

THOMAS PAINE (1737-1809)

Thomas Paine is one of the recognised legends in the founding of the U.S.A. He was an author and revolutionary activist who took part in three revolutions. His role in American history, as well as in world history, is monumental.

However, it's debatable as to how much of a geoist Paine may be classed. He certainly had that characteristic geoist reformist zeal as well as being a fiercely independent thinker. I would have liked him to define better what he meant by property in his call for "property rights", but Mr. Ed is no great scholar of Paine. In his defence it must be said that, in the midst of all the epic events in which he became embroiled, Paine barely had opportunity to turn his great mind to geoist economics.

Born to Quaker parents in Norfolk, England, in 1737, Paine had only a basic education. He worked in a variety of jobs including English government positions, but was not very successful. As an excise officer, he was dismissed from the service after leading (1772) agitation for higher salaries.

His influence on American social and political thought began just before the American Revolution. Paine emigrated to America in 1774, bearing letters of introduction from Benjamin Franklin, who was then in England. Starting over as a publicist, he first published his *African Slavery* in America in 1775, criticising slavery in America as being unjust and inhumane. In April 1775, he helped found one of the first abolitionist societies.

Social issues interested him greatly, and he called for the humane treatment of animals (but it appears that he still devoured the flesh of dead animals!), and urged equal civil rights for women (but not yet suffrage).

He soon became involved in the clashes between England and the American colonies and published the enormously successful pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), in which he argued that the colonies had outgrown any need for English domination and should be given independence. Out of 2.5 million people then living in the 13 colonies, about 500,000 purchased the pamphlet. In that same year Paine wrote the first of a series of 16 pamphlets called *The Crisis* (1776-83). These essays were widely distributed and did much to

encourage the patriot cause throughout the American Revolution.

In 1787 Thomas Paine left for England, initially to raise funds for the building of a bridge he had designed but after the French Revolution broke out, he became deeply involved in it. Between March 1791 and February 1792, he published numerous editions of his *Rights of Man*, in which he defended the French Revolution against the attacks of fellow Englishman, Edmund Burke. The four inalienable rights he named are liberty, property, security, and resistance to oppression. Its basic premises were that there are natural rights common to all men and that only democratic institutions are able to guarantee these rights. The book was banned in England because it opposed the existence of a monarchy. Paine strongly favoured self-government by citizens and was a life-long practitioner of American free speech.

His attack on English institutions led to his prosecution for treason and subsequent flight to Paris (1792), where he was elected into the National Convention. Though a true republican, he was imprisoned in 1793 under Robespierre because he had voted against the execution of the dethroned king Louis XVI. During his imprisonment the publication of his *Age of Reason* started, which was written in praise of the achievements of the Age of Enlightenment, and it was from this book that he was unfairly accused of being an atheist (he actually held liberal Quaker sympathies).

After his release he stayed in France until 1802 when he sailed back to America after an invitation by Thomas Jefferson, who had met him before when he was minister in Paris and who admired him. Back in the United States he learned that he was seen as a great infidel, or simply forgotten for what he had done for America. He continued his critical writings, for instance against the Federalists and on religious superstition.

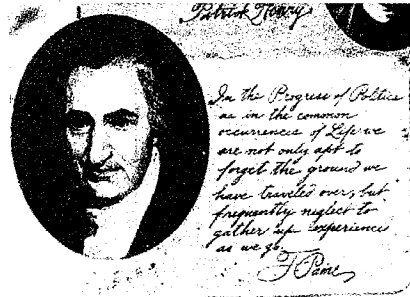
Thomas Paine was incredibly outspoken for his times and, mainly for this reason, was not well liked in any country, even in the U.S.A. where he had wielded vast influence over its establishment. Yet, mainly because of the sensibilities he offended, he died in poverty in New York City in 1809, only to be recognised and revered some time after his death.



T. Paine

"But how often is the natural propensity to society disturbed or destroyed by the operations of government! When the latter, instead of being engrafted on the principles of the former, assumes to exist for itself, and acts by partialities of favour and oppression, it becomes the cause of the mischiefs it ought to prevent."

"All the great laws of society are laws of nature"



"Men did not make the earth it is the value of the improvement only and not the earth itself, that is individual property Every proprietor owes to the community a ground rent for the land which he holds ... from this ground rent I propose to create a National Fund, out of which there shall be paid to every person a sum."