

The Odd Figure In Ford's Speech

By *Mary McGroary*
Washington Star

Washington

Experience has taught all but a few in Gerald Ford's audience that a State of the Union message is like the month of January. It is long, and it always seems longer than it is.

But this year, a small quiver of anticipation accompanied him into the chamber. Word had gone out that Gerald Ford had discovered Tom Paine and was about to make a Republican of him.

Analysis and Opinion

Tom Paine was manifestly not Gerald Ford's kind of man. He was a hard-rock revolutionary, a turbulent, cantankerous, free-thinking unemployable — certainly not a team-player, and considered radical by his times.

But it quickly developed that Gerald Ford had picked up the firebrand as a bicentennial gesture. He quickly put it down. About all he got from Tom Paine was the title of his most famous pamphlet "Common Sense."

When you say as Gerald Ford did, that "common sense tells me to stick to that steady course," you realize that if the President had led Tom Paine onto the floor, he didn't really ask him to dance.

Tom Paine could hardly be at home in a speech where the chief executive is promising the construction of four new federal prisons. Paine went to jail on several occasions himself. The charge was drunkenness.

Tom Paine was for relief of the poor, pensions for aged people

and public works for the unemployed, all to be financed by the levying of a progressive income tax. "Common sense," Gerald Ford said tells us to look for more jobs in the private sector. He wants tax incentives for business.

Tom Paine won't be asked to have a hand in the writing of the Republican platform if Gerald Ford is the candidate.

Since the false dawn of revolutionary rhetoric was soon dashed, the audience could settle into the traditional tedium of these occasions. For the people of the President's party, it is relieved by the need to clap whenever he pauses. The opposition reverts to its usual occupations: inspection of its fingernails, the brushing of imaginary lint off its coat sleeves, surreptitious study of its already prepared "reaction" to the speech.

The diplomatic corps, which is required to applaud only at the entrance and exit, stared straight ahead. Some representatives of the newer, smaller nations frankly dozed. The foreign policy passage had nothing to awaken them. No Tom Paine there. It was pure Henry Kissinger. National "self-flagellation" is to stop. Congress is to cease its meddling and to reconsider its "hasty action" on Angola.

The whole audience was thus free to speculate on the question that comes most sharply into focus when a President facing reelection is diagnosing and prescribing: will Gerald Ford be giving the State of the Union message at this time next year?

His prospects have brightened. Since Ronald Reagan with his \$90 billion federal budget cut — with state option to take over the slashed programs — has fleetingly conferred the mantle of liberalism on the President.



AP Wirephoto
THOMAS PAINE
A firebrand of early America

Gerald Ford trotted out "compassion and a sense of community," two phrases that have not crossed his lips since Reagan began to rise in the polls.

"Complex welfare programs cannot be reformed overnight," he said boldly. "Surely we cannot simply dump welfare into the laps of the 50 states. . . . and just walk away from it."

Reagan's "clarifications" have only served to illuminate the shallowness and heartlessness of his proposal. The last thing he said was that people could "vote with their feet." By which he meant that citizens deprived by state decision of certain benefits could decamp to another state that might confer them.

And if all the states closed down these mercies: would the roads of the country be clogged with refugees? The phrase "vote with their feet" comes from the Indochina war — one million North Vietnamese traveled South to avoid the Communist government. Even Gerald Ford knows Americans do not like reminders of Vietnam.

Ronald Reagan has in short made Gerald Ford seem like a possessor of common sense although not in Tom Paine's terms,

of course. Mr. Ford is not liberal enough for the true liberals of his party, and he will never be conservative enough for the followers of Ronald Reagan. But with an enemy like that, he plainly feels less friendless.

By the end of his speech, he had returned to his old self. He was quoting Dwight D. Eisenhower, with whom he is plainly more comfortable. The State of the Union message like January, "tries men's souls," as Tom Paine once said.

But it's over now, and we know that the man from Grand Rapids has no revolutionary taint. He's going to go on doing exactly what he's been doing. His declaration will be quickly forgotten, as quickly, as Tom Paine will be forgotten by Gerald Ford.

Betty Reviews Speech

Washington

Betty Ford had a gentle criticism yesterday of the President's state of the Union address — she said it was too long, and she was sorry he didn't voice support for the Equal Rights Amendment.

Though she said she sympathized with the President's problem of having so much he wanted to say, she said the speech should

have been about 35 minutes. It ran 48.

Even though it ran as long as it did, Mrs. Ford said she was unable to get the President to put in a pitch for passage of the Equal Rights Amendment.

"I tried to get it into the State of the Union," but with "so much to say . . . sometimes you lose a certain amount," she said.

Associated Press