

Introduction

Some days in our lives are so remarkable that they are never forgotten. They recall deep-felt experiences that made lasting imprints on our minds. Experiences of courage, of hope, sometimes mingled with despair, carve paths of strength in us under no matter what personal circumstance, but particularly when recollected in relation to – or perhaps felt in confrontation with – courageous people whose deeds are unforgettable, no matter how far in time their lives run back.

Thomas Paine, brilliant activator and humble participant in the process of pointing out the reality of human brotherhood and true democracy, was a man whose heroic, yet often misunderstood life brings effects of emotional recognition that imprint infinitely on the minds of generations of people. The precariousness of human destiny and the conscious awareness of severe limitations to human progress were central to forcefully expressing his vision at stirring times of extreme political uncertainty in France, Britain, and America. Such uncertainty about the human condition is so much alive today where only scenario and circumstance have changed.

Intellectual and philosophical developments in the Age of Enlightenment, for which paradigmatic philosopher Immanuel Kant is seen as the patriarch, led to critical questioning of traditional institutions, customs, and morals endeavouring to supplant the arbitrary authority of aristocracy and established churches. For Thomas Paine *reason* became not only the primary source of and basis for authority, where his *Common Sense* prepared minds for independence, but also the pillar for his moral and religious life. His *The Age of Reason*, outlining his personal creed in the first pages, was published in spite of the backlash he knew would ensue. His thinking and deist arguments find intellectual roots in the traditions of David Hume, Spinoza, and Voltaire.

In publishing this book we offer the memory and heritage of deep-felt experiences from a group of people who, each in his own way, wished to memorialize and exemplify Thomas Paine's authentic and inspired life, lived optimistically in spite of all the burdensome hardships he had encountered from contemporaries whose peaceful and meaningful future he only wished to guarantee and sustain. His unquestionable spirit of freedom, fed by the social and political primacy of reason, and the belief

that human beings could better themselves by using their intelligence and moral righteousness, has proved to be irresistible and continues to stir our imagination and action.

This book not only presents scientific analysis of Thomas Paine's life and work but also highlights personal memories from those influenced by his extraordinary character and frame of mind. Delegates came to the Colloquium by invitation of United Teilhard Trust, my brainchild, assisted by the unforgettable perseverance of Florence Stapleton, to United Nations, New York on 10 December 1987, the day on which the 40th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated. Observations from their own lives presented at the occasion as well as historical and academic work await your attention in the pages that follow.

Michael Foot introduced a Thomas Paine working behind the screens when he reminded delegates that Ronald Reagan and Mikhail Gorbachev had signed a historic nuclear missiles control agreement in Washington, DC two days before this Colloquium. Gorbachev's book on *Perestrojka* – just out and read on his flight to New York – was worth reading he argued, adding that Thomas Paine had anticipated and forecast the whole democratic revolution of the 19th and 20th centuries. The new openness in the former Soviet Union, the Polish elections, and China's movement towards democracy had yet to come two years after Michael Foot spoke. He said that 'no other figure in history – and not merely its virtue – could ever have believed in the power of freedom with Paine's single-minded intensity' and argued that against the forces of censorship and suppression Thomas Paine knew he possessed the implements which could work the miracle: the power of free speech, free writing, and free thought that remain irresistible.

Ian Dyck spoke about Paine as one of the most enlightened cosmopolitans of his day but argues that the idea of world citizenship was not his exclusive monopoly. Radical aspiration to embrace international alliance and world unity had already made its presence in circles at London and Birmingham, he said. A prisoner of Robespierre, erstwhile honorary citizen Thomas Paine was jailed in France until James Monroe secured his release. Ian Dyck mentioned that the global citizen and patriot seemed willing to have 'America or France serve as ideological sponsors for the new world union' but both countries left him reviled and ignored to live out his final years.

David Braff measured Thomas Paine's impact on the American and French Revolutions and explored his defense of the rights of the individual and his trust in the legacy of reason. Braff believes Paine could influence and change the 'course of entire nations to accommodate the needs of the living.' Thomas Paine is described by him as a man of reason who provided the vocabulary and frame of reference for modern political thought. But he also touched upon the personally concerned Paine, who was lending his talents to the cause of individuals in need of his support. Forgotten and vilified founding father Thomas Paine owned a unique personality and possessed the rarest gifts a human being may receive – an original mind.

Eric Foner briefly analyzed *Common Sense* and found that several of the ideas expressed therein were already alive in political circles but never before so forcefully, clearly, and directly expressed as by Thomas Paine. He explained how artisan classes in London and Philadelphia, who were just emerging into political consciousnesses, found deep connectivity with Paine's republican ideology. In accepting progressive perfectibility of humanity, Thomas Paine lifted the concerns of humankind from the parochial to a cosmopolitan level according to Foner. Three key characteristics were responsible for Paine's far-reaching success: his impatience with a past that was characterized by hereditary privilege and patronage politics, acrimonious contempt for institutions that fail to stand the test of reason, and unshakable belief that humans could responsibly shape their own destiny.

Charles Francisco commented on the uniqueness of Thomas Paine as a fearless man who never forgot his roots. He mentioned Paine's uncompromising zeal to edify a new worldview, even if it would cause him to fall from hero to outcast in the face of approaching death. An artist and actor, Francisco recited key passages from many of Thomas Paine's works, interwoven with personal comments, recalling the years after Paine's arrival in the New World until his burial 35 years later. He memorializes the subsequent robbing and transport of his remains in a fine wooden chest, later sold as a piece of furniture and lost forever since.

