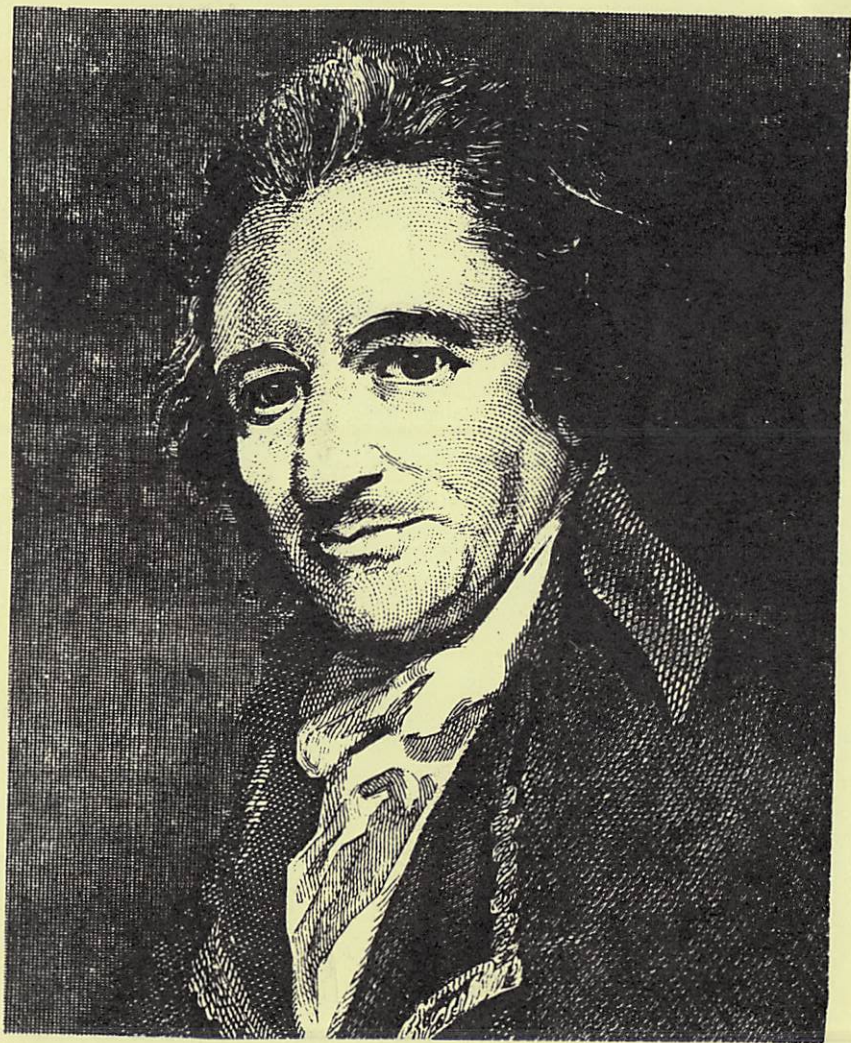


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SOME COMMENTS ON PAINE AND HIS TIMES

(Arising out of the last
TPS Bulletin, Summer 1977)

Audrey Williamson

AS ONE OF Paine's biographers who did point out not only the dangers of the Excise service through public dislike and evasion of the duties (in particular the tea duties), and also the importance of Paine's continued association with George Lewis Scott in showing his dismissal was not considered as on serious grounds, I welcome George Hindmarch's article and most valuable further discoveries. They support my own theory, based also upon research into the Lewes parish records and the New Shoreham by-election of 1770, that Paine's political and sociological attitudes were already well-formed before he went to America. The revelation of the widespread and semi-official nature of his attempts at Excise reform reinforces this. The evidence is partly circumstantial, but I am sure Mr. Hindmarch is right in his general thesis.

I would disagree with him to some extent on the nature of the English so-called "mob" riots of the 18th. century. Hogarth is not a reliable reflector, for his was, like Dr. Johnson's, a highly conservative and pro-establishment political point of view, as his savage anti-Wilkes cartoons demonstrate. Paine would have got a far fairer view of the North Briton controversy from the local Lewes journal, and must have been personally associated with Wilkes' lawyer, Sergeant Glynn, in the New Shoreham election. It is even possible he met Wilkes when Wilkes was received with enthusiasm in Lewes on his tour the same year. More research, I believe, is still possible here into Paine's English life generally.

As for the Gordon Riots of 1780, the exhaustive researches of Professor George Rude (Paris and London in the 18th. Century: Studies in Popular Protest) have demonstrated clearly that these were not only anti-Catholic but also political. No lives were taken by the rioters, and some of the houses burnt were those of politically-disliked non-Catholics such as Lord Mansfield. The burning of Newgate was at least partly to release political prisoners. Dickens' description in Barnaby Rudge of the "sober workmen" drawn into the riots was therefore a true one; and Wilkes, as a magistrate, in helping to put them down lost the support of a number of City aldermen who were politically involved.

