



Education and Culture DG

'Europe for Citizens' Programme

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THETFORD TWINNING ASSOCIATION

KING'S HOUSE, KING STREET, THETFORD, NORFOLK, IP24 2AP

TOM PAINE 200
Celebrations

Tom Paine 200 Weekend: Friday 5th - Tuesday 9th June

Feedback on Human Rights and Democracy Issues

As part of the visit to Thetford to celebrate the life of Thomas Paine, son of Thetford and radical, pamphleteer and revolutionary, hosts and guests were asked to consider human rights and democracy issues in their own towns, areas and countries, and to suggest ways that injustices could be resolved, with the aim of addressing these issues on their return to their home towns. These were the points raised:

Sometimes the same point was made by different groups so appears to be repeated here

- The need of better pro-family policy, aiming at more complete social development of children and enabling mothers to start a job - the solution may be the creation of more nursery schools or kindergartens.
- We should enhance the development of children from the commune's villages or pathological background by creating proper conditions for their education and development of personal outside-school interests.
- The need to ensure decent standards of living conditions for people of low economic status - the solution is to develop the social housing system around the town.
- There are many unemployed people with skills - there is a need for a friendly tax policy for the local businesses in order to create new jobs.
- We should ensure a more active participation of disabled people in public life; eg by providing better access for such people to public buildings and means of transport.
- The fact that one has indeed to think long and hard about the question in what way our civic rights are being violated in the country we live in may be indicative of Thomas Paine's influence on our lives today, at least in this part of Europe. We have come to take the freedoms and rights we are enjoying today, for granted. But they are anything but, as our compatriots from the Eastern part of our country can testify. This does not mean we need not be vigilant. In the name of counter-terrorism, our government and authorities may curtail our right to the protection of privacy. The poor turnout in the EU elections is an alarming sign - people must be made aware that if they do not vote, they may be governed by the wrong people.
- The West European nations have integrated Thomas Paine's thoughts in their constitutions. But these rights must be lived and maintained for the future. Human rights

cannot be interpreted differently in different times, depending on current political and social developments. A glaring example of curtailment of an essential human right is the right to political asylum in Germany.

- The fathers of our constitution, against the background of the Third Reich and the Second World War, had a very broad concept of asylum. In the 60 years since the adoption of our constitution, it has become subject to increasing restrictions. We must act to prevent such restriction of basic human rights.
- In Thetford, we have such a multicultural town. Are we including in our activities, all the various ethnic groups. We should work with the local authorities and voluntary groups to ensure that all groups are included and represented.
- In Thetford community, access to language lessons would improve society cohesion. Are they readily available? Contact with the local education authority to encourage more adult education language classes.
- Human Rights entail human responsibilities. People cannot demand their 'Human Rights' without considering their responsibilities to ensure they are not infringing the human rights of others. There is now a great awareness of one's human rights but these need to be tempered with an educated awareness of what this actually means. Eg people should be advised that their rights do not apply to every aspect of life. You can't burgle, vandalise, threaten or bully people and say this is a right.
- However, one does have a right to a decent education, health support and ability to access the countryside but not to run riot over people's private property, or even plant woodlands if they are planted up for public enjoyment.
- It is a human right to have a fair trial, but it is also the human right of victims to get adequate support from the criminal system and the police. It is also the human right of our police not to be attacked and vilified, same as our health and ambulance service and other public servants who after all are all individuals working for the public and on our behalf.
- It is a human right to be treated fairly by council employees and conversely for council employees also to be treated with courtesy and consideration.
- We have a lot of different nationalities. We have also people with a foreign background and a Dutch passport. If something happens then we read in the newspapers or hear on the radio or television 'a Moroccan-Dutch man has ... ' done something wrong. We should not do that because he is a Dutch inhabitant and nationality makes no differences. This is discrimination.
- That Geert Wilders was not allowed to enter England is not right in the freedom of expression!
- Geert Wilders - We think that it was not good that England did not agree for him to come to England. The only way to let him think about his ideas is talking to him. Not the things we had in World War II (Hitler, etc). People we put into camps when they had other ideas; in prison; or they would be killed. Talking to each other is the most important thing and directly respect for people who had another idea.
- Berlusconi - This man is owner of journals and TV stations. He can say: 'If you talk about things I don't want, your job is over!!' Also the same thing about writing. He is a kind of dictator. There could be no freedom of giving your opinion.