

## SENATE

### McGILL UNIVERSITY

Minutes of a meeting of Senate held on Wednesday, October 19, 2005, at 2:30 p.m. in the Robert Vogel Council Room (Room 232), Leacock Building.

[Extract from: [https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/minutes\\_senate\\_05-06\\_03.pdf](https://www.mcgill.ca/senate/files/senate/minutes_senate_05-06_03.pdf)]

#### **1. RESOLUTION ON THE DEATH OF PROFESSOR EMERITUS RAYMOND KLIBANSKY**

The following resolution on the death of Professor Emeritus Raymond Klibansky was presented by Interim Dean John Galaty, and adopted unanimously by Senate.

Raymond Klibansky, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, who died last month, was born in Paris in 1905 of Jewish parents and lived there until 1914. His father was of German nationality, and the family was obliged to move to Germany at the outbreak of the war. Klibansky was a student and later a Dozent at the University of Heidelberg, where he studied under Karl Jaspers. He also knew Ernst Cassirer and the Warburg family in Hamburg, creators of the Warburg Library.

In March 1933 Hitler's National Socialist party came to power, and sanctions against Jews followed rapidly. For example, on April 1 it was decreed that all shops owned by Jews should be marked by a yellow star. Klibansky moved to Oriel College, Oxford. The Warburg Library was transported to London and changed its name to the Warburg Institute, of which Klibansky became an active member.

In September 1939 war was declared. Klibansky, along with many academics in England, became a member of the "Political Warfare Executive". Their job was to determine in great detail the intentions and morale of the enemy leadership in Germany, using as sources of information newspapers, radio broadcasts, aerial photographs, spies etc. Klibansky's office was near Bletchley Park, where the top-secret Enigma decoding operation was located. The Enigma personnel read German military messages on a daily basis.

In October 1942 the first British military victory took place at El Alamein in Egypt, where the Germans were stopped in their drive to capture the Suez Canal. After that, the decision was taken to invade and occupy Italy. But jointly with military planning, there had to be intelligence gathering on Italy and its leadership. Klibansky knew Italian, and the job of putting together Italian intelligence was given to him. He was responsible for the production of a separate manual for each of the 18 regions of Italy. In two years he became an expert on Italian political and military leaders, the intrigues that divided them, and their struggles for power.

Preparations for the invasion of Italy, through Sicily, were highly secret. Klibansky learned that, once Sicily was secured, the plan was to cross the Straits of Messina and work north along the coast. He was horrified. Every previous attack on Italy, from Hannibal with his elephants to Garibaldi, had demonstrated that to be successful, one must attack either from the north or from the centre of the Italian peninsula, near Rome. In the south, from Messina north to Naples, there is only one narrow road between the mountains and the sea, with several rivers to cross. Klibansky sent his assessment to Eisenhower's headquarters in Algiers, where the invasion planning was taking place, but being merely a political intelligence officer his opinion on military matters carried no weight. In the event, the error of invading from Messina was paid for by heavy losses of Allied soldiers on the march north, including many at Monte Cassino.

One of Klibansky's special competences concerned the character of Mussolini, who was deposed as leader in July 1943. For Klibansky, the importance of Mussolini in the overall picture of the war lay in his relationship with Hitler. Mussolini apparently felt that Hitler should treat him as a senior counsellor and adviser, but alas, Hitler never took the trouble to inform him of his military initiatives. To get his own

back, Mussolini launched an attack on Greece in October 1940 which Hitler learned about only through the newspapers. Unfortunately the attack bogged down in Yugoslavia, and Hitler was forced to come to Mussolini's aid. In April 1941, the German army occupied Greece in six weeks in a brilliant campaign. But there were repercussions. The German attack on Russia which was supposed to begin in May 1941 did not start until June 22, with the result that December found them at the gates of Moscow but not inside. The Germans were forced to retreat in bitterly cold weather. This turning point of the war we can credit to Mussolini.

After the war, Klibansky accepted a job in the philosophy department McGill, and arrived in Montreal in 1946. Of his many publications I mention one in particular, *Saturn and Melancholy*, which he wrote jointly with Erwin Panofsky and Fritz Saxl. More than any other, this work demonstrates Klibansky's incredible breadth of knowledge and scholarship in art, science, medicine, astrology and philosophy.

At McGill, Klibansky stood out in virtue of being the sole member of a sophisticated European intellectual elite in a department whose roots were in moral philosophy and British empiricism. The dominant figure during and after the war was R.D. McLennan, the son of a Highlands Presbyterian minister. Needless to say, there were few direct contacts between the two intellectual wings of our department, but those of us who were philosophy students in late 1940s and early 50s could benefit from the best of two very different traditions. Personally, I owe a huge debt to Klibansky's recommending I read Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, the last sentence of which is "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen". This was heady stuff to an undergraduate in the 1950s.

Raymond Klibansky was married to Ethel Groffier, a professor in the Law Faculty, and died two months short of his hundredth birthday. I cannot think of any McGill professor, in any faculty, whose life has led him through such a rich and varied set of experiences, or who has had contact with so many intellectuals in so many different fields. We are privileged to pay tribute today to the memory of such a distinguished colleague.