One reason for anti-Catholic feeling was the proposed Catholic Relief Bill, in granting civil rights, would make Catholics eligible for the army, thus helping to prolong the now unpopular American War. There was also the usual resentment against poor Irish emigrants undercutting wages.

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James Betka in his review of Eric Foner's book, Tom Paine and Revolutionary America, is equally wrong in suggesting Hogarth's notorious Gin Lane illustrates the life of London's 'Everyman.' The dregs of the poor, especially as depicted by the cartoonist, are never representative of the main body even of a working class, and the weavers, tailors and other artisans who formed committees throughout the 18th century were, like Paine's Excise petitions, part of incipient trade unionism, and their protest not always as riotous as the government liked to present.

There is still much that might be learned about influences on Paine while in London as well as Lewes, but Professor Betka's theory that Paine was largely repeating (or indeed had read) the many sources among political writers he mentions seems to me untenable, and certainly unproved. He denied reading even Locke, and his own style in general is very different from that of the North Briton, whose scurrilous tone he probably did know well. Basically, although he makes mistakes on the English radical movement (naming Major Cartwright as the most "revolutionary" of its exponents and not seeming aware of the far more radical Dr. John Jebb), and overstates the case of Paine's artisan connections as opposed to his middle class ones, I believe Professor Foner is right that Paine did forge a literary style direct enough to reach the people, both American and English, in a way his political theorist or satirist predecessors had never done, some cartoonists excepted. The proof is not only the widespread sale and influence of Common Sense, but the way Rights of Man, far more than the works of any other 18th century writer, penetrated the London revolutionary societies, including the working-class London Corresponding Society, and the later Chartist movement.

The point is Paine was a born writer, with the clarity of expression and picturesque grasp of imagery missing from most writers of political and economic theory, and I suspect Professor Betka's own prose and economic analyses would have been largely unintelligible to him.

Of course it is true that any writer, in particular a political writer, assimilates and reflects the ideas current in his time; and the influence of those in the 18th century, as I have often pointed out, reached right back to the Levellers and English deists, as well as the French philosophes. Paine's originality in presenting and developing these ideas, with practical suggestions as to their implementation, and imaginative use of language, still remain.

It is a pity if Professor Betka's review of some of Foner's theories prevents Paineites from reading Foner's book, for it does, for the English reader, present many little-known facts about Paine's Philadelphia associates and environment that could not but have had some influence on his attitude and American writings. The references to Paine, as Professor Betka points

out, hardly justify his prominent position in the book's title, but Erik Foner has presented an interesting, well-researched social background picture which cannot be ignored in Paine's development, any more than his English backgrounds can be ignored.

Professor Betka himself makes an often-repeated but quite unprovable assumption when he says only Paine's "English enemies" called him "Tom." Late in the 19th century, a British socialist workman objected to the diminutive as deliberately downgrading Paine's status as man and writer, and thus seems to have started this myth; but there is evidence at least some friends in his own time used "Tom" affectionately, and indeed it is inconceivable that anyone christened Thomas, at any period in this country, could avoid this.

As my own book on the Pre-Raphaelites, reviewed in the same issue of the Bulletin, points out, although Paine's works seem to have by-passed later middle class socialist writers such as Ruskin and Carlyle, and William Morris showed no particular awareness of him, some knowledge of Paine's works probably reached Morris in the end, through old Chartists who attended his lectures at working class meetings, and through Walter Crane, his Kelmscott Press assistant. Crane had been an apprentice of the Chartist engraver, W.J. Linton, who in 1842 wrote a brief life of Paine.

I cannot agree with J.A. Hadwick that Morris was essentially a "middle-class" socialist: his Marxist dedication was total and he associated with working-class socialists on their own level, in a way that divided him from the Fabians and other intellectuals in the rising Labour movement. Dr. E.P. Thompson and Morris' latest Marxist biographer, Jack Lindsay, as well as associates of Morris at the time, make this quite clear.

I hope, too, Miss Hadwick in her generous review of my book does not really intend to suggest that I maintain the Pre-Raphaelite mid-Victorian revolt was the first in the world of art. Both my book on Paine and this new one, Artists and Writers in Revolt, mention Blake's radical rebellion. He was, of course, a major influence on the Pre-Raphaelites, who did much to revive his reputation, as they also revived that of Keats.

Finally, Gordon Hoile is wrong to perpetuate the legend that Paine "fled" from England in September, 1792, and was thereafter offered the Calais deputyship in the new French Convention. In fact, as Rickman's biography and French evidence make clear, Paine was offered four deputyships, of which he chose Calais, and the French government representative Audibert came over to England to accompany him. There is no indication at all that these offers were made to help Paine avoid the December trial; in fact the French districts also voted deputyships to Dr. Joseph Priestley and other known foreign sympathisers with the Revolution. It does appear the English police agents got wind of Paine's intended departure and naturally tried to stop him; they turned up at Rickman's house after he had gone.

As I remarked in my biography, Paine, confronted with the French offers, made a sensible choice in accepting in all the circumstances. There is no evidence at all that he would otherwise have attempted to avoid the trial; and indeed later he expressed doubts about the wisdom of his decision, for it did ultimately affect his reputation in England.

