

## Gordon Tullock, The Flying Ambassador

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It must have been in late 1971, if I recall it correctly, when Mrs. Liefmann-Keil, Gordon Tullock, Bruno Frey and I met in Frankfurt and attended a meeting of the Friedrich List Society. My senior Basel colleague, Gottfried Bombach, who chaired the session, extended a special welcome to Gordon, when he learned about his presence. The next day it was very foggy in Frankfurt, so we four decided to skip the session and to move instead out to the sunny Taunus mountains near Frankfurt, and to have a long walk up through the forest from Falkenstein towards the Grosse Feldberg. There we passed the famous Gasthaus (Inn) picturesquely situated among the trees and read the little poem posted in front of the neighbouring glade:

Hier tanzen die Füchse im Maien,  
Immer, wenn keiner sie sieht.

(Foxes dance here in May,  
Whenever nobody looks on).

Certainly stuff for thinking for all Philosophers of Science. Probably stimulated by this experience and by walking like members of the Aristotelean Academy, we soon merged deeply into a conversation about establishing a European Public Choice Society. And in the end, when returning to Frankfurt, helped by Gordon as a fervent advocate, we had decided to create this society with Mrs. Liefmann-Keil as its President. We also selected a Secretary for the organizational and administrative work, from which we, I have to confess to our shame, shied away.

Our first meeting took place in Basel and ended with a gracious dinner in a well-known restaurant, the Schuetzenhaus. It was a productive meeting of about twenty people, some of them students of Bruno Frey and myself, a few from other European countries. Gordon was again with us with stimulating ideas and to provide a link to the American public choice movement.

Unfortunately things did not develop well during the next two years, since the Secretary turned into a kind of Marxist and, sadly, since Mrs. Liefmann-Keil suffered a tragic accident, which made her an invalid. She died a few years later. So we had to make a fresh start in 1974, when I stayed for half a year at the Center for Study of Public Choice at VPI in

Blacksburg. Encouraged by Gordon I took over the presidency of the European Public Choice Society in the Fall, and we met regularly in Basel, first each second year. Some of the participants in these early conferences were students of Bruno Frey and myself and became later presidents of the society: Beat Blankart, Fritz Schneider, Werner Pommerehne and

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Heinrich Ursprung. Gordon was present at each of these occasions, and his advice was so valuable to us that we invited him even to the meetings of our small Board as the “American public choice ambassador”. By 1980 the Society was well-established and we had a first meeting outside Switzerland in Florence. From then on we made it a practice to meet each year in another European country, and to have a regular change of presidents rotating among different European countries. In 1981 I was able to step down and pass the presidency on to Charles Rowley, who chaired the next meeting in Oxford.

Since that time I have attended most, but by far not all meetings of the successful society. But as far as I know, Gordon has not missed one of them. He stayed a true intermediary between public choice enthusiasts in Europe and America, and this not only concerning the official societies and the Center for Study of Public Choice, to which in the course of time more and more Europeans flocked as regular pilgrims.

Gordon likes to present himself as a hard-nosed scientist, an uncompromising discussant and a tough-minded fellow. But all his good friends know well that he hides a kind heart below a coarse surface and is always prepared to help and to encourage even young visitors new in the trade. My wife and my daughters could tell about many such experiences. When we arrived by plane at Roanoke airport with our dachshund, whom we had smuggled on the plane in New York, on Easter Sunday, who turned up to greet us and to drive us to Blacksburg? And who gave us additional bedclothes and linen when we had arrived at our home? Who often joined us for lunch? Gordon.

And it was Gordon who was always prepared to share some experiences with us from playing diplomacy with our girls, some other fellows from the Center and myself, to showing us his property in boots and firing his pistol to enjoy the daughters. And when the girls even once asked him: “Who is more intelligent, you or Peter?” he did not hesitate a moment to answer: “I, of course, for whereas Peter needed three years to study economics, I completed it in nine months.” And he was not offended when I retorted: “We still perceive the gaps because of your inadequate training.”

I am glad that my Faculty at Basel University acknowledged Gordon’s work as a scholar and flying ambassador to Europe, Switzerland and Basel, and bestowed the title of an honorary doctor on him a few years ago. It is not the place here to delve into his scholarly accomplishments as an innovative outsider, especially since I have contributed a paper to the Tucson meeting commemorating Gordon in May 1999 (Bernholz, 2000). But let me at least mention that I have learned a lot from him in several fields, and that I would like to express my deep gratitude at the occasion of his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday.

## Reference

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