

<p style="text-align: center;">F.R. TOMLINSON GEDENKLESING F.R. TOMLINSON MEMORIAL LECTURE</p>
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THE DILEMMA OF A CONTEMPORARY AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST: WILL THE REAL PROFESSOR TOMLINSON PLEASE STEP FORWARD!

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"Digging deeper to reach higher ground" (UB40)

1. INTRODUCTION

Who and what are we commemorating this evening and why do we have such an occasion? Who was Prof F.R. Tomlinson really and what did he contribute to agricultural economics in South Africa to inspire this unique event - the highest honour to be bestowed by the Agricultural Economics Association of South Africa on one of its members?

Since I was invited to present this lecture I intensely debated these questions - within my own mind and also with some of my trusted colleagues and friends - those who shared "my path through the woods" during the 70s, 80s and 90s and today - some are here tonight which I really appreciate.

The WHY is quite straightforward. Inspired by the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE) with their Elmherst Lecture AEASA, during the early 1980s, decided to have a prestige event such as this (Elmherst) lecture.

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The choice of name was also relative straightforward. All of those on the AEASA management committee and many members of the association either knew or was taught by Prof F R Tomlinson. This exceptional man - whom successfully bridged the dualism of our agricultural system (developed and developing) with path breaking scientific and policy work - was an unanimous choice to symbolise the best of agricultural economics in South Africa.

However, times have changed.

To shed light on the WHOM question I had to rediscover Prof F R Tomlinson. Not only in a historical context but also in the South African reality of today. This led me to an exiting, at times painful, journey in which I - as a contemporary agricultural economist - had to deal with some personal dilemmas. More about this later.

2. TOMLINSON - AN AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST DURING THE MID 1900s

Prof F R Tomlinson was born in 1908 and graduated in 1929 with a Masters Degree in Agricultural Economics from the University of Stellenbosch. He continued his studies with a PhD from Cornell University, USA in 1933 and completed a DSc Agric (Agricultural Economics) at the University of Pretoria in 1939. Three DSc Agric Honorous Causa degrees: Pretoria (1975), UOVS (1984) and Stellenbosch (1986) was also bestowed on this exceptional man.

For 40 years he was a formidable force in agricultural economic analysis and policy advice in South Africa. He acted as promoter of many of the great agricultural economists and agricultural extension personalities of our time. He was also an exceptional sportsman on the rugby field and the tennis court. A short, powerfully built man with unlimited energies. Prof Tomlinson died in February 1991 at the age of 82. F R Tomlinson was the thirteenth and last child of his family. (This section with acknowledgement from Smith, 1997.)

In searching for Tomlinson I had the privilege to listen and read through some of the previous Tomlinson Commemorating lectures and some other references (Brand, 1992; Blignaut, 1998; Kassier, 1988; Groenewald, 1990; Louw, 1998; Fenyés, 1996; Nieuwoudt, 1993; Smith, 1997). I also had personal contact with him through the 1970s and 1980s and had the privilege to negotiate the terms and conditions of the Tomlinson lecture with him on behalf of the Agricultural Economic Association of South Africa.

From all these experiences it became clear that Prof Tomlinson was a formidable, energetic and strong person - in the words of Dr Simon Brand, his PhD student in 1968, 'Prof Tomlinson is, in addition to his numerous other achievements, perhaps the one person who has had the profoundest influence on the development of AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS as an academic discipline in South Africa' (Brand, 1969).

Prof Dirk Smith (1997), one of Tomlinson's research assistants and colleagues, referred to him as an economist and researcher of the highest standing, always logical and meticulous to the "painful" extreme! Prof Jan Groenewald (1990) reminded us of Tomlinson's great respect for economic theory, combined with a holistic observation of the world within which we live and a deep respect for the natural environment and how all this impact on prevailing farming systems and human personalities.

This particular view of Tomlinson had a major influence on extension strategy and training in South Africa during the Tomlinson years.