With regard to Paine's imprisonment in the Luxembourg, this was not as a direct result of his voting (with many others) against the execution of Louis XVI but because after the outbreak of war with England all British subjects were incarcerated as enemy aliens (Mary Wollstonecraft's American lover registered her at the American Embassy as his wife so that she could avoid this). Paine then and later based his appeal on the strong protest that he was no longer a British but an American subject: a fact denied by the then royalist American representative in Paris, Paine's enemy Gouverneur Morris. When James Monroe succeeded Morris Paine's release was soon obtained; but later in America he was once infamously denied the right to vote because he was not, it was claimed, an American citizen!

It is necessary to make this clear because the English claim that Paine was a "traitor" had no substance in Paine's own mind. He always, after emigration in 1774, looked on himself as an American citizen. Once the War of Independence was ended no other English emigrant who had fought in the War, to my knowledge, was accused of being a "traitor" to his country of origin. But Paine was a dangerous political writer and the "traitor" myth is maintained in certain Establishment historical circles to this day, although the official accusation even at his trial was merely of "seditious libel" (i.e. a censorship matter).

Obituary

LEN EBURY

ALL THOSE WHO met or heard Len Ebury speak will be sorry to hear that he died in his sleep on December 19, 1977, a few days before his 80th. birthday.

He was the last of the great Freethought open-air speakers, who in earlier days collected audiences of well over a thousand people. Len spoke in public for the Freethought cause for some 54 years.

Len was a Yorkshireman from Heckmondwike, and was very proud of the fact. His father was a true old-time socialist, and was the first candidate for Socialism in his town. He failed to get elected and because he put himself up for election to the local council lost his job, and was discriminated against for the rest of his life. Len's mother was one of the original suffragettes.

Len Ebury first came to London in 1912, and as we know there were many things to disclaim against at that time. He joined the army in the first World War, was wounded, and in 1918 invalided out, being refused a pension. He frequently mentioned on the platform that during the war he saw many friends of strong religious convictions killed by his side, and he said that if there was a god he should have been killed instead.

I shall always remember him as a public speaker well known all over London, especially in Hyde Park, Hampstead and Tower Hill, and he was speaking the day before he died. He could manage all hecklers, even those who simply wanted to bait the speaker. He was respected for his sincerity even by those who strongly disagreed with his views, and when ill many of them visited him in hospital.

Len frequently mentioned Thomas Paine, holding him up as one of the forerunners of the great Atheist thinkers of the Victorian and Edwardian eras.

All who knew Len will miss him, and I feel that we shall never see his like again.

GEORGE MILLER.

Obituary

EDMUND TAYLOR

EDMUND "TED" TAYLOR, who died aged 83 on August 9th., 1977, after a short illness, was a Founder Member of the TPS. Although never active in the society apart from giving a week of his time to act as guide when the society held an exhibition at Nottingham's Co-operative Education Centre some years ago, Ted was a strong supporter of our work and was one of the rare number of individuals you meet who could accurately quote Paine on all manner of subjects.

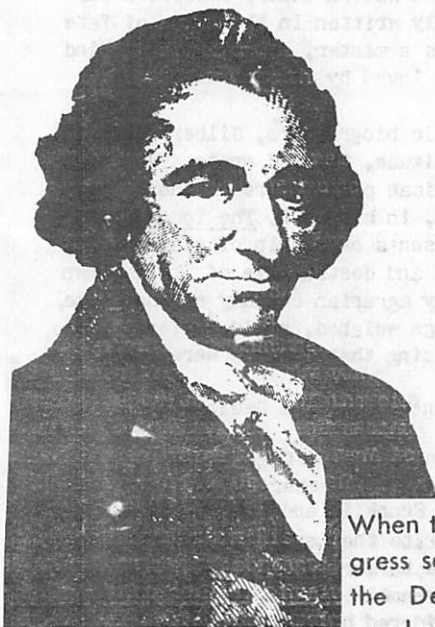
Ted Taylor was born in Radford, Nottingham, where his father ran a green-grocers business. His family were Roman Catholic and Ted was destined, so his parents thought, to become a priest. He entered a Jesuit seminary near Reading when he was 18, but emerged a couple of years later as a dedicated atheist, which he remained for the rest of his life. Ted became active in Labour and Co-operative affairs at an early age, and this formed the substance of his primary interest; however, he also took up rambling, natural history, geology, poetry, swimming, debating, and, according to his son, "parson baiting." Ted visited both Russia (where he met Stalin) and the United States, as guest of the family of John Dewey, where he did not meet the current President.

Ted Taylor was a speaker rather than a writer, although he maintained a massive correspondence. His only published work I can trace is a forward to the booklet which the late Tom Mosley (another TPS member) wrote about the Nottingham Cosmopolitan Debating Society, an organisation which Ted attended regularly for many, many years, and of which he eventually became the Chairman.

Ted married twice and is survived by two daughters and a son, his second wife having died five months before he did.

