

Speech by Prof. Barry Cooper, FRSC,
Professor of Politics, University of Calgary (Canada)
at the celebration in Paris, May 30th, 2008,
in honor of Tilo Schabert

Sehr geehrter Herr Professor Schabert,

Sehr geehrte Frau Professor Schabert

Meine Damen und Herren

Chers amis

Ladies and gentlemen

C'est un grand plaisir et un honneur pour moi de vous parler, brièvement, au sujet de mon ami, Tilo Schabert. Coming from an Anglophone continent, Quebec aside, my command of foreign languages is strictly limited, so I will cease insulting the French and German tongues.

This is a very festive occasion, a time to celebrate Tilo's scientific and scholarly achievements and to honour them as well as him. Alain Juranville has, and Karl-Heinz Nusser no doubt will, draw your attention to the great

work he has done in the history of western political philosophy and, more recently, on western European politics. I would be gravely remiss if I did not add my voice to theirs and say something about Tilo's work, particularly the work he has done in English.

Let me begin, however, with a recollection. Many years ago, in 1971 at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago, when we were both much younger, we found ourselves sitting next to one another listening to an address by Tilo's Doktorvater, Eric Voegelin. I had met Voegelin a few times and had studied some of his work. It was clear we both strongly approved of what Voegelin was saying, and we fell into conversation.

That conversation has continued intermittently over the years, in various American cities when he would cross the Atlantic to attend APSA meetings, in Munich and Baierbrunn, where he is now a political practitioner as well as a political scientist, in Manchester, at Stanford, even in Calgary, and now in Paris. Invariably these have been stimulating times. And the present occasion is certainly one of the best.

Friendship aside, one of the distinguishing attributes of Tilo's work in political science is that it reflects not merely the ability of a first-rate scholar to master the materials, but an extraordinary power of imagination

to order them into an arresting, novel, and always challenging configuration of meaning.

His early book, Gewalt und Humanität, examined the question of modernity in order to understand it both as a kind of spiritual crisis and to account for the propensity of modern human beings to resort so easily to violence. He traced the change, for example, from Platonic peitho, persuasion, to Marx's understanding of critique, namely destruction. He discussed how those changes were reflected in the understanding of how we connect ourselves to, and disconnect ourselves from, the order of nature. He developed the distinction between what he called History I, modern humanity's self-understanding as the progressive mastery of chance, and History II, the real story of human destructiveness.

Or there is his study of Mayor Kevin White of Boston. Boston Politics has the subtitle: The Creativity of Power. It is enough, perhaps, to note two things: first, not many Europeans were interested in local government in America. And second, most of what was written at the time was quasi-Marxist analysis about various "power structures" and coalitions.

Tilo saw Mayor White as a kind of orchestra conductor. He may have been autocratic –orchestra conductors are not notorious democrats-- but he was creative as well. He knew both that power was "the gift of

circumstances,” as Tilo put it, and it was something White knew how to retain and use to realize his own projects.

His study of Boston politics and of its mayor can in a way be seen as a practice run for what, in my view, is his masterwork, his study of President Mitterrand and German reunification. I would draw your attention not to the way Tilo set the record straight on Mitterrand’s foreign policy, important though that was, nor the unprecedented access he had to documents in the Elysée Palace. What I found particularly striking was his use of the image of a “workshop.”

President Mitterrand and the other modern princes in the Kremlin, in the White House or at No. 10 Downing Street, were really going to work in a workshop where world history was crafted. Once you understand the implications of the image, you will never look upon the conduct of the great and lesser powers the same way again.

I might add that he used the same image to describe how Eric Voegelin conducted his affairs as world-historical philosopher. And, as they used to say in KGB and CIA: that is no accident.

Finally, let me congratulate Tilo again on his elevation to Chevalier dans l’Ordre Nationale de la Légion d’Honneur. I am from Calgary, situé dans le far west du Canada, Heimat des Cowboys. It is necessary for a

chevalier to have a cheval or at least to encounter one occasionally. Next time you are in Alberta, perhaps we can ride together and continue our conversation on horseback.

Ladies and gentlemen, please charge your glasses and rise in a toast:
to Tilo Schabert, Chevalier.