

Personal Glimpses of Public Life

By Hikosaburo Okonogi

Meeting in Seoul

I first met West German Minister of Economics Otto Lambsdorff on April 14, 1984, when we were in Seoul to attend a seminar sponsored by the Trade Policy Research Center. With a clear and steady voice that commanded our attention, Lambsdorff appeared quite at ease at the seminar. He was obviously a veteran of innumerable international conferences, and was most convincing as he spoke of the need for a new round of trade talks.

Yet outside the agenda, he was warmly personal: "Are you going to be representing Japan at the London Summit?" "Yes, of course." "Good. I'm hoping to go myself. It should be a good meeting."

I was to see him again at the Deutsche Leistungsschau held in Tokyo from April 23 to May 6. This time we had ample time to converse over dinner, an enjoyable two hours of relaxing conversation during which he was as personable and knowledgeable as ever.

Thus, I was looking forward to seeing him at the Quadrilateral Trade Ministers' Conference held June 1984 in Erbach, West Germany. Yet when I arrived in Bonn, I learned that Lambsdorff had handed in his resignation to Chancellor Kohl the previous evening. While some people questioned whether I should go on with a pre-Conference meeting which had been scheduled, I quickly overrode these doubts by expressing my belief that common courtesy demanded no less.

Our final conversation

Lambsdorff greeted me warmly at the Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft, yet his tone was somber when he said: "I submitted my resignation to the Chancellor last night, and now I have to tell the President of my resignation. This will be my last official meeting as Minister of Economics, and I'm glad it is with you."

Deliberately avoiding the issue of his resignation, I said simply: "I have had many other opportunities to meet with you elsewhere, but I'm especially glad to have this chance to talk with you here."

Although Lambsdorff expressed his satisfaction with the success of the Deutsche Leistungsschau in Tokyo and his appreciation for Japan's support in making the exhibition possible, his demeanor



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was downcast and his voice did not have its usual vigor.

Knowing that he had just returned from the London Summit, which I had missed, I asked him to fill me in on what had happened. For the next 15 minutes, Lambsdorff spoke knowledgeably of economic policy and the global future. Even as I was inspired by his words, I was moved in sympathy for this very capable man who would be leaving his post in a few minutes. Although I had intended to cheer him up, I noticed when it was time to leave that Lambsdorff's eyes were red. We left the room together, he leaning on the cane necessitated by an old war wound, and parted at the head of the stairs. As I made my way downstairs, I silently prayed that he would soon recover from the recent unhappy turn of events.

Winds of politics

Canada's International Trade Minister Gerald Regan appeared in good spirits at the Erbach Quadrilateral Trade Ministers' Conference. Although he was only able to attend one day of the two-day conference, leaving his deputy to fill in for him while he returned to Canada for a meeting of the new Cabinet, there was every indication that he intended to be a forceful and effective trade minister.

Events did not unfold as expected, however. An election was held in Canada very shortly thereafter and Regan's party suffered a serious defeat, depriving Regan of his hard-won post.

In mid-September an international

meeting of trade ministers was held in Rio de Janeiro. With a sardonic grin Regan explained that, since the new Cabinet would not be announced until September 17, he was still responsible for representing Canada.

After the conference, I asked Regan what he planned to do starting September 18, and he replied: "I'd like to become a consultant or something like that. If I do, I may have occasion to visit Japan, and I hope you won't mind if I call on you." In parting, he gave me a thick volume on Canadian cultural history and we shook hands warmly.

Midnight memories

My first meeting with EC Commission Vice President Wilhelm Haferkamp was at the Quadrilateral Trade Ministers' Conference held in Florida in February 1984. Before the main conference, the Japanese and EC representatives held a meeting of our own at a quiet restaurant next to our hotel.

After a hearty lunch we settled down to discuss the many problems between the EC and Japan. Haferkamp, his open collar revealing a bronzed chest, exuded an aura of self-confidence. I had just been appointed MITI Minister, and this was my first ministerial conference. However, for all of his self-assurance, Haferkamp was sympathetically understanding toward my initial nervousness, and I came away from the meeting with a new respect for him personally.

The next Quadrilateral Trade Minister's Conference was hosted by the EC Commission. On June 30, 1984, after the last meeting, U.S. Trade Representative William Brock, his wife, my wife, and I were invited by the Haferkamps to dine with them at "Die Ente Vom Lehel" in Wiesbaden. A little after midnight, the Haferkamps suddenly rose from their seats and gave each other an affectionate hug. We stared at them in amazement, but our bewilderment turned to delight when they explained that July 1 was Wilhelm Haferkamp's birthday. Their sharing of such a personal occasion warmed us and contributed to a pleasant memory.

Although I have left the Ministry, the memory of their friendship stays with me as perhaps the most important element in smoothing international relations. ●

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