Was the Declaration ghost-written?

By Carl Shapiro



Paine



Jefferson

When the Continental Congress sat down to consider the Declaration of Independence, who was its author? History says Thomas Jefferson, but one researcher presents evidence that suggests it could have been Tom Paine.

IS IT REASONABLE to believe that the man wrote "all men are created equal" also owned several hundred slaves and considered blacks "inferior to whites in the endowment of mind and body?"

The first phrase, of course, is from the Declaration of Independence, the second is from the writings of Thomas Jefferson, presumed author of the Declaration.

That Jefferson owned slaves (so did Washington) does not diminish his stature as one of the great libertarian fathers of the republic. A powerful advocate of the separation of church and state, Jefferson framed the Statute of Virginia for Religious Freedom, an achievement guided by his argument that "our civil rights have no dependence on our religious opinions, more than our opinions in physics or geometry." To Jefferson, "the care of every man's soul belongs to himself." He founded the University of Virginia, the first truly non-sectarian college in America. A gifted architect, he also designed the buildings.

Despite his social position as a wealthy plantation owner, Jefferson persistently held that "nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate that these people (slaves) are to be free. As a master, Jefferson was kind to a fault, and the evidence suggests he was loved by his slaves.

Yet even one of Jefferson's most sympathetic biographers, Gilbert Chinard, was distressed by the Virginian's racial attitude. Chinard wrote, "He was a Puritan in so far as he felt that the American people were a 'chosen people,' and Anglo-Saxon." And Claude G. Bowers, in his book, The Young Jefferson, provided a practical reason for Jefferson's ownership of slaves by contending that it "would have been Quixotic and destructive of his own economic life." Considering America's largely agrarian economy at that time, Bowers was probably right. But with all things weighed, could Jefferson still have actually written a document proclaiming that all men were equal?

There is strong evidence to suggest he didn't write the Declaration.

On June 10, 1776, Jefferson was made chairman of a committee chosen by the Continental Congress to draft the Declaration. Other members of the committee included John Adams, Roger Sherman, Benjamin Franklin and Robert Livingston. The five bickered over who should actually write the text, but the job was finally entrusted to Adams and Jefferson, the former for his fame as a lawyer, the latter for previously writing the preamble to the Virginia constitution. But neither Adams nor Jefferson considered himself capable of writing the document and both wished to shun the responsibility. Adams later recalled their dispute:

"The Committee met, discussed the subject, and then appointed Mr. Jefferson and me to make the draught; I suppose because we were the two highest on the list. The sub-Committee met; Jefferson

proposed to me to make the draught. I said I will not.

'You should do it,' said Jefferson.

'Oh, no.'

'Why will you not?', asked Jefferson.

'I will not.'

'Why?', insisted Jefferson.

'Reasons enough,' replied Adams.

'What can be your reasons?'

'Reason first, you are a Virginian and Virginia ought to appear at the head of this business.

Reason second, I am obnoxious, suspected and unpopular.'

Jefferson finally agreed to compose the manifesto, a job that would have taxed the facilities of even the most seasoned statesman, much less the sensibilities of a 33-year old congressman.

Aware that the slavery question was singularly the most volatile issue, Jefferson knew that some of the representatives of slave-holding states would veto any proposal to free the blacks. Nevertheless, the document had to be drafted.

During this crucial period Jefferson was in close touch with Thomas Paine. Earlier that year, Paine had written Common Sense, the stirring pamphlet that pressed for separation from Britain. In his 47 page treatise, Paine had not only directed that a "declaration for independence" be drawn up, but had urged Americans to set a day aside "for proclaiming the Charter." Brilliantly conceived, the pamphlet was unmatched in its persuasive power.

An outspoken enemy of slaver, Paine was also the first to publicly advocate emancipation of the Negro in his Essay of African Slavery in America, published in Philadelphia in March 1775. This work became so popular in such a short time, that only a month after its appearance, the first anti-slavery society was formed in Philadelphia.

Sharing similar ideals, Jefferson and Paine became intimate friends, an alliance that was culminate in 1791 with Jefferson's endorsement of Paine's herculean handbook of democracy, Rights of Man.

Three days after the committee was appointed, Jefferson submitted to Adams, then to Franklin, a rough draft of the Declaration. Corrections, says Bowers, were made "mostly in phrasing and in the choice of words." Finally, on June 28, the polished document was presented to Congress in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia, for approval. As was expected, objections from the southern delegates, particularly those from Georgia and South Carolina,

caused the deletion of the clause:

"He (George III) has waged cruel War against human Nature itself, violating its most Sacred Rights of Life and Liberty in the Persons of a distant People who never offended him, captivating and carrying Them into Slavery in another Hemisphere, or to incur miserable Death in their Transportation thither...He has prostituted his Negative (veto) for Suppressing every legislative Attempt to prohibit or to restrain an execrable Commerce, determined to keep open a Market where MEN Should be bought and Sold, and that this assemblage of Horrors might Want no Fact of distinguished Die."

