

Ditching Socialism in the New World A Lesson for 21st-Century Americans

by Governor William Bradford of the Plymouth Settlement,
as presented primarily in his account of the adventures of the Pilgrims titled
*Of Plymouth Plantation*¹

paraphrased by B. Nathaniel Sullivan

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1623

Our situation was dire — a matter of life and death. For two years we had sought to produce our food on the land we had found in the New World. Thankfully we were able to forge an alliance² with the Indian tribe nearby. Also, God gave us a special Indian friend in Squanto,³ who lived among us and helped us in ways we couldn't have imagined.⁴

Some background information might help you better understand our situation. Our congregation of believers left England and moved to Holland⁵ so we would be able to worship God freely; then, after 11 or so

years, we felt compelled to leave Holland⁶ because we were concerned about how the culture was affecting our children. We departed for the New World in 1620, and later in the year than we ideally would have due to circumstances beyond our control.⁷ Our arrival here came after a rough ocean crossing⁸ on the *Mayflower*. We landed⁹ at Cape Cod in the New World on November 11, 1620. Before we even began to explore the land, we knew there was an important matter of business we had to address.

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The Mayflower Compact

We were keenly aware that chaos would erupt if we didn't live together in harmony, so we drafted what is now known as *The Mayflower Compact*.¹⁰ It was our statement that we would unite in one "Civil Body Politic" and obey the laws that were enacted. Unity and harmony had to be preserved. If we didn't stick together, we wouldn't survive!

Even with God's help, this wasn't going to be easy — not by a long shot. Remember, none of us ever had been here before, nor had anyone else we knew. We had no friends to welcome us, nor were there any hotels to check into so we could rest and recover from our difficult voyage across the ocean. Moreover, winter's cold winds and icy storms were about to bear down upon us! Not only that, but the land before us was more than unfamiliar. It was desolate and inhabited by wild animals, and, quite probably, wild men as well!¹¹

A Brutal Winter

The winter of 1621 was especially cruel. Of our party of about 102, half died.¹² My beloved wife Dorothy was one of the first. She was on the *Mayflower* and fell overboard into Provincetown Harbor on December 7, 1620, before the start of the new year; but a great many of us grew sick and perished during the cold winter months. January and February were especially difficult; on some days as many as two or three of our number passed into eternity. And during the worst of it, only about six or seven were well enough to care for the sick and do necessary chores.¹³ You can read the names of those who died and the dates of their deaths (as

best we were able to record them) on this timeline.¹⁴

Winter, however, did not last forever. When spring at last had arrived, God blessed us with an alliance with the neighboring Indians. One of them, Squanto,¹⁵ whom I mentioned earlier, became, not just a friend, but also a brother. His tribe, which a few years before had occupied the very land on which our settlement now was rising, had been wiped out by a plague. Had Squanto not been kidnapped and taken to Europe, he too would have died. He was able to make it back to his home, only to discover when he arrived that none of the members of his tribe had survived. We became his new family.¹⁶

A Dead End that Would Have Killed Us All

The winter turned to spring, and Squanto became a great encouragement to us; but there was a problem that would plague us during the next two years. I come now to the heart of our story. A number of investors in London had financed our voyage to the New World. In turn, they required us to work for them five days out of each week; the remaining two days per week we would be allowed to work for ourselves. After seven years, all profits would be divided equally between us and them. During the five days we worked for them, all our resources had to be held in common. In other words, *no private property!* No one owned any land or resources of his own. Whatever our team of workers generated had to be put into a common store, and individuals would take what they needed for their livelihoods from that same pool.¹⁷

We faced obstacle after obstacle.

As I said, for two years¹⁸ we operated this way. We faced obstacle after obstacle. Those who worked did so begrudgingly, and many would offer excuse after excuse not to work at all. Here are some examples.

- The young unmarried men — those who were strongest and who had the most time and the greatest ability to produce — resented that they were, in effect, being made to work for other men's wives and children, without any additional compensation.
- Whether strong or weak, everyone working, whether he did much or little, would wind up with the same amount of food and other resources as everyone else. If an individual worked a full eight hours in a day, and another worked only two, each received the same. Those carrying the greater load strongly believed this to be an extreme injustice. Can you blame them?
- Experience counted for nothing; the older men felt disrespected by those who were younger.
- Under the communal arrangement, the wives had to cook and do laundry for anyone and everyone — not just their own husbands and families. This angered the husbands, who, along with their wives, felt it was a form of slavery.

All of this was bad enough, but I'm convinced it would have been a lot worse if we hated each other. No one in our congregation was perfect — not by a long shot. Still, we were a people who had common goals and who sincerely wanted everyone among us to have the best. Our company had more than its share of honest and decent men and women.

As dire as our situation was, it would have been a great deal worse if we had hated one another!

Sharing resources sounds so compassionate and compelling! It has great emotional appeal. Operating this way, however, set us at one another's throats. It bred resentment, disrespect, ill will, selfishness, envy, and greed. It was a dead end that would have killed us all.