This also reflected his interest in the relationship between farm size, farming practices and incomes - the "staple diet" of all respectable agricultural economists! In this context he warned against decreasing farm sizes which would constrain the ability to run an environmentally balanced farming system and generate an economically sustainable farm livelihood.

These views of Tomlinson created a logical thread to the recommendations of his Study Committee on the Use of Arable Land (1968), which formed the basis for the Subdivision of Arable Land Act in 1970. Although controversial it may still be relevant today in our highly deregulated agricultural economy especially in marginal natural environmental areas.

Tomlinson truly excelled in agricultural economic analysis. His interest and active participation straddled the farm level analysis, where his concerns were focused on farm size, costs and income, substitution relationships and diversity; the marketing of agricultural commodities to maximise return to primary producers and appropriate responses to fluctuating price levels; and also the macro and political economy environment through policy analysis and advice. His focus was always to ensure that the agricultural sector accepts its responsibility to contribute optimally to economic growth and the social welfare of the society at large.

An important characteristic of Tomlinson's work in these fields was that he did not treat macro and micro economics as separate entities. His work show

a continuous awareness of the influence which macro trends have on decision-making at the individual farm level, and vice versa. This inherent economic logic makes him acutely aware to the extent to which the actions on the farm level can support or undermine the intended effect of macro economic policies. He respected the law of unintended consequences (Brand, 1992). More about this important aspect later.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT ECONOMIST

For many, however, Prof Tomlinson's most visible and important task was his role as Chairman of the "COMMISSION FOR THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE BANTU AREAS WITHIN THE UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA" or the so-called "TOMLINSON COMMISSION". This commission was appointed in November 1950 and presented its report in October 1954. The full report of 18 volumes comprises of 15 chapters, 3755 pages, 598 tables and an atlas of 66 large-scale maps (Houghton, 1956).

In the micro economic investigations he developed a "new" methodological basis for the most comprehensive factual survey ever undertaken on rural conditions, farming systems and practices and financial results in these resource poor and densely populated areas of South Africa. In the recommendations, aimed at establishing a "middle class" of full-time, economic viable farmers, he suggested that a comprehensive farmer support system be implemented to allow such farmers access to increased farm land, markets, financial support and credit and high quality extension services. For him farming had to be economically viable. All these principles are generally still accepted in today's policy frameworks.

However, the Tomlinson Commission dealt with far more than agricultural development of resource poor areas. The Terms of Reference to the commission was "to conduct an exhaustive enquiry into and to report on a comprehensive scheme for the rehabilitation of the native areas with a view to develop within them a social structure in keeping with the culture of the native and based on effective socio economic planning".

The report proposed plans for agricultural, natural resource, industrial, mining and manufacturing development; labour development; tertiary activities and urbanisation; the provision of social services; education; health; nutrition and administrative organisation and the expansion and consolidation of land areas. All this could be viewed as sound development economics and, with a 1950 - 1955 date tag, surely a world first for integrated regional and rural development planning.

Prof Lieb Nieuwoudt referred to this as follows: "F R Tomlinson was ahead of his time in his approach towards social upliftment of the developing (agricultural) sector" (Nieuwoudt, 1993).

4. TOMLINSON - A ROLEPLAYER IN THE POLITICAL ECONOMY?

The painful reality, however, struck me that all of this positive development economics might be undone by the stated acceptance by the Tomlinson Commission of "separate development (or apartheid in the words of Dr Verwoerd in his reply to the report), as the only possible solution for South Africa" (Tomlinson Commission Summary Report, page 106). This clearly implied that the Commission opted for a spacial framework to "create a basis for black economic, social and political life outside the white areas of the day".

This realisation led to a dilemma in my mind. I would like to share it with you.

Could we, as Agricultural Economic Association, with a proud record of path breaking and even fearless work and viewpoints, to promote democracy, access to agricultural resources including land for all our citizens and free economic activity continue to commemorate the Prof Tomlinson of the Tomlinson Commission? They did support apartheid after all.