Adams did all he could to defend the clause which could have finally put an end to the slave trade. Jefferson, too, was disappointed and partially blamed "our northern brethren...for though their people had few slaves themselves, yet they had been pretty considerable carriers of them to others."

Jefferson removed the clause and sent the edited copy to his fellow-delegate from Virginia, Richard Henry Lee, who had originally proposed to Congress that a declaration be drawn up. Lee replied:

"I thank you much for your favour and its enclosures by the post, and I sincerely wish, as well as for the honour of Congress, as for that of the States, that the Manuscript had not been mangled as it is."

Lee regretted that the Declaration had been "mangled" and Adams felt that "the purpose of the Declaration was to level all distinctions."

The "mangled Declaration was ratified on July 4.

Now despite his prudent opposition to slavery and the fact that the Declaration, as we know it, is in Jefferson's handwriting, there has been doubt that he actually wrote the original draft containing the slavery clause. Morally, Jefferson hated slavery; economically, he depended upon it. In view of the circumstances, could Jefferson have been so profoundly moved as to write a clause against slavery? And what of the whole structure of the Declaration? Its literary style? Phraseology? Are they characteristic of Jefferson?

Historian Julian P. Boyd was not convinced that Jefferson wrote, most importantly, the original draft of the Declaration. In his scholarly brochure, The Evolution of the Text, published by the Library of Congress in 1943, Boyd said "there is evidence in the Rough Draft itself, the significance of which apparently has been overlooked, pointing to the fact that the Rough Draft was copied by Jefferson from another and earlier document or documents." Yet Boyd gave no indication as to what "document or documents" Jefferson could have copied from.

Boyd may not have been aware that a more positive view was set forth in 1892. Biographer Dr. Moncure D. Conway, in his two volume, Life of Paine des-

cribed the events of June 1776: "At this time Paine saw much of Jefferson, and there can be little doubt that the anti-slavery clause struck out of the Declaration was written by Paine, or by someone who had Paine's anti-slavery essay before him."

Dr. Conway felt that the literary style and sentiments of the deleted slavery clause "are nearly the same" as these phrases from Paine's essay:

"That some desperate wretches should be willing to steal and enslave men by violence and murder for gain is rather lamentable than strange....these inoffensive people are brought into slavery, by stealing them, tempting Kings to sell subjects, which they can have no right to do, and hiring one tribe to war against another, in order to catch prisoners...Our traders in MEN, an unnatural commodity must know the wickedness of that SLAVE TRADE, if they attend to reasoning, or the dictates of their own hearts; and such as shun and stifle all these, wilfully sacrifice Conscience, and the character of integrity to that golden idol....to go to nations....purely to catch inoffensive people, like wild beasts, for slaves, is an height of outrage against Humanity and Justice...."

In support of Dr. Conway's theory, Joseph Lewis, late author and Secretary of the Thomas Paine Foundation, maintained that the use of the word "hath" in the Declaration was vital evidence indicating the handiwork of Paine. Lewis argued that the "old English word was not generally used by the people of the American colonies, with the exception of the Quakers." Paine was of Quaker origin.

Lewis pointed out that while the word was used only once in the Declaration, it nevertheless "may be the key which unlocks the secret to many of Thomas Jefferson's most important papers.... In his ordinary correspondence and his individual State documents, Jefferson does not use the word once, despite the fact that these voluminous writings aggregate more than three million words."

Yet, Lewis argues, "In Common Sense alone, a pamphlet of only fifty thousand words, Thomas Paine used the word 'hath' at least one hundred and twenty times."

The word "hath" appears in this phrase from the Declaration: ".....and accordingly all experience hath shewn..." (Lewis also noted that the word "shewn" as spelled with an "e" in the Declaration, was Paine's way of writing it. "The word is always spelled with an "e" in Jefferson's writing, and was the prevalent way of spelling the word in the colonies at that time.")

Prior to Common Sense, Paine also used the word "hath" in one of his provocative calls for independence. In this work, published in the Pennsylvania Journal in October, 1775, Paine intimated that the inevitable document of separation should also abolish slavery once and for all:

"I firmly believe that the Almighty, in compassion to mankind, will curtail the power of Britain. Ever since the discovery of America

she hath employed herself in the most horrid of all traffics, that of human flesh, without provocation, and in cold blood, ravaged the hapless shores of Africa. When I reflect on these, I hesitate not for a moment to believe that the Almighty will separate America from Britain. Call it Independency or what you will, if it is the cause of humanity it will go on."

And later, in Common Sense, Paine co-ordinated the contents of the Declaration:

"Were a manifesto to be published, and dispatched to foreign courts, setting forth the miseries we have endured, and the peaceful methods which we have ineffectually used for redress; declaring at the same time that not being able longer to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition of the British court, we had been driven to the necessity of breaking off all connection with her....such a memorial would produce more good effects to this continent than if a ship were freighted with petitions to Britain."

To say unequivocally that Thomas Paine wrote the original draft of the Declaration of Independence exceeds the limits of speculation. But one of the first questions a skeptic might ask would be why, if Paine wrote it, he never admitted authorship.