Bernard Vincent described the road from social to international peace where he found Paine's utopian proposals realistic and clearly ahead of his time. Paine saw world peace as a reward for a 'long, patient and difficult struggle' and developed pacifying ideas to nations through the

liberation of trade for maritime commerce. Paine's presentation of the alliance of nations was considered his most original proposal. Bernard Vincent added that Paine had Paul I, Emperor of Russia, in mind as the first President of an Association of Nations where each member, irrespective of its size or the nature of its government, could function as an equal partner in the preparation of peace agreements.

Clive Phillipot brought pictures of historical places depicting Paine's life in Britain to the delegates, shown during his presentation at the Colloquium. His personal journey into the history of America's independence from Britain went through a wealth of books and publications which did make a lasting impression on him. Phillipot's thinking about acquiring US citizenship led him to become interested in Jefferson's role in America's history. The political swing to conservatism, and with it the confrontation with the revival of media-unchallenged and old, reactionary ideas, at his arrival as an alien in the US, severely disenchanted him and very seriously dented his belief in human progress. In Thomas Paine he found the missing essential ideas to reset his compass to progress.

Paul O'Dwyer, American politician and lawyer, said that Thomas Paine's writings had left him with a most disrupted mind, leading him to examine truths previously accepted without question. A public place to attach Paine's name to was one of his goals but interest among city governors appeared minimal. Finally, after a long bureaucratic struggle, Thomas Paine Park was born at his initiative and established in New York across the street from the Prosecutor's office, the Federal Courts, and the Federal Correctional Institution. Paul O'Dwyer mentioned that Tom Paine's name had been invoked at that place by thousands of New Yorkers in defence of an innocent Irishman, six months before the Thomas Paine Colloquium took place.

Sean Wilentz, searching for Thomas Paine's legacy and dearth of official glory through established channels and literature, heralded him as the first of the modern intellectuals, who rejected an obsolete view of the world and urged for a fundamental change in human consciousness. He remarked that Paine touched the experience of three nations: France, Britain, and the USA. Paine never renounced support for the French revolution, not even after his release from prison, taking pride in his association with the Girondin faction. His influential writings were a critical component in the establishment of America's independence. In

England Paine's writings became the foundation texts of the labour movement. Over time, France and the US relinquished their interest in him. Wilentz concluded that Paine's true legacy lives on in the tension between life's unfulfilled visions and the struggle to reform living realities – the source from which his writings still exert their great power to us, today's practical utopians.

David Henley portrayed Thomas Paine by listing all daring and revolutionary initiatives taken by him. To illustrate Paine's remarkable influence on others, he composed two tables with quotes from historians and biographers on the effect of *Common Sense* on American Independence. Henley's third table listed writings supporting the possibility of Paine's authorship of the first draft of the Declaration of Independence. In finishing his series of 'portraits' Henley gave a fascinating account of measures taken by ill-thinking magistrates to avoid or counteract the display of art immortalizing Thomas Paine to the public.

Robert Muller characterized Thomas Paine in staging him as an honest interrogator to political and social leadership in present-day society. In offering critical insights, Paine would never allow public opinion to shape and influence his views; he would question every aspect of societal behaviour and raise issues that should appeal to world government. Muller lets Paine ask penetrating questions about desirable changes at a global level that would reassure the future and destiny of humanity, presenting them one by one as crucial material to institute some of the most wanted social and political revolutions that Paine would likely have recommended if he were here, alive today.

Zofia Libizowska's paper discussed how Paine's political theory translated the political philosophy of the Age of Enlightenment in an ordinary person's vocabulary. Paine demanded immediate proclamation of the Declaration of Independence, which would constitute a document of America's own national sovereignty, built on the principle of the sovereignty of the people and human rights. She pointed out how his vision became instrumental in the composition of America's gift to the world: the first-ever realization of an Agreement by its people. It was embodied by the Continental Charter, an act of the people constituting a government and composed by delegates of each colony immediately after the announcement of independence. Libizowska described in detail how the document followed Paine's ideas in ensuring that order

and righteousness in the new State, to be a federation of republics, were to be effectuated and preserved.

United Nations Secretary-General *Pérez de Cuéllar*'s message to the Colloquium underlined the experience of human brotherhood, held central in Paine's passionate life and thought. Paine believed that true world citizenship could become possible through an alliance of nations, offering new hope for a global future in which individual responsibility, opportunity, and action would interlock to shape one's own destiny.

Thomas Paine's significant contribution to the principle of independence was to provide all stimuli to bring forward a new, just, and modern system of government in which the rights and freedom of all people should be preserved to the benefit of the world and across boundaries of national interests and concerns. Although the complexification of issues has dramatically increased by scientific progress, sociological insights, and pluralism since the times of Milton and Paine, today's requirements are no less utopian: how should it be possible to preserve the cultural domains in which humankind expresses its unique and diversified character, and simultaneously provide a governing structure that ensures maximal responsible freedom to each individual? A rich variety of ideas for political renewal knocks on the door of the established bastion of present-day legitimated representative system of democracy to provide impulses for improvement.

Experts from the domain of the philosophy of science point to John Dewey to discover the connection between people, problems, new objects and environment, or Bruno Latour's hybrid networks between humans and non-humans, alongside the deliberative democracy theory of Jürgen Habermas. Yet there is not in the year 2008 a political statement, testament or will with a validity consistent with humanity's desire to anchor its identity, evolutionary advance, and zest for action at a level congruent with the all-embracing scale of Thomas Paine's visionary eye. That is what makes him an unforgettable example of what it means to be human and to build our future accordingly.

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