

## RICHARD PRICE: PROPHET OF FREEDOM

BY ROBERT O. BALLOU

THE Rev. Richard Price was one of those rare men gifted with far vision and perhaps a touch of prophecy. One reads his words with the realization that only the most "advanced" political thinkers have as yet caught up with his ideas. A Welshman who never visited America, and today almost entirely unknown on either side of the Atlantic, his thoughts and very phrases are woven into our Declaration of Independence and Constitution. Nearly two centuries ago, moreover, he sketched the Wilsonian dream of a League of Nations, the Union Now idea and modern concepts of global patriotism.

Richard Price was born in 1723 at Tynton, Glamorganshire, Wales. The son of a dissenting minister (a Calvinist), he himself became a Unitarian minister and, opposed by the Church of England and conservative political forces, joined the ranks of the great progressive divines of the eighteenth century. A prolific correspondent with Turgot, an intimate friend of Doctor Priestly

and Benjamin Franklin, an acknowledged source of inspiration for Thomas Paine, Price influenced his contemporaries and was forgotten in recorded history.

He was a tireless writer of pamphlets, under such titles as *A Review of the Principle Questions of Morals, Observations on the American Revolution and the Means of Rendering it a Benefit to the World*, and *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America*. The last mentioned pamphlet of twenty-five or thirty thousand words was published in England early in 1776. Copies reached America a few weeks before the Declaration of Independence was drafted, and were sent by the Continental Congress to Colonial newspapers, at least one of which, *The Connecticut Courant*, reprinted it in full in eight installments. It is to such an obscure source that one must go if he would read it today. Blazing with the doctrine of human liberty, it

was undoubtedly discussed in the taverns, on the street corners, and at town meetings, and carried into battle by many a continental soldier.

Some time in June of that year, Thomas Jefferson drafted the Declaration of Independence. As he wrote years later to Henry Lee, it was "neither aiming at originality nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing." Yet many words, phrases and formulations of thought seem, upon examination, to have come from a pamphlet now so obscure that few persons, even among historians of America, have heard of it. Thus Price wrote:

No people can lawfully surrender their liberty. . . . Such a cession, being inconsistent with the unalienable rights of human nature, would either not bind at all or bind only the individuals who made it. This is a blessing which, when lost, a people always have a right to resume.

And Jefferson wrote in the Declaration:

All men . . . are endowed by their creator with inherent and unalienable rights. . . .

Price wrote:

All civil government, as far as it can be denominated free, is the creature of the people. It originates with them. It is conducted under their direction and has in view nothing but their happiness. . . . For their sakes government is instituted. . . .

Jefferson wrote:

To secure these rights governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. . . . Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles . . . as to them shall seem most likely to effect their happiness.

Price wrote:

Mankind are naturally disposed to continue in subjection to that mode of government under which they have been born and educated. Nothing rouses them into resistance but great abuses, or some particular oppressions out of the road to which they have been used.

Jefferson wrote:

Mankind are more disposed to suffer while evils are sufferable than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses evinces a design to reduce them to absolute despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government.

Two years after the Declaration of Independence abolished the complicated and disturbing political union between America and England, casting adrift a nation in embryo, the Continental Congress wrote to Richard Price and invited him to remove to America and help them set up a stable form of government. Though only fifty-five, Price felt his age, and was further limited by the ill-health of

his wife, who died a few years later. He wrote to the Congress and declined, but in his letter, he uttered these deeply prophetic words:

"I look to the United States as now the hope, and likely soon to become the refuge, of mankind."

In 1783, Yale University conferred honorary doctors' degrees upon two men in recognition of their services to American liberty. One of these men was General George Washington. The other was the Reverend Richard Price.

## II

In 1787, when the Constitutional Convention met in Philadelphia, not thirteen United States of America (though they had been called that in the Declaration of Independence), but thirteen sovereign nations of white men inhabited the eastern portion of this continent; thirteen nations in the conflicts of whose selfish interests were all the seeds of disunion and even bloodier wars than the one which they had waged against England. "An infinity of little jealous, tumultuous commonwealths," Alexander Hamilton called them, "the wretched nurseries of unceasing discord and the miserable objects of universal pity or contempt."

Plainly, neither the Declaration

of Independence nor the Continental Congress was generally regarded as having created any kind of union. The war effort had united the thirteen colonies briefly against the common enemy. Now their attitude was that the Declaration had asserted their freedom from England, and their independence each from every other one. It was the task of the Constitutional Convention to find a remedy for the evils which arose from an excess of unbridled liberty and disunion.