Should I have accepted this great honour to present the lecture only to point to this legacy and recommend that we terminate this tradition as it does not have any standing in the new South Africa?

Truly a personal and a professional dilemma I had to deal with. This then led me to "dig deeper till I reached higher ground" (UB 40).

The main thrust of the recommendations of the report struck me as substantially illogical to achieve the purpose as set out by government, i.e. to establish a basis for "separate development to contain black economic, social and political life outside the white areas."

The major recommendations proposed were: access to more land (despite 66 maps no clear borders were drawn or proposed) and land tenure reform so that land could be bought and sold; investment and business partnerships (between white and black groups) to promote economic viable activity; industrial development adjacent (border industries) as well as within the traditional native areas; and urban settlement.

Within a "LOGICAL FRAMEWORK ANALYSIS", which describes a logical cause and effect relationship between outputs and activities, all the abovementioned activities would clearly rather result in viable regional and rural development. It would hardly promote "separateness (or apartheid)". Indeed the then government, especially through Dr Verwoerd, obviously concurred with my analysis and reached the same conclusion. The major recommendations of the Tomlinson Commission were therefore rejected by the Government, as they could not guarantee the "apartheid state" sought after (Government of South Africa, 1956).

It rather created a "developmental state" where economic forces would dictate future development and grown paths - not government wishes and administrative interventions. Dr Verwoerd was quite clear about the reasons for the rejection of these recommendations.

The question begging therefore is: how could Prof Tomlinson, the economic scientist, with such a great respect for logic and meticulous analysis, with such an acute understanding of economic logic and the potential of "unintended consequences", especially through economic responses at the micro level, propose measures which would clearly undermine the requested macro outcomes?

Pressure was indeed put on him to change and conform. He literally rose up, as a short person, to the tall imposing Hendrik Verwoerd, banging the table and refusing to rescind on these recommendations because it was, according to Tomlinson based on sound, economic development principles.

Does this justify the actions of Prof Tomlinson? Justification, however, is not the purpose of my argument; rather to understand and contextualise this high calibre agricultural economist whom had a major opportunity to impact on the future of our country.

All this led me to conclude that Tomlinson was indeed of enigma.

5. WILL THE REAL PROFESSOR TOMLINSON PLEASE STEP FORWARD?

Does the above argumentation solve my dilemma? Not so easily - After all the Commission did support the apartheid system.

However, are we dealing here with a scientist who respectfully ignored the larger constitutional context in which he and his team were making

recommendations, based on the clear and meticulous application of their disciplinary principles? Did they naively believe they could undermine political imperatives in this manner? Did they sincerely believe that by dealing with the micro dilemma of rural poverty, under development and the exploitation of natural resources, a macro paradigm would emerge that would satisfy political aspirations and at the same time improve rural livelihoods at the household level and create economic development forces?

I do not have the answers to these questions of motive.

Economic history, fortunately, have examples which could assist us with the "Tomlinson dilemma". Judged against today's knowledge Robert Mathus can easily be discredited. But those who would do so would miss the point, i.e. his scientific analysis of the social and moral problems of his day. David Ricardo, one of the greatest economic thinkers of all times missed the potential of technology. We still honour him today. What about Karl Marx? We may disagree with his proposals on economic organisation but we respect his intellect and contribution in the context of his times. Have we forgotten John Maynard Keynes? Even the great Aristotle – since Descartes the Aristotle scientific method was not followed. This brilliant thinker, however, is still honoured (the above with acknowledgement to Prof Jan Groenewald).

All these contributions were considered within a particular historic context but also in the value of the thinking in a more universal context.

Tomlinson was also a thinker, concerned with agricultural economic development. Even within the "apartheid" state, rural development would have impacted positively on the circumstances of the poor and destitute.

