

## When I First Met Gordon

by

Mark Crain

Nothing in the first 25 years of my life prepared me for Gordon Tullock. I certainly knew Professor Tullock by reputation. Two of my professors in graduate school, Bob Tollison and Jim Miller, were on the Texas A&M faculty at the time, and they were full of Tullock tales from their own graduate school days at the University of Virginia. And by the end of graduate school — even if you don't learn anything else — you certainly figure-out that academics are generally a strange lot. But, *still* I was not prepared for Tullock.

I finally met Professor Tullock in 1976 during my job interview with VPI at the Southern Economic Association Meetings. We met again when I was invited to Blacksburg to give my job market seminar.

He made me really nervous.

Shortly after that Blacksburg seminar trip, Wilson Schmidt (the late economics department chairman at VPI) made me a job offer, and I accepted after tense negotiations over salary. (As I recall, Wil offered me \$15,000 and I demanded \$15,500!) But before I actually had a signed job contract from VPI in hand, I got a phone call one day.

“This is Gordon Tullock. Crain, you still want a job here, **don't you?**”

Naturally I said, “yes.”

Tullock: “Then you have to agree to be a discussant on a panel I'm organizing at the Public Choice Society Meetings in Roanoke. It's a special

panel of Japanese professors doing mathematical models of institutions in Japan.”

Crain: “But I’m not really a mathematical economist, and I don’t know anything about Japan.”

Tullock: “*Do you still want a job here or not?*” (He then hung up.)

I frantically started rummaging through my desk looking for Wil’s phone number to call him to see if this was on the level. But before I could find it, the phone rang again. It was Tullock:

“And, Crain, don’t say anything that will upset these professors! We’re trying to encourage the development of the Japanese Public Choice Society, and you better not upset these professors if you want a job here!”

(He again hung up without waiting for my reply.)

Now think about that. **Tullock** telling someone to be *nice* at a seminar! Here’s a man who’s never been nice at a single seminar in his life.

Sometimes I start to think that Tullock is mellowing out a bit. But as recently as a year ago, Tullock was in the audience at a conference and the speaker was introducing his paper with the usual statement about his co-author (who was not present). We’ve all heard the line many times: “Any mistakes or errors in this paper are the responsibility of my co-author.” Not missing a beat, Tullock shouted from the audience: “Then your co-author must have written the whole paper!”

The speaker’s knees just buckled.

Of course, I'm not the only new professor that Dr. Tullock has put on edge. In Blacksburg, we regularly had parties and receptions following seminars at the Center, which was housed in a mansion formerly used by the university's presidents. And in those days Betty tended to serve wine and beer pretty freely at these receptions. Following one of these events, I recall an exasperated faculty member having a heated exchange with Professor Tullock. He went to Tullock's office, picked up a chair, and smashed it into his fireplace (yes, Tullock had a working fireplace in his Blacksburg office). I watched with interest the next day to see Tullock's reaction. As far as I could tell, there **was** no reaction; he simply lit up the fire, burned the chair, and went on about his day.

#### Memorable Tullock Moments:

- Gordon Tullock has a policy about giving away "free copies" of his books. They are "free" as long as you can answer a question about the book after one week. If you can't answer his question, you have to fork over the full price. As far as I know, Tullock has **never** given away a free copy of one of his books.
- (A Tullock-style compliment.) At a conference in Atlanta, Professor Tullock ran into a former secretary that had worked for him quite a few years. He had not seen her for some time, and his opening comment: "Gee, you're not nearly as fat as you used to be."
- At a Christmas party in 1981 in Blacksburg, David Laband and I were playing guitars, and singing Christmas carols with Ann and Jim Buchanan and

Gordon. To our astonishment, Gordon knew all the words to the “12 Days of Christmas.” So, if you ever need to know how many “lords-are-a-leaping,” just call Tullock.

In a way that only he can, Gordon challenged me, encouraged me, and helped me a lot by publishing many of my early papers in *Public Choice*. And, yes, Gordon comforted me at a time when I went through a personal crisis in those early Blacksburg years. It has been my good fortune to be his colleague in the Public Choice Center for 26 years.

Thank you, Gordon, and Happy Birthday.