

PRESERVING THE LEGACY OF PAINE SCHOLAR, KLARA RUKSHINA, AN IMPORTANT PROJECT FOR THOMAS PAINE FRIENDS

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Background for this proposed undertaking is found in two articles in the TPF *Bulletin* available at the TPF Website: www.thomas-paine-friends.org

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KLARA RUKSHINA'S UNFINISHED SCHOLARLY WORK

Over seven years have passed since Klara Rukshina's death and finally the first steps have been taken to preserve her legacy, especially as it relates to her significant work on Thomas Paine. A steadfast member of TPF who served on the Board of Directors, Klara was well regarded as a thorough, careful scholar on Thomas Paine and related subjects. Klara's papers have been organized according to subject by her daughter, Elina Gartsman. Recently, we spent an afternoon reviewing the contents of some sixteen packets of Klara's papers, books and pamphlets in English and Russian. The collection would probably occupy about ten feet of shelf space in a library!

Elina provided us with copies of two invaluable documents: a list of Klara's publications in Russian and English, and the second, of particular interest, an eight-page "Plan" for her book on *Thomas Paine and the Origins of Modern Democracies*, to which Klara devoted her last years.

The first paragraph from Klara's "Plan" follows.

Book Title: *Silent Partner: Thomas Paine and the Origins of Modern Democracies*

Part 1 *Junius Letters (1769-1772)*

Part 2 *CS [Common Sense] (1776) Thomas Paine and the American Revolution*

Part 3 *Rights of Man (1791-1792) Thomas Paine and the Revolution and Revolutionary Uprisings in Europe (French Revolution, English Working Class Movement—3 periods)*

In the "Plan", each Part is divided into chapters and even chapters contain several sections. For example, under Part 1 The Letters of Junius, chapter 2 is entitled, "Letters [of Junius], as a major ideological precondition of *Common Sense*." Under chapter 2 are "paragraph 1, (Dedication and Preface), Letter 35, Letter 66; paragraph 2, Junius on America, and paragraph 3, Junius as a Whig."

The last page-and-a-half of her "Plan" is devoted to an even more detailed outline entitled, "Plan of the Article on Junius." The Junius letters appear to have been a major concern in her last years.

This small sample should give the reader some idea of what Klara was proposing to include in her book on Paine and Modern Democracies, which was to be her *magnum opus*. How far Klara was to go toward completing this unique study would be revealed by a close examination of her papers. Finally, a notation from Klara's "Plan":

**"Paine was not only an outstanding agitator.
He most certainly was an outstanding innovator."**



WHAT CAN TPF DO ON BEHALF OF KLARA'S SCHOLARLY LEGACY?

At the upcoming TPF Annual Meeting (via teleconference), I will introduce a motion calling for a committee, open to all TPF members, to be set up with several goals suggested.

- 1) Highest priority should be given to discovering how far Klara had proceeded in writing her book on, *Thomas Paine and the Origins of Modern Democracies*;
- 2) Finding a secure and accessible location for papers, books, pamphlets, etc., included in the sixteen packets organized by her daughter, Elina;
- 3) Attempting to publish in English several of her papers which have appeared only in Russian; and
- 4) Attempting to produce a small book of excerpts from Klara's writings.

A TPF fund has been started for the costs of these objectives.

We hope that the academics among us will join the committee and offer their expert advice on how we might achieve the goals set by the committee.

Klara Rukshina was one of the few professional historians who were, and are, members of TPF. She was an engaged member contributing to the TPF *Bulletin* as well as to other activities. She was always available to offer help and suggestions to others who were attempting to write effectively about Thomas Paine.

Of even greater importance, Klara was one of a small band of professionals who saw Paine's significance going

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far beyond the minimal designation by the "American History Establishment", some of them labeling Paine only as *the pamphleteer of the American Revolution, a rabble-rousing radical*. Another way of minimizing Paine's greatness is basically to ignore him – to write him out of the history and political science texts wherever feasible. The Establishment simply does not entertain discussions of Paine's role, for example, in the writing of the Declaration of Independence, or that he might be the author of the Junius letters, or that he was an important political philosopher.

Klara and a few others see Paine as a major political philosopher of the Enlightenment who contributed to

constructing the elements of the modern representative democracies. It was Paine who insisted that government's primary task was to ensure the natural and civil rights of all its people. Much of what Paine was demanding can be found in the United Nations' *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Paine expressed this point in *Rights of Man*, part 2, chapter 5 (1792):

When it shall be said in any country in the world, "My poor are happy, neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive; the rational world is my friend, because I am a friend of its happiness:" ---when these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and its government.