I was fortunate to observe something of this enigmatic person while I worked at the Development Bank of Southern Africa in the 1980s. We regularly consulted Prof Tomlinson during the design of the farmer support investment strategy of DBSA (Van Rooyen, Vink & Christoudoulou, 1987). Tomlinson, in his advice often took us back to the Tomlinson report. He never discussed the economic political dimensions of the report. However, he revisited the tension surrounding the rejection of the main recommendations.

He told us that he refused pressure to change these recommendations and he and his Commission stood by the full report because (a) it executed the terms of references, given the historical context of government policy, and (b) because of the meticulous application of sound principles of economic enquiry and socio economic planning.

He often referred to the relevancy of the Von Thunen regional development model for the economic development of South Africa's rural areas.

With these thoughts, often repeated, he then rested his case and congratulated DBSA (with Simon Brand as the CEO) that at last the recommendations for viable rural and agricultural development was now, 30 years later, properly respected and attended to. The relative success, again in its historical context, of the farmer support investment programme of DBSA in the 80s and early 90s must be noted. This is well documented in the book "Serving Small Scale Farmers" (Singini & Van Rooyen, 1995).

One final piece of the Tomlinson puzzle was required before I could fully address my dilemma and put my unease to rest.

Prof Tomlinson clearly believed in the findings of the Commission because of the meticulous application of sound economic and development principles and analysis. This conviction was also observed in many of his other strong stances on agricultural matters (evidence is well documented in previous Tomlinson lectures).

How did his stand against a powerful political system impacted on his personal and professional life? He was clearly not a Beyers Naude. However, he did not operate in the "church" environment. Tomlinson was, according to evidence, on his way to become a top-level executive in the National Department of Agriculture. Some even predicted that he would be a future Secretary of Agriculture (today's DG). Instead he was sidelined and he retired as a regional director. He might have been somewhat bitter about all this – certainly with justification. However, he continued, as an enthusiastic, energetic and inspired agricultural economist, to establish his profound influence over the agricultural economic and extension disciplines, supporting students who were interested in agricultural development in its broader sense (my own Masters and PhD work was inspired by him), and continued to be a "giant" in South African agricultural policy development.

One last consideration then: To what extent could the recommendations of the Tomlinson's Commission assisted in dealing with today's problems in the resource poor rural environments of South Africa?

Despite the completely changed socio political landscape of South Africa today, recommendations such as: increased access to land and land tenure reform which include the right of a successful farmer to expand (both these recommendations was specifically rejected in the government White Paper on

the Tomlinson report); access to a range of support services to enable economic viable farming; joint ventures and business partnerships; development investment in infrastructure and capacity development; community development; industrial development; and the promotion of urbanisation would still be highly relevant.

Indeed, within our current landscape some of these recommendations could have been implemented in a much more productive and innovative manner. Take for example current thinking on partnerships between commercial and developing or emerging agriculture and also to link developing agribusinesses into the added value chain (ABC 2000).

The idea of "rural" urbanisation might have been a long shot in the 1950s. Today it is vitally important to activate rural towns and larger rural cities, as the "cutting edge" for economic development and the creation of livelihoods in these environments. We urgently need rural diversification, local forward and backward linkages and rural entrepreneurship development. Unless all this is done, our existing cities will be swamped by the jobless. This will definitely further activate criminality and food insecurity - a "Mad Max" scenario?

In today's context land reform will have to be entirely repacked. The active promotion of a range of alternative and innovative "land access" models is important. Farm worker equity schemes, outgrower programmes, etc is required. The implementation of land rental agreements should be considered. Land ownership transfer will cost an immense amount of scarce capital. However, landownership was never a pre-requisite for successful farming (Tomlinson agreed with this). In Belgium for example, more than 60% of farmland is rented. Such a scheme will render capital free for the required farming support services. This strategy will however require adaptations in financing arrangements by commercial banks as well as the review of land rental "rules".

Tomlinson proposed viable "middle class" economic farming units. The National Department of Agriculture is currently working on a policy that would link land reform to viable farming. This is a step in the right direction.