There are several plausible reasons.

First, he was not a member of the Continental Congress and therefore had no official authority.

Second, he was an Englishman. At the time of the Declaration, he had been in America only two years. Hence, he would have been open to suspicion. That is why Paine wrote Common Sense, published only five months before the Declaration, together with numerous prior works, he used pseudonyms.

Thirdly, he characteristically chose to remain silent on anything that could damage America's reputation, even to the sacrifice of his own literary pride. His loyalty to principle, rather than fame, was later expressed. "But as I have ever been dumb on everything which might touch national honour so I mean ever to continue so."

It is also relevant to mention that linked with Paine's impassioned pleas for independence was his clear vision and support for an American republic:

"The mere independence of America, were it to have been modeled after the corrupt system of the English government, would not have interested me with the unabated ardor it did. It was to bring forward and establish the representative system of government that was the leading principle with me in all my works during the progress of the revolution."

On the other hand, Adams and Jefferson, in all their years of association and correspondence, widely differed in ideas on government and avoided discussion of America's political destiny. In a letter to Jefferson, Adams recalled:

"You and I have never had a serious conversation together that I can recollect concerning the nature of government. The very transient hints that have passed between us have been jocular and superficial, without ever coming to any explanation."

With the evidence already presented, it is not inconceivable that Paine, with remarkable perception and clearheaded purpose, wrote the original draft of the Declaration of Independence. In view of his irrepressible denunciation of slavery, vigorous literary style and similarity of his anti-slavery essay to the deleted clause, the theory of his authorship is plausible. The spelling and use of the words "hath" and "shewn," peculiar to Paine throughout his writings, together with his close contact with Jefferson during the sultry months of 1776, further enhance that possibility.

But there is another piece of evidence, perhaps the most enigmatic of all, that adds more to the mystery. It is a puzzling sentence contained in one of Paine's last letters to Congress. The letter was written in 1808, one year before he died. Paine was impoverished and was desperately trying to obtain a small allowance:

"As to my political works, beginning with the pamphlet Common Sense, published in the beginning of January, 1776, which awakened America to a declaration of independence (as the president and vice-president both know), as they were works done from principle, I cannot dishonour that principle by asking any reward for them."

It is difficult to determine what Paine is bringing to mind. It sounds sarcastic when he says, "as the president and vice-president know" (Thomas Jefferson was president and George Clinton was vice-president). What is it that they know? That he (Paine) wrote the Declaration of Independence? Or that his political works inspired the manifesto to be written? We know of his perpetual silence "on everything which might touch national honour." Therefore, even in his most destitute state, Paine would never disclose secrets injurious to America's reputation.

But as mysterious as the circumstances are, another firebrand of the Revolution, Samuel Adams, was more convinced:

"There is as much evidence in favour of Thomas Paine's authorship of the Declaration of Independence as there is of any other man."

What do you think?

THE BACKGROUND TO RIGHTS OF MAN

Alfred Jenkins

THE INTELLECTUAL CONDITION of England at the time when Thomas Paine entered the world in 1737 and for many years afterwards is well described by Friedrich Engels: "The peasants at that time used to lead a quiet, peaceful life of honest piety harassed by few worries, but on the other hand inert, not united by common interests and lacking any education or any mental activity; they were still at a prehistoric stage of development. The situation in the towns was not very different. London alone was an important trade centre; Liverpool, Hull, Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds and Glasgow were hardly worth mentioning. Spinning and weaving, the main branches of industry, were practised for the most part in the country, or, at least, outside the towns, on their outskirts. Metal-working and pottery-making were still at the handicraft stage and thus what real developments could be expected in the towns? The unequalled simplicity of the franchise spared the townspeople all political cares; they were nominal Whigs or Tories but knew full well that in fact it made little difference, since they did not have the right to vote. The town dwellers consisted exclusively of petty merchants, shopkeepers and artisans and theirs was the familiar life of the small provincial town, quite inconceivable in the England of today. Mines were still only being exploited on a small scale; iron, copper and tin deposits were left more or less untouched and coal used only for domestic purposes. In short, England was then in a position, in which unfortunately the majority of the French, and in particular, the Germans still find themselves, in a position of antediluvian apathy with regard to anything of general or spiritual interest, in social infancy, when there is as yet no society, no life, no consciousness and no activity. This position is a de facto continuation of feudalism and medieval mental apathy, which will only be surmounted with the emergence of modern feudalism, the division of society into property owners and the propertyless."¹

This benighted condition did not, however, prevent the English from regarding their country as the centre of the earth. Oliver Goldsmith, who came to London from Ireland in 1756, was greatly impressed by this attitude of mind. In his Citizen of the World, published in 1762, he wrote: "The English seem as silent as the Japanese, yet vainer than the inhabitants of Siam."

