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PBM - 36
Concrete Steps Toward
Territorial Apartheid

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SANLAM Building
Baker Avenue,
Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue,
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

I shall remember one of the most important men in South Africa most clearly as he appeared in a photograph. The picture showed a burly, short man of past-middle-age sitting at a desk. Stacked beside him was a pile of books, 16 of them, which towered a good three feet above desk level. In front of him, opened to the flyleaf, was a seventeenth book. He was bent over, his face set with concentration, as he wrote on the flyleaf with a fountain pen.

"I was writing an inscription to the Governor-General," he told me as I marveled at the dizzying height of the stacked volumes.

The man was Dr. Frederick R. Tomlinson,¹ the man to whom the Nationalist Government has entrusted the Augean task of drawing up a complete plan for developing the South African Native Reserves to a point where apartheid might prove feasible. The books represented four years of effort on the part of himself and his nine-man Commission, known to almost every South African as the Tomlinson Commission but officially referred to as the Commission on the Socio-Economic Development of the Native Territories.

The Commission's report has not been released to anyone--press, public or Members of Parliament. When it does appear, it is bound to cause a stir, all five, fat, closely printed volumes of it.²

The importance of the report is great. If apartheid is to work, a way must be found to develop the Native Reserves to the point where they can accommodate almost the entire South African Native population. Many well-informed South Africans, Afrikaner Nationalists included, believe that this is not possible. The Reserves, they say, are just not sufficient, in size or potential, to house, feed and employ eight and one-half million people. They say that the British Protectorates of Swaziland (PBM-27), Bechuanaland and Basutoland must be incorporated into the Union's Native areas in order to provide room.

Before I left South Africa I spent a day with Dr. Tomlinson in Pretoria. He and his Commission have offices in President Building, just across the street from President Kruger's old wood-and-iron home and next door to a large Dutch Reformed Church. He showed me the large, bulletin board-lined room where the Commission met and heard evidence; the long, narrow file room filled with testimony and facts and figures gathered by the Commission's 12 researchers; and his roomy office overlooking the Kruger Home and the Church.

We sat in the latter, and after Tomlinson had exhibited his photographs we talked of the Report. One of my first questions dealt with the adequacy of the Reserves. Did he think, I asked, that the Reserves were large enough to accommodate all South African Natives without incorporating the British Protectorates?

1. Professor of Agricultural Economics, University of Pretoria.
2. The 17-volume edition was mimeographed.

"When you read the report," he said, "you'll find it taken for granted that the Protectorates will eventually become part of the Union. We decided that since the Protectorates are economically and geographically part of the Union we must consider them as such in our calculations, even though it looks as though we'll be delayed in getting direct control of them. But we also found that the present reserves, though they contain only 14 per cent of the total land area, could support, with proper planning, just about the whole Native population. That's the principle we followed throughout the whole report."¹

This would seem, to most people, a slightly golden view of the situation in the Reserves. It certainly seemed so to me, just back from a few months' trip through Zululand and the Transkei, two of the largest and most fertile of the Reserves. Tomlinson bases his view on a study he has made of the statistics gathered by his Commission and its researchers over the past four years. These figures show, he says, that although the Native Reserves include only 14 per cent of South Africa, that 14 per cent comprises 25 per cent of the country's agricultural potential.

He points out, by way of proving his point, that the largest, unified Native Reserve is the Transkei which lies in the fertile, well-watered, warm-all-year-round belt between East London and Durban along the Indian Ocean. He quotes figures to prove that Zululand, north of Durban, could produce enough sugar to allow South Africa to compete on the international sugar market. He does have to gloss over the arid Reserves which border on Bechuanaland to the northwest, but points out that farmers on neighboring land are making a good living with sheep.

He does not attempt to justify the fact that approximately 71 per cent of the population of South Africa must live on 14 per cent of the country's land surface and be permitted to use 25 per cent of the agricultural potential; Tomlinson is a Nationalist, even though he received his Ph.D. at Cornell (and mentions it regularly) and is married to an American wife. He takes the reserve system for granted and takes his segregation seriously. When I asked if, at any time during their deliberation, the Commission members considered expanding the present size of the Reserves in order to provide a more equal distribution of land, he looked at me with appropriate scorn.