A Faulty System

On reflection, I have become convinced that it wasn't our fault that this plan didn't work. It didn't work, and it doesn't work, because *it is a faulty plan!* The communal system (often now called socialism) does not fit human nature, and it will fail wherever and whenever it is tried. Few things in this life are more certain.

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Philosophers like Plato¹⁹ called for this kind of communal system (and Plato's call for it foreshadowed the thinking and writings of Karl Marx later on). Yet this plan works only in socialists' minds! Oh, some may sincerely believe that eliminating private property and putting the state in charge of producing and managing everything will create a utopia — but it never will. This idea is a complete fantasy. Socialists actually are pretending to be wiser than God! We are grateful that God showed us a better way.²⁰

The Way Out

We knew we couldn't continue on as we had. Had we done so, all of us would have starved to death. We discussed it thoroughly among ourselves, considering all our options. In the end, we decided that I as governor, taking into account the advice given by the other leaders among us, would assign a tract of land to each family. Each one, in turn, would be responsible to plant corn and other crops for themselves.

In other words, we ditched the communal system. Our investors simply would have to live with that! What kind of return on their investments would they receive if all of us had starved? We traded the failed system for one that emphasized

- the benefits of private property and
- the responsibilities of the owner(s) to effectively manage the resources in his/their charge.

As we assigned the land, we were mindful that larger families would need more resources, so we made our decisions accordingly. We weren't thinking about inheritance or other future matters, but mainly about immediate needs. Children who had been orphaned and other single individuals were assigned to families — and so management of work responsibilities would belong strictly to each family unit. Also — and this is key — so would the crops they produced. In this way, laziness naturally would be penalized, and hard work rewarded.

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The change was remarkable and immediate! Whereas before the men in our

company had looked for excuses not to work and had complained when they did, they now labored willingly and eagerly. More corn was planted than would have been under any other system I or anyone else could have devised. It wasn't just the men, either! Wives and children also worked in the fields, and they apparently wanted to! Before we adopted this system, urging a woman to till the ground and plant corn was thought to be oppressive and mean.²¹

A Path to a Hopeful Future

There's more. Thanks for your patience as I explain even further. Be assured, though, I'm almost done. In November of 1621, the ship *Fortune* arrived²² with about 35 new colonists. The ship brought us mouths to feed, but no supplies; and our rations were cut in half. It wasn't that we wished hardship on anybody, but the additional needs among us made our task even more challenging.

So it's easy to see how the arrival of new colonists made us wary. We limped along as best we could until 1623 when we established private property rights and the free-market system I've described. Soon after we changed our approach — around July and August of that same year — 100 new colonists arrived²³ on two ships, the *Anne* and *Little James*. We wanted them to feel welcome, but it quickly became apparent we needed to clarify some matters with them so no unnecessary misunderstandings would occur.

The settlers who had been around from the beginning worried that when the corn they'd planted ripened, the new members

of the colony would expect they would be entitled to some. With so many mouths to feed, there wouldn't be enough corn to go around.

As I indicated, we'd already adopted the new system, and those who had worked hard to plant their own corn had done so with the understanding that what they harvested would be theirs to enjoy. They preferred to eat the crops they had planted as opposed to being fed from any of the food supplies the ships delivered.

So we reached an agreement. The new arrivals would use the food that had come over with them, and the early members of the colony wouldn't have access to it, except that for which they bargained, or the food they purchased.

This put everyone's mind at ease. You see, it wasn't just the "old-timers" who were worried! The new arrivals actually had been afraid *their* food would be devoured by the settlers who had been around for a while. Isn't it interesting how all of us tend to view others — even friends and potential friends — with a mutual kind of skepticism?²⁴

Editor's note: Don't let this section mislead you! This incident doesn't indicate a free-market system breeds selfishness. Not at all! The tendencies to look out for oneself and to view others skeptically are natural. But the "other side of this same coin" is that with enough to go around, generosity can be encouraged and joyfully practiced. When a person has worked hard to meet his own needs and has a surplus, and when he experiences the satisfaction of hard work and the fruit of his labor, he is free to think about others and to give of his own resources to help them and to meet their needs. As Paul wrote in Ephesians 4:28, "Let

him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need."

The Dawn of a New Day

After the newcomers joined us, it wasn't that long until it was time to harvest our crops. We reaped a bountiful harvest that year, certainly because God had been good to us, but also because the members of the colony had worked hard in both planting and harvesting. In fact, we enjoyed more than enough! Some members of the colony even were able to benefit others because they had enough to sell. Also, through their transactions, they managed to benefit themselves as well by making a profit. Having worked hard, they deserved it! With God's help, we had turned a corner!²⁵

We knew we had much for which to be grateful, and we celebrated that year, thanking God for all His abundant blessings!²⁶

We were so grateful! We celebrated that year, thanking God for all His abundant blessings!

Despite the hardships of the past, and despite other hardships that were yet to come, the future looked bright!

A new day had dawned! I shudder to think what would have become of us if we hadn't ditched socialism!