Today we also realise that our rural poverty problems will not be solved on farms alone (Tomlinson also knew this). Recent knowledge that the rural situation is far too complex and diverse to successfully promote only "middle class farmers" as the major rural development strategy (Laurent, Van Rooyen,

Madikezela, Bonnal & Carstens, 1998), may have disappointed, but not surprised Prof Tomlinson.

Our stock of available technology will have delighted him. The inability to transfer this technology to successful application would have saddened him. He clearly would applaud the availability of a range of financial instruments to support agricultural and rural development as well as the large number of agribusinesses and co-operatives willing to support developing agriculture. The inability to integrate all these positive structures into viable agricultural and rural development programmes and projects would have shocked him. A coherent approach to design policy and implement programmes and projects are urgently required. Projects can indeed still be the “cutting edge” of development (Gittinger, 1982). We, however, require a system of accountable “implementing agencies” to manage the required actions. This capacity is currently missing.

In the context of our times the agricultural economist must find his and her tasks and inspiration in the development of our rural areas, both commercial and developing agriculture. Agricultural development is also not only confined to farming but also to study and manage the agribusiness chain and to share in the added value generated.

Our focus should furthermore not only be on local events and markets. The world is globalising, operating in a highly competitive but unequal global economic environment, this might have been strange to Prof Tomlinson. A regulated agriculture economy was part of his frame of reference. For us "think global, act local" is today's reality. The strength of the agricultural economic discipline is that it enables us to operate in this new, strange and exciting environment.

With all this in mind, the request: Will the real Prof Tomlinson now please step forward!

6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Prof Tomlinson retained his dignity and deserves our respect by standing firm on tested agricultural economic principles despite the historical context in which he had to make his contribution. He had his choices: he stood by his professional principles, possibly, even to his own detriment; but he kept his integrity. The best we as professionals can hope for is that the future will judge us in our historical context and also find that we fearlessly stood by our principles.

Within this context I accept this honour to deliver the Tomlinson lecture. However, I would advise the Agricultural Economic Association of South Africa to pause and seriously consider the symbolism of this particular event. I would not like to prescribe the future to them; I have made my peace about the importance and inspiration that I could find from the way Prof Tomlinson conducted his professional life – despite the “difficult neighbourhood” of the “old” South Africa.

Kollegas, dit was vir my 'n groot eer om deur u genomineer te word vir hierdie toekenning. Dit was ook vir my seersekerlik 'n pynlike eroaring om die dilemma wat dit meebring het te hanteer. U uitnodiging het my egter forseer om diep na ons land se situasie te kyk en my eie posisie ('n 50 jariger) daarin te beoordeel. Ons is inderdaad, soos pres Mbeki dit stel, twee nasies in een land. Die een arm; die ander ryk aan stoflike besittings. Ons deel ook 'n gesplete historiese erfenis, maar ons moet saam leef en vorentoe beur – ons het geen keuse meer nie - ook nie oor die loop van 'n AK47 nie, maar deur onderhandeling, wedersydse erkenning en samewerking soos die nuwe Suid-Afrika ontstaan het. Die landbou-ekoonoom van vandag, en ek sluit myself steeds daarby in, het 'n enorme taak in hierdie verband: om binne die sosio-politieke konteks studie te doen, aanbevelings te maak en take onverskrokke uit te voer, gerig deur die beginsels van die landbou-ekonomie.

Die professore het ook 'n gedugte taak in die verband: om studente te inspireer en hulle die beginsels van die landbou-ekonomie te leer en te laat respekteer. Dit is die ware erfenis van prof F.R. Tomlinson en ons eer hom daarvoor.

Baie dankie vir die moeite gedoen om vannaand hier te wees en hierdie gebeurtenis met my te deel. Behalwe vir my vriende en kollegas sê ek ook dankie aan my ouers, vrou en kinders. Hulle plaas ook my lewe en geringe bydrae in konteks. Dankie daarvoor.

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