Richard Price was not at that convention, but most assuredly his *Observations on Civil Liberty* was, though apparently no member of the Convention ever publicly acknowledged its contribution. Written eleven years earlier, it had this to say to George Washington, Benjamin Franklin, John Langdon, Roger Sherman, Alexander Hamilton and the rest who were trying to form a new kind of government in the world:

Though in a great state all the individuals cannot be admitted to an immediate participation in the powers of legislation and government, yet they may participate in these powers by a delegation of them to a body of representatives. In this case it is evident that the state will still be free or self-governed, and that it will be more or less so as it is more or less adequately represented. If the persons to whom the trust of government is committed hold their places for short terms, if they are

chosen by the unbiased majority of the state, and subject to their instructions, liberty will be enjoyed in its highest degree.

Let every state with respect to all its internal concerns be continued independent of all the rest; and let a general confederacy be formed by the appointment of a senate consisting of representatives from all the different states. Let this senate possess the power of managing all the common concerns of the united states . . . together with the sole power of imposing taxes and originating supplies . . . having at the same time the common force of the states to support its decisions.

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There may be the best reasons for joining to such a body of representatives an hereditary council. . . .

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Let there be a supreme executive over all. This will form useful checks in a legislature and contribute to give it vigor without infringing liberty.

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Thus might the scattered force and abilities of a whole continent be gathered into one point, all litigations settled as they arose, universal peace preserved, and nation prevented from any more lifting up a sword against nation.

Thus spoke Richard Price to the founding fathers. We have only to make his senate our dual Congress, substitute our Supreme Court with life tenure for his hereditary council, and we have, almost as if *post-facto*, an outline of the Constitution of the United States of America. Price expressed clearly and concisely the theory of representative

democracy, of a working federation of free states, the preservation of state rights, and the principle of dual fealty to state and to a federation of states. In addition, his pamphlet pointed out the necessity of religious and civil liberty, guarantees by the United States of the inviolability of the several states, and other principles which became parts of the Constitution at its inception, have since become parts of it, or are ideals toward which we strive today.

Yet, amazingly, it was not of a union of the American colonies which Price wrote in 1776, but of a United States of Europe! Europe did not heed him then. Our founding fathers did.

Now we and our allies, marching toward the most important peace that was ever achieved in history, call ourselves "the United Nations," just as thirteen colonies in 1776 called themselves "the United States." Shall we fall apart again after the victory is won, as the American colonies so nearly did in 1783, as the democratic allies did in 1918? Or shall we, the victorious but spent free nations of the world, heed, as our founding fathers did, the words of Richard Price and form a true union that "the scattered force and abilities of a whole world may be gathered in one

point, peace preserved, and nation prevented from any more lifting up a sword against nation?" That, rather than any academic argument about how much Price influenced the writing of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, intimates his true significance today.

Across the generations, these words of Price reach out to us:

While Europe continues divided as at present into a great number of independent kingdoms whose interests are

continually clashing, it is impossible but that disputes will often arise which must end in war and carnage. It would be no remedy for the evil to make one of these states supreme over the rest, and to give it absolute plenitude of power to superintend and control them. This would be to . . . establish an ignominious slavery not possible to be long endured. It would therefore be a remedy worse than the disease.

Written long ago for Englishmen about one continent, it reads as a living commentary for a world now smaller than a continent used to be.



*"Beg pardon — is this country taken?"*

► *A correspondent who knew him  
well in Moscow analyzes*

## THE LEGEND OF SIR STAFFORD CRIPPS

BY ALICE-LEONE MOATS

ON June 22, 1941, Sir Stafford Cripps became a hero to the English people. That was the day Germany attacked the USSR and, somehow, the British public got carried away by the idea that, single-handed, Cripps had put Russia into the war on the right side. The idea caught on and has flourished no less amply in the United States.

It is true that one man was responsible for the lucky event of June 22, but his name was Hitler, not Cripps. The great moment, indeed, overtook Sir Stafford in England, while he was grouching publicly about the futility of his Soviet mission. During his long months in Moscow, he had been treated disdainfully, and on the eve of his departure, even Molotov had flatly refused to receive him. It was in the tense period when a warning of the coming Nazi assault by our own Secretary of State brought him this bouquet from the Moscow *Pravda*: "SENILE CAPITALIST STIRS TROUBLE BETWEEN RUSSIA AND GERMANY." The Cripps warnings had about the

same social success. Soviet officials, until the very last moment, did not risk offending Germany by being polite to Hitler's enemies.

His emergence as a hero must have surprised, most of all, Cripps himself. However, he did not dispute the popular verdict and the legend that he "won over Russia" has prospered. For reasons that defy ordinary logic, the splendid Soviet resistance has somehow served to confirm and fortify the original Cripps illusion.

When he resigned as Ambassador to the Soviet Union in January of this year and returned to London, Cripps was acclaimed on all sides as the man of the hour. The *London Times*, which had previously attacked him, called for his inclusion in the War Cabinet. Newspapers and magazines in England and America ran over with extravagant laudation, singling out for special approbation the gift he had not yet demonstrated — statesmanship. One journalist described him in his triumphant return "as the man who had thawed the ice in the