¹ Pride seems the source not only of their national vices, but of their national virtues also. An Englishman is taught to love his king as his friend, but to acknowledge no other master than the laws, which himself has

contributed to enact. He despises those nations who, that one may be free, are all content to be slaves; who first lift a tyrant into terror and then shrink under his power, as if delegated from Heaven. Liberty is echoed in all their assemblies; and thousands might be found ready to offer up their lives for the sound, though perhaps not one of the number understand its meaning. The lowest mechanic, however, looks upon it as his duty to be a watchful guardian of his country's freedom, and often uses a language, that might seem haughty, even in the mouth of a great emperor who traces his ancestry to the Moon."

Goldsmith's "Citizen of the World," is an imaginary Chinese traveller, who is represented as writing home to a friend: "This universal passion for politics is gratified by daily gazettes, as with us in China. But, as incurs the emperor endeavours to instruct his people, in theirs, the people endeavours to instruct the administration. You must not, however, imagine that they who compile these papers have any actual knowledge of the politics, or the government, of a state: they only collect their materials from the oracle of some coffee-house, which oracle has himself gathered them, the night before, from a beau at a gaming-table, who has pillaged his knowledge from a great Man's porter, who has had his information from the great Man's gentleman, who has invented the whole story for his own amusement, the night preceding."

In the article which we have quoted, Engels writes: "It was while the industrial revolution was taking place that the democratic party came into being. In 1769 J. Horne Tooke founded the Society of the Bill of Rights, in which, for the first time since the republic, democratic principles were discussed again. As in France, so these democrats were men of purely philosophical education but they soon found that the upper and middle classes were against them and that it was only the working-class which lent their principles an ear." In actual fact, however, this did not take place immediately. Francis Place, who was in a very good position to know, wrote that: "At this time there was no political public, and the active friends of parliamentary reform consisted of noblemen, gentlemen, and a few tradesmen."

"Neither these societies nor the other political bodies at that period had any continuous existence; they met occasionally, talked over the concerns of the moment, ordered a tract to be printed or an advertisement to be inserted in the newspapers. Their proceedings were neither adapted for, nor were they addressed to, the working people, who, at that time, would not have attended to them."²

"The struggle with the North American colonies," wrote Karl Marx, "succeeded the Hanoverian dynasty at that time from the outbreak of an English Revolution, symptoms of which were alike perceptible in the cry of Wilkes and the letters of Junius."³ This may seem surprising in view of such statements as that of Lord Camden, who had resigned his office as Lord Chancellor on account of his opposition to the war: "I am grieved to hear that the landed

interest is almost altogether anti-American, though the common people hold the war in abhorrence and the merchants and tradesmen, for obvious reasons, are altogether against it.⁴ This, however, is probably an over-estimate of the political understanding of "the common people." Opposition from the merchants and manufacturers, especially those who had suffered from the prohibition of trade with North America, was certainly very strong. Edward Gibbon, then a Member of Parliament, wrote to his friend, J. Holroyd, afterwards Earl of Sheffield, on January 31st., 1775: "Hitherto we have been chiefly employed in reading papers and rejecting petitions. Petitions were brought from London, Bristol, Norwich, etc., framed by party and designed to delay. By the aid of some parliamentary quirks, they have all been referred to a separate inactive committee, which Burke calls a committee of oblivion, and are now considered as dead in law." In December 1777, a report was sent to Lord Sandwich, then at the head of the Admiralty, from one Thomas Rawson of Nottingham: "This town is without exception the most disloyal in the Kingdom, owing in great measure to the whole corporation (the present mayor excepted) being dissenters, and of so bitter a sort that they have done and continue to do all in their power to hinder the service by preventing as much as possible the enlistment of soldiers."⁵

In all these towns, however, "the common people" only signed the petitions against the American war when they were set in motion by those who were considered to be their social superiors. Nearly twenty years later, after a great deal had happened to widen their horizon, Charles James Fox in conversation with another politician: "made use of this (for him very) remarkable expression, that the husbandmen and labourers thought so little of public matters that he should as soon think of consulting sheep on the propriety or impropriety of Peace as the people who had care of them, or in general the lower order of peasantry. That in towns, from their ale-houses, clubs, etc., they turned their thoughts more to political subjects."⁶ William Cobbett tells us that his father, a small farmer and inn-keeper in Surrey, read the newspapers and defended the Americans. When Cobbett senior expressed these sentiments at Weyhill Fair, however, the astonished company gaped open-mouthed in wonder that a man in their position in life should express any political opinions at all. When all the government had really become unpopular it was rescued by the Gordon Riots, directed against the Roman Catholics. When they were over Edward Gibbon wrote to his step-mother: "The measures of Government have been reasonable and vigorous, and even Opposition has been forced to confess that the military power was applied and regulated with the utmost propriety. Our danger is at an end, but our disgrace will be lasting, and the month of June 1780 will ever be marked by a dark and diabolical fanaticism which I supposed to be extinct, but which actually subsists in Great Britain perhaps beyond any other country in Europe."

