

OBITUARY ON JAN TUMLIR

Professor Jan Tumlr, until recently the Director of Economic Research and Analysis at the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), Geneva, died suddenly at his home in Versoix, Switzerland, early on Saturday morning 22 June. He was 58. Tumlr was also a senior member of the economics faculty at the Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales at the University of Geneva.

Through his official work, and his participation in "outside" activities, attending conferences and contributing to professional journals and collections of essays, Tumlr had come to exert an extraordinary influence -- unusual for an international civil servant -- on the thinking of those in government, and on its fringes, concerned with international economic affairs. Having just retired from the GATT Secretariat, Tumlr was about to take up a senior teaching post at the University of California at Los Angeles, where he was a visiting professor in 1983-84.

In his diagnosis of, and prescriptions for, problems afflicting the world economy, Tumlr drew on a close acquaintance not only with economic thought but also with law, philosophy and history, which in part explained his role in the renewal of interest during the 1970s in the writings of F.A. Hayek and other liberal economists. His own contribution to economic thought was the clarification, in a rapidly integrating world economy, of the essentials of international economic order.

Tumlr set the pace in economic policy discussion in GATT circles. More than that though, in his capacity as head of its "think tank", Tumlr enabled the GATT Secretariat to be the pace-setter among inter-governmental organisations on many of the basic economic issues of today, tracing the origins of inflation and "slow growth" back to the government intervention in the market process which took a hold during the 1960s in what Tumlr called the "core" economies.

Tumlr had gravitas. His independence of mind and strength of character were formidable. They were formed in troubled times from which he did not hold back.

Born in Prague on 18 August 1926, Tumlr's father was chief government statistician in Czechoslovakia, his mother being an Agrarian Party member of the Czech Senate in the 1930s until the outbreak of the Second World War. After the war Tumlr was studying law at Charles University in Prague at the time of the Communist take-over of the country and was editor of a youth magazine. Jailed in 1948 after trying to escape to the West with his parents, he was later transferred to hard-labour in a coal mine, from which he escaped in 1949 to work in West Germany as a journalist on Radio Free Europe.

In 1951, Tumlr went to the United States on a scholarship, enrolling at Yale University to study economics. The most lasting influence there was the late William Fellner with whom he kept in

touch to the end. Tumlr obtained his doctorate in 1962 and was appointed an assistant professor of economics at Yale, before being recruited by Sir Eric Wyndham White in 1964 to work at the GATT Secretariat, becoming its Director of Economic Research and Analysis in 1967.

Wyndham White's successor as Director-General of the GATT was Dr Olivier Long who, also a professor at the University of Geneva, encouraged Tumlr to help and stimulate the work of economists and others in universities and institutes who were trying to make sense of what had become a complex world economy. Tumlr was especially active in the Trade Policy Research Centre in London and joined its Council in 1982.

Tumlr is survived by his wife Liba, a son and two stepsons.

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JAN TUMLIR

Jan Tumlr, an active member of the Council of the Trade Policy Research Centre, died on Saturday 22 June from a heart attack. He retired at the end of February as Director of Economic Research and Analysis at the Secretariat of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Enclosed is a copy of the Obituary which appeared in The Times on 25 June (together with a copy of the full text prepared for the newspaper).

It is difficult to convey the kind of impact that Tumlr made on international economic discussion.

In the 1985 number of Contemporary Economic Problems, an annual review published by the American Enterprise Institute in Washington, Gottfried Haberler, the doyen of international economists, wrote of the last annual report of the GATT, International Trade 1983-84: 'As usual, it stands out among reports of international institutions, because it is not a negotiated document, trying to accommodate different, often divergent, viewpoints. The GATT document is a staff report that develops a consistent liberal stance -- liberal in the classical sense of laissez faire, laissez-passer, not in the perverted modern sense.'

Professor Haberler observes in a footnote that 'the GATT report has received hardly any attention in the media', remarking that 'a notable exception is an excellent article by Samuel Brittan in the Financial Times. Mr Brittan pays high tribute to the principal author of the report, Jan Tumlr'. Professor Haberler adds: 'I wish to associate myself with that tribute.'

HUGH CORBET
Director