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Some Writings of Thomas Paine in Pennsylvania Newspapers

ALFRED OWEN ALDRIDGE

IN 1945 appeared *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, edited by Philip S. Foner. This work was designed "to include all of Paine's writings available at present." It contains much material not found in previous collections of Paine's works but does not include several writings in contemporary Pennsylvania newspapers which now need to be added to the Paine canon. These comprise two papers in the *Crisis* series, three letters on the Bank of North America, and an explanation in an advertisement of Paine's publishing arrangements for *Common Sense*. These items have not previously appeared in Paine's collected works or been noticed by Paine scholars.

Most important historically are the two additional numbers of the *Crisis* series, each of which may be called with others already collected a "Crisis Extraordinary" or a "Supernumerary Crisis." Paine himself used this device of classifying three other extra papers in order not to swell the number of the *Crisis* series beyond thirteen, the number of the colonies. Both of the newly discovered papers are addressed "To the People of America" and signed "Common Sense." The first is dated June 10, 1778, and appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, June 13, 1778. It served to bridge the hiatus between *Crisis* No. 5, which was dated March 21, 1778, and *Crisis* No. 6, which was ready for the press when Paine's letter in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* appeared but which was "delayed in order to take in a larger compass of affairs than was at first intended." Actually *Crisis* No. 6 did not appear until October 20, 1778.

Midway between *Crisis* No. 5 and *Crisis* No. 6, the letter of June 10 discusses the interim between the occupation of Philadelphia and the arrival of the commissioners for peace. In spite of being about one sixth the length of *Crisis* No. 5, the letter has more specific information and a shrewder analysis of the state of affairs than its predecessor. The latter is a forensic piece designed for the arena of rhetoric. In an optimistic tone, Paine demonstrates that the loss of Philadelphia is more of an advantage than otherwise. His style shows signs of careful planning and polishing. The subsequent letter, however, has less art and more fact. Paine's tone is less ebullient as

he warns against overconfidence with the return of spring. As though to compensate for the dampening effect of his spirit of caution, he heaps abuse on English leaders and politicians. This was no novelty since in *Crisis* No. 5 Paine had effectively abused Howe by the methods of literary satire—carefully worked out irony, ingenious parallels, ludicrous allusions, and sardonic euphemisms. The odium of June 10, however, is unpremeditated and consists of rapid, sharp stabs. The importance of the letter consists not in its rhetorical powers but in its analysis of events. Paine finds only three possible courses.

First. A war with France [by England].

Secondly. An acknowledgment of our independence on the part of Britain, by which such a war may be *creditably* avoided. And,

Thirdly. Her submission to every indignity which France has or may show, by which submission a war may be *meanly* avoided.

Paine's predictions proved accurate since *Crisis* No. 6 was written when the English peace commissioners had arrived and were appealing to the Americans over the head of Congress to lay down their arms and to fight for the king against France. Paine denounced the double-dealing of the commissioners and taunted the British for burning houses in Rhode Island while they were pretending to negotiate.

The second newly discovered letter in this series appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, April 3, 1782, between *Crisis* No. 10, March 5, 1782, and *Crisis* No. 11, May, 1782. It is introduced with a quotation of the first paragraph of *Crisis* No. 9. The subject of the letter is taxation and national defense. The foundation is laid in "The Crisis Extraordinary" of October 4, 1780, which gives particular details of taxation, and in *Crisis* No. 10, which is in part devoted to "the expenses, arrangements and disbursements for carrying on the war." In the April letter, finance is considered the fundamental problem. Paine attempts not only to inspire general willingness to pay increased taxes but to convince his readers that system and method in finance are needed as well as patriotism.¹ In answer to the vested interests and the ultra conservatives, Paine expounds the principle that "Government and the people do not in America constitute distinct bodies." Using a forensic style, he appeals variously to self-interest, patriotism, and honor to meet the nation's financial needs. Then he presents a brief, concise statement of what these needs are and the policy of taxation necessary to meet them.

Paine's first printed work with a purely personal emphasis is also absent from Foner's edition. This is a letter in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post*, April

¹ For the historical background, see Philip S. Foner, ed., *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine* (New York, 1945), II, 383, 1230.

