

Mr. Dick Morris, a well-known political pundit, recently announced his acceptance of the Huguenot and New Rochelle Historical Society's *Spirit of Thomas Paine* Award. At the **Thomas Paine National Historical Association** we were initially quite surprised. Who would ever imagine Mr. Morris as a Paineite? Nevertheless, we are happy to acknowledge his conversion. In these times of political half-truths and vapid attempts to celebrate ignorance as one's vainglory, standing in the *Spirit of Thomas Paine* is worthy of applause.

Society is Responsible for the Creation of Both Wealth and Poverty. Thomas Paine wrote that "Poverty ... is a thing created by that which is called civilized life." He held society responsible for both wealth *and* poverty. We always thought Mr. Morris was a staunch individualist. By endorsing Paine's philosophy, Mr. Morris is agreeing that society is largely responsible for the well-being of its citizens. Bravo, Mr. Morris. Promoting the State's responsibility to its citizens is a breath of fresh air.

Progressive Redistribution of Wealth. Thomas Paine strongly supported the idea that government should tax the rich and redistribute those revenues to the poor to help equalize the financial well-being of all its citizens. Paine is a leading figure in the movement to progressively redistribute wealth. He proposed the first estate tax. He advocated taxing the rich to create a national fund to help the young, the aged, and the infirm. Thomas Paine, the original proponent of social security! Tax the rich to care for the less fortunate – Mr. Morris, we had no idea.

Proponent of a Strong Central Government. Standing in *The Spirit of Thomas Paine*, Mr. Morris has apparently now become an advocate of a strong central government, a major tenet of Paine's political philosophy. No more States' and Local Governments' Rights for Mr. Morris.

Turning Against the Churches and Becoming Pro Union. Those in the Freethought movement have long considered *Age of Reason* among the clearest anti-Church documents ever written. Paine wrote, "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions, set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit." Many Unionists consider Paine the Father of the Trade Union movement. Welcome, Mr. Morris!

Disavowing the Constitution as it was Originally Written. Even more of a surprise is Mr. Morris' new take on the Constitution. Paine was no "originalist." He believed that a constitution was a living and dynamic document that was only as strong as the people's ability to change it. Mr. Morris may have to find a whole new circle of friends.

Could this be a mistake? Perhaps Mr. Morris knows and understands the history of the New Rochelle Huguenots. Perhaps he understands how throughout history, Paine's philosophy has been anathema to them. After all, it was the Huguenots and New Rochellians who shot muskets at Paine, refused to acknowledge his right to vote as a citizen, and later vandalized his gravesite. Maybe it should simply be called the Huguenot and New Rochelle Historical Society award and leave Thomas Paine's name out of it.

Or Simple Misuse and Ignorance? Or maybe it is a case of simple ignorance. Perhaps those involved with this award simply have no idea what the *Spirit of Paine* truly stands for. Perhaps they are using this award to crassly hoodwink the public or worse, perhaps they are trying to rewrite history, itself.

The Huguenots should look after the history of the Huguenots. Since 1884 *The Thomas Paine National Historical Association* has looked after the legacy and spirit of Thomas Paine and will vigorously continue to do so. As such we question the authority, legitimacy, and motives of those involved with this "award."

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