

# RECALLING KLARA RUKSHINA'S PAINE SCHOLARSHIP

by Irwin and Martha Spiegelman



Historian Klara Rukshina was an enthusiastic, painstaking Paine scholar and a member of the TPF Board from 2005 to her death in January, 2010. She was born near Minsk in Belarus in 1931 and spent World War II in Khazakistan. She earned an advanced degree in philology and became a university professor in Belarus until 1993, when she won an IREX (International Research and Exchange Board) grant to take up her research in the History Department at Harvard.

The TPF *Bulletin*, volume 11, number 1, Spring, 2010, contained a long article, "Thinking About Klara Rukshina and Her Legacy," and we follow-up here after seven-and-a-half years.

In 2010, members of the TPF Board agreed to help get many of Klara's Paine writings, which were published only in Russian, translated into English and published. The group would also try to find a journal for her unpublished manuscripts. In addition, the group would help in finding a secure and convenient repository for Klara's papers. Late in 2009, Klara asked friends to try to get her papers into publication. After her death, an initial fund, donated by Klara's friends, several of them not TPF members, was established with TPF to finance these efforts.

Sadly, nothing had been done since 2010. However, with a burst of new energy, largely driven by a \$1,500 donation from TPF member Martin Brod to help pay for a publication of some of her key Paine papers, the tasks concerning Klara's legacy have been revived. It is the aim to publish a volume, sponsored by TPF. Elina Gartsman, Klara's daughter, has been contacted, and she is now going through Klara's papers and organizing them. Collaborating with Elina, we hope to find translators as well as academics familiar with Klara's work who will lead the way in finding journals to publish Klara's papers and locate a home for them. The question of how the TPF can be involved in these efforts will be on the agenda of TPF Board meetings later in the year.

Two short samples of Klara's scholarship concerning "On the Origin of Modern Democracies", a subject of central importance in her research, reveal her careful attention to history and to words. The first excerpt below is taken from her paper, "On the Origin of Modern Democracies: Thomas Paine and Alexander Radishchev," dated March 27, 1998.

"Paine's "hints" [from *Common Sense*] include some radically new ideas in constitutional history.

"**First**, the American constitution should be a **written** one, unlike the "unwritten" constitution of England. In fact, as far as we know, until the American state and national constitutions no country had a written constitution.

"**Second**, that constitution should "come from some intermediate body between the governed and the governors, that is between the Congress and the people," in the form of a continental conference convened for that purpose.

"**Third**, Paine proposed that the continental conference was 'to frame a Continental Charter, or Charter of the United Colonies.' It should consist of two parts: a Bill of Rights for individuals, and a setting forth of the Structure, Powers and the terms of government offices. Since then the Constitutions of many democratic countries have been built on the same model.

"**Fourth**, The Law – the Constitution – should be supreme. Paine eulogized law: in America the law is king. Law must retain a royal aura by inspiring reverence and awe. The idea was influential for the future development of the American system, as America took the English respect for law one step further. In England, whatever Parliament passes becomes the law without further review. In America, all laws must meet the requirement that they be 'constitutional' – that is, not in conflict with the Constitution.

"So *Common Sense* outlined America's future development as a new type of state heretofore unknown in human history: a democratic, representative republic based on a written Constitution, as the Supreme Law, that ascribes the highest value to individual human rights."

The second excerpt comes from her paper, "Who Wrote the Declaration of Independence", third in her three-part series titled, "On the Origin of Modern Democracies". The paper opens boldly with the basic question and starts at the right end.

"...nothing can settle our affairs so expeditiously as an open and determined **Declaration for Independence**,... setting forth the miseries we have endured, and the peaceful methods, which we have ineffectually used for redress; declaring at the same time, that not being able any longer to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition of the British court, we had been driven to the necessity of breaking off all connections with her; at the same time, assuring all such courts of our peaceful disposition towards them, and of our desire of entering into trade with them.' (The anonymous pamphlet *Common Sense*, January 10, 1776)

"The *Declaration of Independence*, proclaimed on July 4, 1776 was composed **in exact accordance with the aforementioned plan**.

Continued on page 5, *Rukshina's Paine Scholarship*

**"About the Declaration of Independence: the contents and the logic of composition.**

"The *Declaration of Independence* is a universally recognized document of historic significance. It starts with the words:

"*When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume, among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.*"

"This first passage was titled The Manifesto on the Proclamation of Independence.

"The second passage was generally titled the Bill of Rights and states:

"*We hold these truths to be self-evident: That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its power in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.*"

"The ideas embraced in the two passages had their roots in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Thus, the *Declaration* is the **first official state document known in history** which proclaimed as common and universal to all mankind the principles of a new form of government: the supreme power of the people, and the republic based on natural equality of all people. The provision of "unalienable rights" of all people was declared to be the main foundation of all governments. That is, for the achievement of this goal, the governments should be created. Moreover, in the usual triad of philosophy of the Enlightenment period (the XVIIIth century), the rights of "life, liberty, and property" were transformed into "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." The equality of people *irrespective of their property* was proclaimed in the *Declaration of Independence*.

"The next paragraphs of the *Declaration* ideally match the plan of this document as presented in the pamphlet *Common Sense*. The reader may compare the *Declaration* with the paragraph from *Common Sense* to verify this statement. In parentheses are numbers of the paragraphs of the *Declaration*, which correspond to the plan presented in *Common Sense*. So, the *Declaration* has to contain the following items:

"1, "the miseries we have endured" (Nos 3-22); 2, "and the peaceful methods, which we have ineffectually used for redress" (№ 23); 3, "declaring at the same time, that not being able any longer to live happily or safely under the cruel disposition of the British court, we had been driven to the necessity of breaking off all connections with her" (№ 24); 4, "at the same time, assuring all such courts of our peaceful disposition towards them, and of our desire of entering into trade with them" (№ 25)."

Following is a list of copies of Klara's papers in our possession.

- ❖ *Thomas Paine and the First Russian Radical, Aleksander Radishchev* (51 pages )
- ❖ *On the Origin of Modern Democracies: Thomas Paine and, Alexander Radishchev* , March 27, 1998 (7 pages)
- ❖ *The Anonymous Pamphlet Common Sense (1776, January 10)* (10 pages) ---for the Russian version of the article see: *Slovo/Word*, N55
- ❖ *Milestones of Thomas Paine's Biography, with Some Unique Features of his Personality* (5 pages) includes extensive excerpts from *The Philosophy of Thomas Paine* by Thomas Alva Edison
- ❖ *Who Wrote the Declaration of Independence?* (10 pages), the third article in the series, *On the Origin of Modern Democracies*
- ❖ *Thomas Paine and the Destiny-Determining Treatise, Rights of Man* (5 pages)

Klara Rukshina also wrote for the *Bulletin of Thomas Paine Friends*.

- "Common Sense as a Source of the Presidential Oath in the United States of America", in vol. 6, no. 2, July 2005, pp 3 – 8
- Comment on "Declaration of the Rights of Men and of Citizens", in vol. 6, no. 3, October 2005, p 3
- Review of the book, *My Pen and My Soul Have Ever Gone Together, Thomas Paine and the American Revolution* (2006) by Vikki J. Vickers, in vol. 7, no. 4, December 2006, pp 5, 10, 11
- Comment on Authorship of the Declaration of Independence, in vol. 11, no. 2, Summer 2010, pp 1 and 8