30, 1776, inspired by the controversy between Paine (under the pseudonym of The Forester) and Rev. William Smith (under the pseudonym of Cato). Soon after the publication of *Common Sense* a number of Tories and conservatives attempted to counteract its republican doctrines. The most vociferous and literary of these was Smith, an Anglican clergyman who published a serial attack on *Common Sense* beginning in April, 1776, in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Paine replied with four Forester letters in the *Pennsylvania Journal*, April 3, 10, 24, and May 8, 1776.² Near the end of this series Paine wrote the letter to the *Pennsylvania Post*, April 30, 1776, defending his character against the aspersions of Smith. He sets forth his antecedents in detail, particularly emphasizing his being introduced to Pennsylvania by Dr. Franklin, and challenges Cato to declare his own antecedents.³

Only recently Harry Hayden Clark discovered a series of letters by Paine on the Bank of North America. These have been reprinted by Foner.⁴ Three other letters on this subject, however, are to be added to Clark's list. The first, which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, December 21, 1785, was drawn out by a number of publications in newspapers and pamphlets which had been attributed to Paine. Above his own name, Paine wrote to the *Pennsylvania Gazette* asserting that he had never previously published anything on the subject of the charter of the bank. In order to declare his private opinion, however, he added a long letter on the bank which he had written to Thomas Fitzsimmons on April 19, 1785. Eight other letters by Paine on the subject of the bank appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* from March 29, 1786, to March 7, 1787. The first five, which appeared originally in the *Pennsylvania Packet*, are reprinted by Foner. He also reprints the eighth letter (*Pennsylvania Gazette*, March 7, 1787) but does not mention the sixth and seventh, which appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* on September 20, and November 8, 1786.

These omitted letters discuss problems ancillary to the bank; the letter of September 20, the disadvantages of a unicameral legislature, and the letter of November 8, the dangers of paper money. The second letter is specifically concerned with financial matters and is closely connected with the letters on the bank already published and with Paine's *Dissertations on Government: The Affairs of the Bank; and Paper Money* (1786). I have discussed this letter in another publication.⁵ The letter of September 20 is primarily

² *Ibid.*, II, 60–87.

³ This letter is described by Frank Smith in *Thomas Paine, Liberator* (New York, 1938), p. 32, but Smith does not say in which newspaper it appeared.

⁴ *Thomas Paine, Representative Selections* (New York, 1944), p. lxxiv; Foner, ed., *Writings*, II, 414–39.

⁵ *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, XCIII (September, 1949), 309–15.

political, is not necessarily connected with the bank, and helps explain an important passage in *The Rights of Man*. For this reason, a brief treatment of this letter is appropriate. Paine himself gave it the title "On the Affairs of State." He discusses in it the weaknesses of a unicameral system because the action of the Pennsylvania assembly in revoking the charter of the bank seemed to him a proof that a single legislature in the hands of whatever party it may fall "is capable of being made a compleat aristocracy for the time it exists." When the majority is ruled by party prejudice, he observes, "a single legislature, on account of the superabundance of its power, and the uncontroled rapidity of its execution, becomes as dangerous to the principles of liberty as that of a despotic monarchy." According to Paine's interpretation, it was thought at the beginning of the Revolution that the executive branch of government was the only dangerous part, but, at the time he wrote, it was realized that the legislative might be as arbitrary and mischievous. The Constitution took care to prevent the executive council from being subject "to inconsistent and contradictory conduct, and sudden convulsions" by providing that the periods of their elections shall not all expire at once. The same safeguard was needed for the legislature and would have been provided "could the convention have foreseen the capricious and inconsistent conduct of assemblies." When the legislature is entrusted to a single body of men, that body all expiring at once, the state is subject to "perpetual convulsions of imperfect measures and rash proceedings," for it may happen, as already has happened in the attack on the bank, "that a number of men, suddenly collected, unexperienced in business, and unacquainted with the grounds, reasons and principles, which former assemblies proceeded on in passing certain acts, and without seeking to inform themselves thereof, may precipitate the state into disorder by a confused medley of doing and undoing, and make the grievances they pretend to remove." Paine concludes his paper with the remark that "so long as it shall be the choice of the people to continue the legislature in a single house, the circumstances of the country and the importance of the trust (being greater than that committed to any single body of men in any state in the union) evidently require, that the persons to be elected thereto be men freed from the bigotry and shackles of party, of liberal minds, and conversant in the means of increasing the riches of the state, and cultivating and extending the prosperity thereof." In this letter Paine does not specifically advocate bicameralism, but he threatens to.

Paine mentions the problem of a unicameral or a bicameral legislature in the next year, 1778, in *A Serious Address to the People of Pennsylvania on the Present Situation of Their Affairs*. He promises to take up in detail

the subject of the "proposed addition of a second Legislative House," but he either never finished the series or his remarks still remain undiscovered.⁶ We may assume, however, that, very much under the influence of Franklin as he was, he would have been a strong advocate of unicameralism. In his *Dissertations on Government* (February, 1786), Paine speaks of his "idea of a single legislature."⁷ By September, however, as we have seen, he had modified his views, and, in the second part of *The Rights of Man* (1792), he presents his unique proposal to remove the disadvantages of both the unicameral system, that it acts too hastily, and the bicameral system, that the two houses counteract each other and that one is no wiser than the other. He proposes to have one representation divided by lot into two or three parts, to have every bill debated in succession in each part, to have each part hearer of the others, and to have a vote taken only after a general assembly and general debate.⁸ In 1805, Paine offered a variation of this proposal for application to Pennsylvania.⁹

A hitherto unnoticed letter concerning Paine's reputation in France as an engineer appeared in the *Federal Gazette*, February 9, 1789. Paine had written the letter from Paris on May 4, 1788, announcing the success of his bridge and suggesting its suitability for the Schuylkill. He enclosed a long, favorable report from the Royal Academy of Sciences (Paris, August 29, 1787) on the bridge.