The Commission did not only set out to prove that the Reserves as they stand can provide living room for all South African Natives; it drew up a detailed plan for complete reorganization of the Reserves so that when the great day comes returning Africans will be able to provide food, lodging and employment for themselves along practical, organized lines. They may even make a little money, as Tomlinson sees it.

The first major reorganization he outlined was in agriculture. The time has come, he says, for Native farming to be brought up to date. He proposes a complete survey of all land in all the Reserves and a division of that land into economic farm units. These farm units will be given, leased or sold (under a system of controlled freehold title) to farmers of proven merit. They will be made to plant crops suitable to their particular agricultural area; for instance, farmers living in a sugar cane area will grow sugar cane, those who occupy farms in a timber area will grow timber and those whose land is suited for livestock will raise livestock.

Each farm will be of such size and fertility that the farmer living thereon should be able, if he farms the land properly, to provide himself with an annual income of £60 (\$168). Tomlinson said that if a Native plants a cash crop and makes

1. Italics mine.

more than ~~7~~60 each year, he soon leaves the land and goes somewhere to spend all that money, losing a year of agricultural productivity and harming the country.

"At the other end of the scale, we can't have any more of this cattle, goats and a few mealies kind of farming. If a farmer can't see beyond his own table, he doesn't deserve to be a farmer," Tomlinson emphasized.

To anyone with the slightest knowledge of Native agriculture, this sort of talk is revolutionary. I asked Tomlinson if he realized the number of traditions and shibboleths he was violating and he said he did. Tomlinson is set on doing away with the African's traditional belief in cattle as wealth; the libola (bride-price, usually paid in cattle) system; wasteful, unscientific subsistence farming; communal ownership of land by the tribe; and the authority of the chiefs to allocate land to members of the tribe. He says flatly that the Natives cannot continue to ruin the Reserves without ruining the country as a whole. If apartheid is to work, Natives must be able to feed themselves--something they cannot do by today's farming methods.

In the southern Transkei, there are already farms of an economic size being run by Natives who own the land in freehold. Tomlinson inspected these in the course of his investigations, and was horrified. "Those farmers have taken a piece of land that should provide a living for one man and have divided it up among their brothers, cousins, uncles and what have you until the farms are cut into such little bits and pieces that it is producing nothing. We can't afford to let that go on. We'll have to limit occupancy of a farm to the farmer, his immediate family and his labor. He may leave it to his son, but he can't be permitted to split it up--that way lies ruin."

I asked Tomlinson what was in store for the hundreds of thousands of Africans who now live on small plots of ground growing just enough to feed themselves and leaving from time to time to go to Johannesburg or Durban to earn a bit of cash for taxes, small luxuries and the rising cost of being an unproductive plowholder.

Tomlinson answered without thinking twice. "We'll put them in the cities." Here was another major point in the Commission's findings. He went on to say that it was "foolish to consider every Native a farmer." He proposed to establish cities in the Reserves where Africans who did not qualify as farmers could live on small urban plots with perhaps a small vegetable garden ("no goats, though"). These cities will be places where Natives will be able to run and work in their own secondary and tertiary industries; where they will be able to elect their own mayor, city councillors and district council representatives; and where they can attend cinemas without offending the sensibilities of white South Africans.

Tomlinson sees fit to force the pace of westernization of South Africa's Native population. He told me very emphatically that "tribalism must go." He stressed the fact that the Natives have been living for generations under a system of decadent peasant farming which has sapped the moral strength of Natives as well as the agricultural strength of the country.

It is a flat negative to economic integration--the United Party policy based on the belief that Native labor is a permanent part of the South African economy. Apartheid will work, Tomlinson says, but it must bring radical change to traditional African life. He is confident that he will be able to find the necessary number

of able farmers to run his economic farm units. He is confident that he will be able to keep unauthorized farmers off the farm land and either in the new cities-in-the-reserves or in the European cities as migratory labor. He is sure that European industrialists will be interested in moving to the Reserves because of the presence of labor and the presence of water, echoing Otto Schwellnus (FBM-25, Page 3).

