

Klaus Goldschlag, the Man and His Accomplishments

In government, success has notoriously many fathers, which makes it all the more remarkable how strong the consensus is that Klaus Goldschlag was a giant of the Foreign Service, someone whom all agree stood out and, his physical stature notwithstanding, stood above. A thinker whose genius was matched by his integrity and whose humanity touched everyone from government ministers to security guards, Klaus was a man of ideas, of erudition and cultivation, legendarily hard-working, wonderfully witty and, at the same time, exceptionally kind.

As Si Taylor has observed,

It was his extraordinary intelligence that commanded admiration and respect. Anyone who heard his reviews of the international scene, during briefings in Ottawa or diplomatic exchanges abroad, was bound to ask himself whether Klaus was not the finest exponent of the Canadian perspective on the world he had ever heard.

His was the mind and pen behind some of the biggest foreign policy initiatives of the Trudeau years. In the early Seventies, Klaus worked with then Foreign Minister Mitchell Sharp to produce a paper on Canada-US relations. The paper was drafted primarily by Klaus, and it offered the government three options. The government opted for the Third Option, i.e., diversifying our international economic relationships, which became a guiding principle of Trudeau's foreign policy. It was a big idea by a big thinker. Ahead of its time, the Third Option languished for many years as the Europeans focused inward and the Americans proved more receptive to partnership. The idea's time has come as the Harper Government negotiates a new economic relationship with Europe and launches new links with China and India.

When Allan Gotlieb took over as Undersecretary in 1979(?) he realized it was essential to appoint as Political Director someone to match the intellect of Pierre Trudeau, who hadn't bothered to hide his skepticism about advice from "External" as it was then called. Allan persuaded an unhappy Klaus to come home early from Rome, a post he loved in a country he adored for its music and food and to which he returned often in later years. Confirmation of the wisdom of the Allan's judgment was not long in coming. In Allan's own words,

A test soon arose when a major world disarmament conference was convened at the UN. Most heads of government or state planned to attend but Trudeau dug in his heels. "Why should I go?" he asked. "I have nothing to say." I told the Prime Minister I would guarantee that he had something to say, to which he replied "show me." I arranged for him to meet with Klaus and there followed several meetings with myself, Klaus and others. As a result of Klaus' intellectual input into his address, Trudeau became a highly committed advocate of the need for urgent action. The strategy of 'suffocation' [of nuclear weapons in their crib/labs] was just one of several ideas that Klaus proposed and Trudeau adopted. In other words, Trudeau did a hundred-percent turn.

These things would have been enough to crown any career, but there was much more. On assuming office in 1979, then Prime Minister Joe Clark announced he was moving the Canadian embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, causing an instant, strong and very negative reaction among friends and foes alike, including Washington and the Canadian business community. At External, Alan Gotlieb and Klaus Goldschlag set about helping the government extricate itself from its ill thought out promise. At Klaus's suggestion, the Prime Minister appointed Robert Stanfield as a one man commission to make recommendations on the matter. Klaus worked direct with Mr. Stanfield as they made their way through the legal, political and economic thicket, and

recommended putting the move off until such time as the legal status of Jerusalem was agreed, a recommendation Mr. Clark gratefully accepted.

A man with a rare acuity and wonderful antenna, a few years before the collapse of East Germany he reported back to Ottawa from Bonn that converging political events would bring the Wall down. Although the message was received in Ottawa with some incredulity, Klaus was later proven right in both his political observations and his predicted timing.

Klaus was known for his sharp wit and lucidity. Of Africa and the Caribbean, he once said: "In Africa, we have no interests but we have a foreign policy. In the Caribbean we have interests but no foreign policy." Tom Delworth observed that Klaus was gifted with one of the most serious and creative minds he had ever encountered, and at the same time he knew when and where and how to laugh at it all, that his motto could have been "if faut prendre tout au sérieux, rien au tragique".

The misadventure that cut short his appointment as ambassador to Germany and limited his powers was a personal tragedy for him, but equally a tragedy for the Foreign Service and for Canada. But it was the measure of the man that he was able to put one foot in front of the other every day, even when that day was filled with therapy, doctors, disappointment, and tragically the death of his beloved and adoring wife Shan. His daughter Caroline observed that he never allowed himself to get depressed, even through five interminable years of pain management after the accident.

Paul Dubois captured the man's extraordinary character thus;

juif en Allemagne hitlérienne, orphelin de père, déplacé vers le Canada en adoption à 15 ans, qui a perdu sa mère et sa soeur à Auschwitz, se refusait de condamner les autres. Il insistait qu'il fallait savoir pardonner et à continuer à

avoir confiance en l'homme. Sa vie est un témoignage vibrant de cette conviction profonde...

When I was departing to Ankara on my first posting, the late Jim Nutt who, along with Gordon Osbaldeston, had recruited me into the Service, knew somehow that Klaus would soon become Ambassador there, and told me that I was lucky because I would learn something from him. And learn I did. I worked with Klaus for three life-changing years, getting an international relations education from him that money could not have bought, as I sought to emulate his drive for excellence, dedication and his professionalism him and to earn his respect. Klaus worked as hard as any senior officer did. His capacity to read the vast overnight traffic from scores of posts abroad was legendary, absorbing gist and detail before most other people got up. And, as I learned to my chagrin, it was never safe to assume he had forgotten an assignment he gave. But it was the many personal kindnesses that he and Shan extended to me, a very young officer that I remember best, taking me along to archaeological sites throughout Anatolia, nursing me back to health in their residence when I contracted a serious bout of hepatitis and opening their home to Ayse and me for our marriage, kindnesses that only strike me as the more remarkable the older I get.

An inspiration to his colleagues, contemporaries and juniors, it is no deprecation of those of us who followed to say that they don't make them like that anymore.