

HONORARY CITIZEN OF FRANCE OR ENGLISH VOLTAIRE

Hamzayev Ravshanbek Erkinjon o'g'li

Jizzakh State Pedagogical University 2nd year student of the Faculty of History

E-mail: ravshanbekhamzayev04@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

This article is about an honorary citizen of France, an English Voltaire, an American revolutionary, the author of the revolutionary book 'Common Sense', a defender of human rights, one of the fathers of American Independence, a person who actively fought against slavery.

Keywords: English Voltaire; Common sense; Rights of Man; Norfolk; Lexington; Concord; Benjamin Franklin; Girondists; American Crisis; Jefferson; Washington; Independence.

Introduction:

Thomas Paine (born January 29, 1737, Thetford, Norfolk, England—died June 8, 1809, New York, New York, U.S.) English-American writer and political pamphleteer whose *Common Sense* pamphlet and Crisis papers were important influences on the American Revolution. Other works that contributed to his reputation as one of the greatest political propagandists in history were *Rights of Man*, a defense of the French Revolution and of republican principles, and the age of the place of religion in society.

Born in Thetford, England, in the county of Norfolk;, Paine emigrated to the British American colonies in 1774 with the help of Benjamin Franklin, arriving just in time to participate in the American Revolution. His principal contributions were the powerful, widely read pamphlet *Common Sense* (1776), the all-time best-selling American book that advocated colonial America's independence from the Kingdom of Great Britain, and *The American Crisis* (1776–83), a pro-revolutionary pamphlet series. *Common Sense* was so influential that John Adams said, "Without the pen of the author of *Common Sense*, the sword of Washington would have been raised in vain." Paine lived in France for most of the 1790s, becoming deeply involved in the French Revolution. He wrote the *Rights of Man* (1791), in part a defence of the French Revolution against its critics. His attacks on British writer Edmund Burke



led to a trial and conviction in absentia in 1792 for the crime of seditious libel. In 1792, despite not being able to speak French, he was elected to the French National Convention. The Girondists regarded him as an ally. Consequently, the Montagnards, especially Robespierre, regarded him as an enemy. In December 1793, he was arrested and imprisoned in Paris, then released in 1794. He became notorious because of his pamphlet *The Age of Reason* (1793–94), in which he advocated deism, promoted reason and freethinking, and argued against institutionalized religion in general and Christian doctrine in particular. He also wrote the pamphlet *Agrarian Justice* (1795), discussing the origins of property, and introduced the concept of a guaranteed minimum income. In 1802, he returned to America where he died on June 8, 1809. Only six people attended his funeral as he had been ostracized for his ridicule of Christianity. [8]

Paine had arrived in America when the conflict between the colonists and England was reaching its height. After blood was spilled at the Battles of Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775, Paine argued that the cause of America should be not just a revolt against taxation but a demand for independence. He put this idea into *Common Sense*, which came off the press on January 10, 1776. The 50-page pamphlet sold more than 500,000 copies within a few months. More than any other single publication, *Common Sense* paved the way for the Declaration of Independence, unanimously ratified on July 4, 1776. During the war that followed, Paine served as volunteer aide-de-camp to Gen. Nathanael Greene. His great contribution to the patriot cause was the 16 “Crisis” papers issued between 1776 and 1783, each one signed *Common Sense*. “The American Crisis. Number I,” published on December 19, 1776, when George Washington’s army was on the verge of disintegration, so moved Washington that he ordered it read to all the troops at Valley Forge. Its opening is among the most stirring passages in the literature of the American Revolution:

These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it now deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered; yet we have this consolation with us—that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly: It is dearness only that gives everything its value. Heaven knows how to put a proper price upon its goods; and it would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as



freedom should not be highly rated. Britain, with an army to enforce her tyranny, has declared that she has a right not only to tax but “to bind us in all cases whatsoever,” and if being bound in that manner is not slavery, then is there not such a thing as slavery upon earth. Even the expression is impious, for so unlimited a power can belong only to God.[7]

"The present situation of our public affairs," the commander-in-chief once observed, "affords abundant causes of distress, we should be very careful how we aggravate or multiply them, by private bickerings.

All little differences and animosities, calculated to increase the unavoidable evils of the times, should be forgotten, or at least postponed.[2]

In 1802 or 1803, Paine left France for the United States, also paying the passage for Bonneville's wife Marguerite Brazier and the couple's three sons, Benjamin, Louis and Thomas Bonneville, to whom Paine was godfather. Paine returned to the United States in the early stages of the Second Great Awakening and a time of great political partisanship. The Age of Reason gave ample excuse for the religiously devout to dislike him, while the Federalists attacked him for his ideas of government stated in Common Sense, for his association with the French Revolution, and for his friendship with President Jefferson. Also, still fresh in the minds of the public was his Letter to Washington, published six years before his return. This was compounded when his right to vote was denied in New Rochelle on the grounds that Gouverneur Morris did not recognize him as an American and Washington had not aided him.[3]

Materials and Methods:

Thomas Paine was no Atheist, Theodore Roosevelt to the contrary. Together with the foremost liberals and intellectuals in America and Europe, he believed in Deism.²¹ And like many of these thinkers, Franklin, Jefferson, Wollaston, etc., he was influenced by the intellectual revolution achieved by Newton and Locke in their discovery of a systematic and harmonious universe whose laws could be ascertained by human reason. After seeing the application of the light of rationalism in the political revolutions in America and in France, it seemed to him that the next step was to apply this same rationalism in religion. In his Letter to Erskjne, Paine wrote: "Of all the tyrannies that effect mankind, tyranny in religion is the worst; every other species of tyranny is limited to the world we live in; but this attempts to stride beyond



the grave, and seeks to pursue us into eternity." Paine's views about the Bible and religion were in no sense original for every one of them had been expressed by Deists before him. But these men had written heavy treatises for scholars. Paine wrote in his usual simple and clear language for the common man. He took Deism out of the sphere of academic discussions and made it a living creed for the average man. By doing so, of course, he threatened the hold of the clergy upon the people. As long as Deism was confined to intellectuals in the upper middle class and liberal sections of the nobility there was no danger to the vested interests of the priesthood. But once it became, as it did after the publication of *The Age of Reason*, a subject for discussion among the common people, the outlook was entirely different. Men, who had said many times before the same things Paine set down in his work, had been ignored. Paine was forced to endure a barrage of calumny and vituperation such as has been visited upon few men in our history.[1]

Discussion:

On the morning of June 8, 1809, Paine died, aged 72, at 59 Grove Street in Greenwich Village, New York City. Although the original building no longer exists, the present building has a plaque noting that Paine died at this location. After his death, Paine's body was brought to New Rochelle, but the Quakers would not allow it to be buried in their graveyard as per his last will, so his remains were buried under a walnut tree on his farm. In 1819, English agrarian radical journalist William Cobbett, who in 1793 had published a hostile continuation of Francis Oldys (George Chalmer)'s *The Life of Thomas Paine*, dug up his bones and transported them back to England with the intention to give Paine a heroic reburial on his native soil, but this never came to pass. The bones were still among Cobbett's effects when he died over fifteen years later but were later lost. There is no confirmed story about what happened to them after that, although various people have claimed throughout the years to own parts of Paine's remains, such as his skull and right hand.[5] At the time of his death, most American newspapers reprinted the obituary notice from the *New York Evening Post* that was in turn quoting from *The American Citizen*, which read in part: "He had lived long, did some good, and much harm". Only six mourners came to his funeral, two of whom were black, most likely freedmen. Months later appeared a hostile biography by James Cheetham, who had admired him since the latter's days as a young radical in Manchester, and



who had been friends with Paine for a short time before the two fell out. Many years later the writer and orator Robert G. Ingersoll wrote: Thomas Paine had passed the legendary limit of life. One by one most of his old friends and acquaintances had deserted him. Maligned on every side, execrated, shunned and abhorred – his virtues denounced as vices – his services forgotten – his character blackened, he preserved the poise and balance of his soul. He was a victim of the people, but his convictions remained unshaken. He was still a soldier in the army of freedom, and still tried to enlighten and civilize those who were impatiently waiting for his death. Even those who loved their enemies hated him, their friend — the friend of the whole world – with all their hearts. On the 8th of June 1809, death came – Death, almost his only friend. At his funeral no pomp, no pageantry, no civic procession, no military display. In a carriage, a woman and her son who had lived on the bounty of the dead – on horseback, a Quaker, the humanity of whose heart dominated the creed of his head – and, following on foot, two negroes filled with gratitude — constituted the funeral cortege of Thomas Paine.[9] Biographer Eric Foner identifies a utopian thread in Paine's thought, writing: "Through this new language he communicated a new vision – a utopian image of an egalitarian, republican society".[6] Paine's utopianism combined civic republicanism, belief in the inevitability of scientific and social progress and commitment to free markets and liberty generally. The multiple sources of Paine's political theory all pointed to a society based on the common good and individualism. Paine expressed a redemptive futurism or political messianism. Writing that his generation "would appear to the future as the Adam of a new world", Paine exemplified British utopianism.

Conclusion:

Thomas Paine was the impassioned democratic voice of the Age of Revolution, and this volume brings together his best-known works: Common Sense, The American Crisis, Rights of Man, The Age of Reason, along with a selection of letters, articles and pamphlets that emphasizes Paine's American years. "I know not whether any man in the world," wrote John Adams in 1805, "has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine. The inventor Thomas Edison said: "I have always regarded Paine as one of the greatest of all Americans. Never have we had a sounder intelligence in this republic.... It was my good fortune to encounter Thomas Paine's works in my boyhood... it was, indeed, a revelation to



me to read that great thinker's views on political and theological subjects. Paine educated me, then, about many matters of which I had never before thought. I remember, very vividly, the flash of enlightenment that shone from Paine's writings, and I recall thinking, at that time, 'What a pity these works are not today the schoolbooks for all children!' My interest in Paine was not satisfied by my first reading of his works. I went back to them time and again, just as I have done since my boyhood days."

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