

WE THE PEOPLE

A Commune Called Plymouth: What the Pilgrims Taught Us About Socialism

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Architect of the Capitol, "Landing of the Pilgrims"

Each Thanksgiving season, we are reminded of the Pilgrims and their early settlement at Plymouth in 1620. The story of the Pilgrims is an important example of one of the first failures of socialism, and

since most of today's youth will be taught a different version of these events, it is crucial we pass this lesson down to our children and grandchildren each year at our own family Thanksgiving celebrations, lest we forget the real meaning of this uniquely American holiday.

The Pilgrims' early settlement, by today's standards, was essentially a socialist commune. The settlers received their clothing, food, and supplies from the colony's "common stock," all farmland was collectively owned, and each family received provisions according to their needs, with the profits of labor being divided equally rather than by what was earned through hard work.

This system quickly led to discontent: The healthy and able-bodied colonists who worked in the fields all day began to resent the colonists who claimed to be ill, frustrated that they received the same amount of food and supplies as those who performed zero labor. The socialist system was also harmful to the health of the Pilgrims: Nearly half of the colonists died of starvation during their first winter in the New World, unable to feed themselves and stay healthy with the colony's shrinking harvest sizes.

Sound familiar?

Unfortunately, none of this is all too different from the system currently in place in Venezuela, a once-wealthy country currently crumbling under a socialist regime. Just like the Pilgrims, Venezuelan citizens today are dealing with major social upheaval, mass starvation, and lack of basic supplies like toilet paper, water, and over-the-counter medicines. The collapse of the country shows the grim reality of living in a socialist “paradise”, with thousands of citizens fleeing the country each month to escape its hellish conditions.

After about two years of famine and disaffection, the Pilgrims finally had a meeting amongst themselves and chose to abandon the socialist system for all of the suffering it had caused. The colony’s new system required each family to take care of themselves, and made the settlers personally responsible for their own means of survival. Colonists were encouraged to grow their own food knowing that there was no “common stock” to provide for them. This led to the entire colony becoming more prosperous—those who earlier claimed

to be intirm became motivated and industrious, with men, women, and youth alike working in the fields eager to reap the benefits of their labor. Interestingly, the settlers in the Jamestown colony went through the same experience and passed a rule: “If you don’t work, you don’t eat.”

These Pilgrims taught us a valuable lesson: Communal arrangements only foster discontent, and the only “cure” for this social collapse is the free market. The only way for a society to prosper as a whole is through hard work and personal responsibility, *not* through promises of equal outcomes.

The Pilgrims saved their settlement by abandoning socialism and embracing the free market. Today’s socialist countries like Venezuela should take a page from their book before it is too late.

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