacity of a builder of unity among the diverse and pluralistic aspects of the progressive movements.

He was an experienced politician who lost sight of the final outcomes that we all pursued, and who strove to improve and build political viability, and to change into public policies the ideas concerning health and health systems that emerged from social movements.

These traits drove him to be in leading roles for decades, in struggles established by the Italian *Servizio Sanitario Nazionale*, and in the development of Social Medicine worldwide, and, more recently, at the Commission on Social Determinants of Health of the World Health Organization.

#### CITATION

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