Also in the *Federal Gazette* (February 19, 1793) appeared a long defense of the French Revolution in the form of an extract of a letter from a "Gentleman now in France to his correspondent in this city." The letter is undoubtedly by a Philadelphian since the author speaks of a past conversation in Philadelphia with his friend. He says that his friend has acquired faulty ideas of the French Revolution from the press and as an antidote accords it wholesale praise. I do not know of another Philadelphian besides Paine who was in France in 1793 and who would speak as enthusiastically of the French Revolution as the author of this letter does.

The final writing from the Pennsylvania press which I wish to introduce concerns the publication of *Common Sense*. It is a paragraph of great bibliographical as well as biographical interest. Until January 25, 1776, *Common Sense* had been regularly advertised by the printer Robert Bell as a work containing the following parts:

- I. Of the origin and design of government in general, with concise remarks on the English constitution.

⁶ Foner, ed., *Writings*, II, 292.

⁷ *Ibid.*, II, 409.

⁸ *Ibid.*, I, 390.

⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 1001.

- II. Of monarchy and hereditary succession.
- III. Thoughts on the present state of American affairs.
- IV. Of the present ability of America, with some miscellaneous reflections.

In the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* of January 25, 1776, the same issue with Bell's standard advertisement, appeared an advertisement by W. & T. Bradford, announcing a new edition of *Common Sense* "with large and interesting additions by the author . . . among which will be a seasonable and friendly admonition to the people called Quakers." A notice to the public explained why the new edition was called for and why Bradford, not Bell, was to publish it.

The great encouragement and reception which this pamphlet hath already met with, and the great demand for the same, hath induced the publisher of the first edition to print a new edition unknown to the author, who expressly directed him not to proceed therein without orders, because that large additions would be made thereto; wherefore the new edition, lately advertised by the printer of the first, is without the intended additions.

On January 27, 1776, Bell ran an advertisement in the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* attacking both Paine and Bradford and ingenuously accusing them of "dishonest malevolence." He also continued his efforts to sell his own second edition.

In the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* of January 30, 1776, Bradford repeated his advertisement of January 25, with the following significant addition.

The author, for the sake of relieving the anxiety of his friends, maketh the following declaration— That he first intended the above work to have been printed in a series of letters in the news-papers, but was dissuaded therefrom, on account of the impossibility of getting them generally inserted— That he knew nothing of Robert Bell, who was engaged to print it by a gentleman of the city [Benjamin Rush?], and who can but be concerned for the unpleasant situation in which he hath, though from a well meaning motive, involved his friend— That he hath neither directly, nor indirectly, received, or is to receive, any profit or advantage whatsoever from the edition printed by Robert Bell— That over and above the expence of printing, which was to be paid whether the work sold or not, he gave to this noisy man one half of the profits thereof, amounting to upwards of thirty pounds, as a present for the trouble he might be at, as the author did not intend to take on any himself, or mean to be known; and that, when the news of our repulse at Quebec arrived in this city, he gave the other half, with an order for the payment thereof, together with said Bell's written promise for the same, into the hands of two gentlemen (whose names are left at the bar of the London Coffee-house, and who will authenticate the assertions contained herein) for the purpose of purchasing mittens for the troops ordered on that cold campaign.

The said gentlemen have not yet been able to settle with Robert Bell according to the conditions of his written engagement. The account which he hath delivered

in not appearing to them equitable; and which, if he do not perform within the course of this week, he will be sued for the same, &c. This is all the notice that will ever be taken of him in future.

On February 1, 1776, the whole back page of the *Pennsylvania Evening Post* was taken up by Bell's counterattack. The above declaration by Paine, whether written entirely by him or in conjunction with Bradford, is of great bibliographical interest. It explains why there were two "second" editions of *Common Sense* and why Bell's edition continued to appear after Bradford's new edition.¹⁰ This material has not been used by bibliographers. Moncure D. Conway only hints at it in his *Life of Thomas Paine*,¹¹ and I do not know of any writer who discusses it at greater length. It is generally known, however, that Bell later brought out his own expanded edition of *Common Sense*, which contained a number of additions not by Paine at all.

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¹⁰ Paine's financial arrangements with Bell are treated in a letter to Henry Laurens, Jan. 14, 1799. *Ibid.*, II, 1160-65.

¹¹ (New York, 1892), I, 181.