After the ending of the American war the majority of the British people sank back into their old somnolence. As Francis Place put it: Efforts to procure a reform in the House of Commons were made in many places. The

number of public meetings and of petitions to the House of Commons increased continually, when the coalition of Lord North and Charles James Fox, in the spring of 1783, caused an opinion to be generally entertained that no faith could be reposed in public men, and suspended all active proceedings in favour of parliamentary Reform; which lingered on, and were, at length, nearly extinguished." The conclusion of the war was followed by a great economic revival and many people were never before or afterwards so prosperous as they were in the years from 1783 to 1793. This is reflected in the scenes of country life painted by George Morland, somewhat sentimental but drawn from real life.

The first support for the French Revolution of 1789 came from the "middle classes," especially the Nonconformist manufacturers and the attitude of the working class varied from indifference to hostility. There was very little in the first part of Rights of Man to which a prosperous Nonconformist could object. Strutts, the Unitarian textile manufacturers of Belper in Derbyshire, distributed copies among their workers who read them when the mill was stopped through lack of water power and threw them into the water. When in 1791 the leading citizens of Birmingham held a dinner to celebrate the anniversary of the fall of the Bastille there was a violent riot, followed by similar demonstrations in other places directed in the first place against the Nonconformists. It was only the publication of the second part of Rights of Man, with its fifth chapter showing what could be done if there was no National Debt, which for the first time showed the advanced section of the working class that political reform could really turn to their benefit. The ideas were not really original, the criticism of the National Debt having already been made by Dr. Richard Price, but the novelty was in their exposition. For the first time they were expressed in language which working men could understand, by one who had himself been a working man.

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BOOKS



TESTAMENTS OF RADICALISM. MEMOIRS OF WORKING CLASS POLITICIANS, 1790-1885. Edited with an introduction by David Vincent. Europa Publications, £7.

DAVID VINCENT IN his introduction refers to the quite unprecedented circulation in the 1790s of Thomas Paine's Rights of Man. Its dangerous truths in explaining the corrupt nature of British government provoked a response from the political and religious establishment, that, when it could not denigrate and twist the activities of the radicals, threw a blanket of silence over them. Only in recent years is Paine emerging again into the sun.

After the turbulent 1790s, access to and the use of the means of publication (writes Vincent) became a central component of class struggle - a common thread in virtually every campaign was the hostility to the treatment the working class received from the contemporary press.

This book presents five autobiographies of working class politicians, spanning the period from the crisis over the American Colonies to the threshold of workers discovering Marxism. They told it like it was, and so the memoirs form invaluable correctives to bourgeois histories. Because their stories were feared by the ruling class, the authors have not yet become household names.

They are Thomas Hardy, Piccadilly shoemaker (not the author) and founder of the London Corresponding Society; James Watson, compositor, freethinker, Owenite and Chartist; Thomas Dunning, another shoemaker, trade unionist and Chartist from Nantwich; John James Bezer, Spitalfields Chartist; and Benjamin Wilson, whose career bridged half a century of political activity and co-operative work in Halifax.

Fascinating as they are in their varied styles and different periods and locales, that they deal with, the memoirs are only fragments of our history. They are especially useful, though, in understanding the roots, from which the labour movement developed. In addition to the events they recount, it is the flavour that the five authors give that helps us to understand the struggles of our political forefathers. The least imaginative of us is immediately put in their shoes.

In Hardy's autobiography we can understand the appropriateness of his heavy language: he writes of the intrepid martyrs of freedom, "that patriotic band who broke the ruffian arm of arbitrary power, and dyed the field and the scaffold with their pure and precious blood, for the liberties of their country." Hardy's home was raided at 6.30 one May morning in 1794, he was thrown into the Tower of London, and his wife died in pregnancy soon after; his treason trial lasted nine days, and "by the unanimous voice of as resp-

ectable a jury as ever was empannelled" he was found not guilty.

James Watson in the 1820s was imprisoned in Dorchester and Clerkenwell prisons for selling radical and freethought literature. He summarises his memoirs as having one object alone - "to show my fellow workmen that the humblest amongst them may render effectual aid to the cause of progress, if he brings to the task honest determination and unfaltering perseverance."

Thomas Dunning includes an account of organising the defence of two men arrested for Trades Union activity. One was quite illiterate and the other "a light minded, dancing, public house man" - a brace, as Dunning tells us, of very awkward clients. Like thousands after them, Dunning and the comrades rally round; the case was no landmark in trade union history, but the style of operating - reading as an exciting adventure, yet with high and serious stakes - is almost classical in showing that the pioneers knew how to organise.

In racey style, J.J. Bezer describes his youth and the grinding poverty he suffered in London. At Clerkenwell Green he first learns of Chartism, and hurray in a land of plenty, for the first time seriously enquires "WHY, WHY - a dangerous question...is'nt (sic) it, for a poor man to ask." There Bezer's story abruptly ends, since the Christian Socialist, which was serialising it, ceased publishing in December 1851.

Benjamin Wilson's The Struggles of an Old Chartist is dry by comparison. Published in Halifax in 1887 it recounts many events of Chartism from the Peterloo massacre of 1819 to the general election of 1886.

Testaments of Radicalism includes a few illustrations and is competently indexed.

Christopher Brunel.