William Bradford

William Bradford
Governor of the Plymouth Colony

Editor's note: The events at Plymouth actually represent the second time in the New World that proves socialism does not work. The settlers at Jamestown had an experience similar to the Pilgrims'. Read

historian and sociologist Alvin J. Schmidt's summary of what happened at Jamestown and Plymouth — and the implications of both — at <https://bit.ly/3zrc8Pj>.²⁷

Learn More!

To access a six-session Bible study series, *Principles of Economic Liberty: The Biblical Case for Free Enterprise*, visit discoverbedrocktruth.org/freemarketbiblestudy.

Also, you're invited to visit a page offering three more articles for you to read and enjoy. Two of them further examine the experiences of the Pilgrims and offer additional lessons for us as 21st-century Americans, and another explores what America's Founding Fathers

believed about biblical principles addressing Marxism and about the teachings of Marxism itself. You'll find all of these, as well as "Ditching Socialism in the New World" (an online edition of the article you hold in your hand), at <https://bit.ly/3za20iu>.



Dedication

This article is dedicated to the memory of Dr. D. James Kennedy (1930-2007). Dr. Kennedy was the senior pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida for 47 years. Although he was widely known for his emphasis on evangelism (Dr. Kennedy knew how to "keep the main thing the main thing"), he understood as have very few pastors and Christian leaders that socialism is an enemy of Christianity and the church that, unfortunately, is winning hearts and minds every day.

Accordingly, Dr. Kennedy preached against socialism and other manifestations of

Marxism with clarity and consistency throughout his ministry. Today, D. James Kennedy Ministries continues to warn people about socialism and upholds biblical teachings on economics, private property, and personal freedom. It is here, in these very arenas, that fierce spiritual battles continue to be waged. The need for pastors and Christian leaders to speak out as Dr. Kennedy did never has been greater.

You're invited to visit <https://bit.ly/3kpLrGE>, where you'll be able to watch two excellent programs on socialism produced by D. James Kennedy Ministries.

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Notes

¹William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation*. Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. — <https://amzn.to/2DkZMxl>

²<https://bit.ly/2sf8URX>

³<https://bit.ly/2OpFmKl>

⁴Writing about himself and his own people in the third person, William Bradford wrote, “Squanto stayed with them, and was their interpreter, and became a special instrument sent of God for their good, beyond their expectation.” William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (p. 87). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book II, Chapter I.

⁵<https://bit.ly/34pD9UK>

⁶<https://bit.ly/2QZhkqS>

⁷<https://bit.ly/3hKow7a>

⁸<https://bit.ly/2DkV3vH>

⁹<https://bit.ly/2QSFcN6>

¹⁰<https://bit.ly/33hhrRi>

¹¹William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (p. 74-75). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book I, Chapter IX. Go to <https://bit.ly/2XP0Gvz> for more information.

¹²Larry Schweikart, *48 Liberal Lies About American History (that You Probably*

Learned in School), (New York: Sentinel, 2008), 178. Schweikart writes, “Of the *Mayflower’s* 102 Pilgrims who arrived at Plymouth Rock, only 46 remained alive by the following spring.”

¹³Bradford Smith, *Bradford of Plymouth*, (New York: J. B. Lippincott Company, 1951), 146-147. For Bradford Smith’s vivid description of the darkest days of the Pilgrims’ first winter at Plymouth, go to <https://bit.ly/2Dhopv3>.

¹⁴<https://bit.ly/2sfegg1>

¹⁵<https://bit.ly/34oTijQ>

¹⁶In this interview from CBN — <https://bit.ly/2OP9ptw> — Eric Metaxas, who wrote a book about Squanto — <https://bit.ly/2KSkeKk> — states, “And it just so happens that he [Squanto] grew up on the very spot where they had settled. This was his home that had been abandoned, and now he was back in his village, and they basically adopted him. He had no place to go. They became his family.”

¹⁷Schweikart. Go to <https://bit.ly/2XOYnst> for more information.

¹⁸<https://bit.ly/2QR9hfW>

¹⁹<https://bit.ly/2DhrU4u>

²⁰William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (pp. 116-117). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book II,

Chapter IV Go to <https://bit.ly/34mFjo7> for more information.

²¹William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (p. 124). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book II, chapter IV Go to <https://bit.ly/2QWjh7B> for more information.

^{22,23}<https://bit.ly/2rw5euE>

²⁴William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (p. 124). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book II, chapter IV Go to <https://bit.ly/2Dlai8a> for more information.

²⁵William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation* (p. 124). Portcullis Books. Kindle Edition. Edited by Harold Paget. Book II, chapter IV Go to <https://bit.ly/2qMjQpX> for more information.

²⁶D. James Kennedy and Jerry Newcombe, *What If Jesus Had Never Been Born?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1994), 121-122. Kennedy and Newcombe write,

The result [of the Pilgrims' adaption of a free market system] was that the following harvest was a tremendous, bountiful harvest, and abundant thanksgiving was celebrated in America. Had they not gone into private enterprise, it is likely the Pilgrims would have died off. Note it well: When socialism was abandoned, Thanksgiving was established! When socialism is reinstated in America, thanksgiving will be abolished! That is the history of America — a lesson that we have all too easily forgotten.

²⁷ <https://bit.ly/3zrc8Pj>