Tomlinson's plan has the merit of improving farming methods and stopping waste by means of complete reorganization. I doubt, however that he will be able to set it in motion as easily as he seems to think. Perhaps in Swaziland (FBM-27) he could find the sort of cooperation he will require. But in Zululand, for example, he is bound to find strong resistance and, what's worse, indifference. It will be hard to convince a Zulu or Xosa farmer that it is in his own interests to give up his land and move to a city.

Goulab Gool felt (in FBM-33), and I am inclined to agree, that land comes first to all rural Africans and to many urban ones. It will be a deep shock to the African farmer to find himself arbitrarily removed from his land and put into a city where he will not even be allowed to keep a couple of goats or a cow. And there is bound to be a strong reaction to the emasculation of the power of chiefs over land that belongs to the tribe as a whole. Agitators should find a more fertile field in the reorganized reserves than in the black spots of Johannesburg (FBM-17 & 18).

Tomlinson realizes clearly that he needs the cooperation of the African population. On July 9, 1954, he delivered an address at the graduation ceremony for non-Europeans receiving degrees from the University of South Africa. Said he:

"When the Bantu of South Africa reached a stage in their population growth where they had either to 'diversify or die,' in other words develop a diversified economic system or accept an even lower standard of living than they had, alongside of them grew up a vigorous European economy. Instead of developing their own diversified economic system the Bantu merely flowed over into the European economy--in fact they followed the road of least resistance. This of course suited both Europeans and Bantu. But this process has caused many a headache. I am touching on one aspect of the headache, namely the imprint the historical process in South Africa has left on the Bantu areas.

"The Bantu areas, through various causes, have undergone a process of terrific deterioration. This imposes an increasing pressure and drain on the rest of the South African economy. Although the Bantu areas comprise only about 13 per cent to 14 per cent of the total area of the country, the inherent potential is far higher than the surface percentage indicates. No country can afford to let such a large percentage of its inherent potential lie dormant and far less can a country afford to let such potential deteriorate. Apart from any social or other reason, the South African economy as such requires the full development of the potential of the Bantu areas. Under their present system of utilization they are sadly overpopulated, but it does not take much imagination to realize also that they are underpopulated in terms of their actual potential.

"And herein lies your great opportunity when it comes. If what I foresee is correct, then the Bantu of South Africa will be spared many centuries of slogging which the European has gone through to reach the present economic pattern of the western world. With the help and guidance of the European and his technology you may be spared several centuries in reaching that aim. But don't think you can reach it by sitting and looking on. Success will largely

depend on the Bantu themselves.

"In regard to the development of the Bantu areas the question has often been put to me, namely, 'can the Bantu take to development, will they be able to deliver the technicians who can take over at a later stage?' My own opinion is that they can and that they will. I have faith in the potential of the Bantu."¹

Tomlinson could not give me a copy of his report. It still must be translated from Afrikaans and has not yet gone to the Government printer. I have not been able to compare, therefore, his statements with what appears in the official Report. From the way he talked, however, I gather that what I've reported above are the most important points in the 17 volumes. They deserve to be. They are bound to cause a storm of controversy from Beit Bridge to Cape Agulhas.

They are not, strictly speaking, a new approach to the problem of the Reserves. Almost every student of African Affairs has advocated some sort of reform in Native agriculture--and cities in the Reserves built around secondary industry have been suggested time and again.

Tomlinson, however, has gone beyond the stage of conjecture and radical guessing. His commission is an official body, appointed by the Nationalist Government to draw up a plan that presumably will be put into effect. I gathered from a few statements he made that Dr. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, has been told of the Commission's findings and has commented favorably. It would seem that South Africa has come to the end of an era. The end of the day-to-day, easy tribal life is in sight. Africans will be forced to make a tremendous adjustment to fit in with the changes proposed by Tomlinson.

It remains to be seen how much of the Tomlinson Commission's report is put into practice and how much is destined to become a sort of Nationalist Bible--to be read from, preached from and quoted, but seldom applied in everyday life.

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin

1. Bantu, An Informal Publication of the Department of Native Affairs; No. 6, September, 1954; Compiled by the Information Service, P.O. Box 384, Pretoria.