

From *Pig's Meat: The Selected Writings of Thomas Spence, Radical and Pioneer Land Reformer*. With an introductory essay and notes by G.I. Gallop. Nottingham: Spokesman, 1982, pp. 76-79.

The Marine Republic (1794)

A Certain man having many sons all bred to a seafaring life, was desirous that they should live together in a just, brotherly, and social manner; and that though he wished to encourage individual industry, and improvement in abilities, by providing that every one should reap the fruits of the same, yet was he determined to form their plan of union in such a manner that none, not even their children, should be so depressed as to be excluded from the common benefits of their birthright and of an equal token of the impartial regard of their common parent. Wherefore one day having called his sons together, he addressed them to this effect:

"My dear boys, my behaviour and conduct towards you, has always been such as to convince you, I was strictly, just, and impartial. You were all equally my delight and care in your infancy, you have been equally provided with the means of Education, and with every comfort and convenience. I have shewn no partiality to any, as being older or younger, I have been in all respects your common parent, and I wish you and your children to live together as my common children for ever, for I extend my parental regard to your offspring through every generation -- Behold, then, this gallant ship, equipped and provided with everything necessary for sea, her rigging and tackle all of the best materials, and admirably adapted to the ocean you have to occupy; amply provided with stores and provisions for a long voyage, and waiting only for intelligent and skilful agents to conduct her whithersoever they will. You my dear boys, are such agents, sufficiently qualified for the adventurous task. *Accept, then my sons of this my precious gift, but remember, I do not give it to one, or two, or a select few, but to you all, and as many of your posterity as shall sail therein, as a COMMON PROPERTY. You shall*

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all be EQUAL OWNERS, and shall share the profits of every voyage equally among you. You shall choose from among yourselves, one fit to be captain, another to be mate, another carpenter, etc., -These officers shall continue in office while you please, and when you please you shall change them for others, that your affairs may be conducted in the best manner possible. At the end of the voyage, or at other stated times agreed upon, you shall settle your accounts; and after paying the captain, the mate, and every other officer and man his wages, according to station and agreement, and all bills for upholding wear and tear, provisions, etc., then the remainder, which is the net profit of the voyage, and which would have been mine had I retained the property of the ship in my own hands, is now your common property, and must be shared equally among you all, without respect to any office anyone may have held. For as I make you all equal owners, so shall you be equal sharers in the profits of each voyage. You are all equal to me, and you shall be all equal in this respect to each other. Let not the captain, who receives the wages of a captain, or any other officer, who receives the wages of his station, murmur that his brethren before the mast, and receive only the wages of common men, should receive share and share alike with himself of the profits. No my dear children, let no such unjust and unbrotherly grudging ever be found among you.

“Again my sons, as I have been just and impartial to you, be ye the same to your children. And when they shall multiply so that you cannot all sail together in the same vessel, provide another ship out of your common profits, for such of yourselves and your sons as shall choose to sail together, which shall be their common property in the same manner as this ship is yours. This do, and live like men and Brethren through all generations. And as a swarm of bees, when grown too numerous for one hive, send off colonies to people new ones, so when the crews of your ships become too numerous, let new ships be built, and manned on the Same equitable plan that I have done, and my blessing go with you.”

These injunctions were received by the young men with inexpressible joy. And having wrote them, they were called the Constitution of their "MARINE REPUBLIC", and swore to maintain them inviolate to the end of time. Then they choose a captain, and other officers, and proceeded on a trading voyage, and being prosperous they shared very considerable dividends both at the end of this, and many future voyages.

In process of time, however, it so happened that these marine republicans were dissatisfied with the government of the country , in which they resided. Wherefore taking all their

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families and all their effects on board, they set sail for America, where they expected to see government administered more agreeably to their notions of equality and equity. But a violent storm arising, they were driven far out of their course, and at last arrived at an uninhabited island of a luxurious soil, and an agreeable climate. Here they gladly landed after much danger, and their ship being so much damaged as to be no more fit for sea, they determined to settle on the island. The ship was now broke up, and houses built with the materials, and preparations were made to cultivate the soil, as they must now think of living by gardening and agriculture. But they foresaw that if they did not apply the Marine Constitution, given them by their father, to their landed property, they would soon experience inexpressible inconveniences. They therefore declared the property of the island to be the property of them all collectively in the same manner as the ship had been, and that they ought to share the profits thereof in the same way. The island they named Spensonia, after the name of the ship which their father had given them. They next choose officers to mark out such portions of land, as every person or family desired to occupy, for which they were to receive for the use of the public, a certain rent according to its value. This rent was applied to public uses, or divided among themselves as they thought proper. But in order to keep up the remembrance of their rights, they decreed that they should never fail to share at rent-time, in equal dividend though ever so small, and though public demands should be ever so urgent.

They now spread considerably over the Country, and houses and workshops were built at the public expense. The space inhabited became too extensive for one district, wherefore they divided it into many, and called them parishes. As they had determined, when seeing that every succeeding ship they should build, and man, should, according to their father's maxim, be the property of the crew, so, in conformity therewith, they decreed, that every district or parish which they should people, should be the property of the inhabitants, and the rents and police of the same at their disposal. Thus they live in union and equality on land, as their father intended

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they should do on sea, and frame and people new parishes, at the public expense, as he designed they should build new ships. A national assembly or congress consisting of delegates from all the parishes, takes care of their national concerns, and defrays the expenses of state, and matters of common utility, by a pound rate from each parish, without any other tax.

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