

A Look Back at Jamestown Shows Why the Social Justice Movement and Socialism, Despite All Their Appeals to Justice, Are Inherently Unjust

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In different places over the years I have had to prove that socialism, which to many western thinkers is a sort of kingdom of justice, was in fact full of coercion, of bureaucratic greed and corruption and avarice, and consistent within itself that socialism cannot be implemented without the aid of coercion. Communist propaganda would sometimes include statements such as ‘we include almost all the commandments of the Gospel in our ideology’. The difference is that the Gospel asks all this to be achieved through love, through self-limitation, but socialism only uses coercion.

—Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn¹—

Key point: You show me the social justice movement and socialism, and I’ll show you systems promoting hard, cold, relentless, and compassionless injustice.

Recently at Word Foundations, I posted a 100-word paragraph against socialism:²

In the early 1600s, settlers at both Jamestown and Plymouth initially sought to produce food and wealth according to a communal system. Workers contributed the fruits of their labors to a “common store” on which all relied. This approach pushed both

settlements to the brink of starvation. The people knew they would starve if they continued operating this way, so they assigned land directly to individuals and families, who then could reap the benefits of their own work. After this change, both communities prospered. History proves socialism leads to bondage and misery, and that free enterprise promotes freedom and prosperity.

In North America even before Karl Marx, two specific attempts at communal arrangements for production and

¹ <https://bit.ly/3EpeOTK>

² <https://bit.ly/3CJsjwn>

allocation of goods and services failed completely. They occurred a decade apart and several hundred miles apart — with amazingly similar results. We’ve already examined what happened at Plymouth,³ but thus far we’ve only mentioned Jamestown. In this post, after making a brief observation about Plymouth, I’d like to describe what occurred at Jamestown and draw lessons from it for Americans today.

Learn about the Pilgrims’ failed 2-year experiment in socialism at “Ditching Socialism in the New World: A Lesson for 21st-Century Americans,” a paraphrase of Governor William Bradford’s account of what transpired.⁴

Plymouth: Lead a Quiet Life

The story of what occurred at the Plymouth settlement is perhaps well represented by Paul’s encouragement to the Thessalonian Christians in 1 Thessalonians 4:11-12. The apostle instructed his readers, “[A]spire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you, that you may walk properly toward those who are outside, and that you may lack nothing.”

³ <https://bit.ly/3RRFEEXE>

⁴ <https://bit.ly/3RRFEEXE>

⁵ <https://bit.ly/3yOD8uP>

Because the Pilgrims saw that the communal approach was creating consternation⁵ among them and actually hindering production, they abandoned it for one that recognized property rights.⁶ At last, families could work hard⁷ with their own hands, produce what they needed to survive, and lead quiet lives. Also, when they were able to create a surplus, they could assist others⁸ who truly needed help. This leaves open the possibility of sacrificing to help others, as well. Charity is not forced, but offered freely. First Thessalonians 4:11-12 fits with what happened in Jamestown as well as Plymouth, but at Jamestown, another passage became especially important.

Jamestown: If You Don’t Work, You Don’t Get to Eat

Second Thessalonians 3:10 offers a principle that absolutely saved Jamestown from extinction. In this verse, the apostle Paul reminded his fellow believers in Thessalonica, “[E]ven when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat.” Second Thessalonians 3:6-12 provides the context:

² Thessalonians 3:6 But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from

⁶ <https://bit.ly/3rHsOkc>

⁷ <https://bit.ly/3yqH11Z>

⁸ <https://bit.ly/3rEm5Yc>

every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. ⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; ⁸nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, ⁹not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us.

¹⁰For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. ¹¹For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. ¹²Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

**If anyone will not work,
neither shall he eat.
—2 Thessalonians 3:10—**

The Settlers at Jamestown Almost Died Off

In the early 1600s, Europeans could hear the call of the New World. It wasn't just adventure that compelled men to dream

and to plan, either; it was profits. London's Virginia Company pulled together the investors and the resources it needed to launch a voyage across the Atlantic in late 1606⁹ — with the hope of a financial return as the planned settlements in America would take root and grow. Commanded by Captain Christopher Newport, 120 men in three ships — *Susan Constant*, *Godspeed*, and *Discovery* — ventured forth from England toward America, even as they faced the onslaught of winter.¹⁰

"They made land," writes historian William Bennett,

but the start was inauspicious. Naming their first settlement after their king, in the spring of 1607 the Jamestown settlers began building a village that could be defended against both Spanish raiders and Indians. Few of the first settlers in this stronghold on the James River had any knowledge of farming, and the first attempts at communal sharing of all food and supplies resulted in near starvation. Diseases — malaria, typhoid, dysentery, and yellow fever — were the direct result of locating the settlement on marshy, swampy land. With many deaths and with discipline breaking down, it seemed this

⁹ <https://bit.ly/2GHLp9T>

¹⁰ William J. Bennett, *America, the Last Best Hope— Volume 1: From the Age of Discovery to a World at War*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2006), 33.

attempt, too, would fail.¹¹ These early years were known as the Jamestown colony's "Starving Time."

Then came Captain John Smith. He quickly imposed firm discipline on the colony, discarding the ineffectual sharing system and replacing it with incentives for hard work.¹²

Many more difficult days lay ahead for the residents of Jamestown, but with Smith's enforcement of an important biblical mandate (2 Thess. 3:10), the colony had turned a corner. Smith's bold leadership saved it from almost certain extinction.

What Did John Smith Tell the Colonists?

Capitan Smith was Jamestown's council president.¹³ He took the reins of leadership at the settlement on September 10, 1608.¹⁴ He "simply assumed control....[He] imposed military discipline and order and issued the famous biblical edict, 'He who will not work will not eat.'"¹⁵

Here's what Captain Smith told the Jamestown settlers:

Countrymen, the long experience of our late miseries, I hope is sufficient to persuade everyone to a present correction of himself, and think not that either my pains, nor the Adventurers' purses, will ever maintain you in idleness and sloth. I speak not this to you all, for diverse of you I know deserve both honor and reward, better than is yet here to be had; but the greater part must be more industrious, or starve. However you have been heretofore tolerated by the authority of the Council, from that I have often commanded you. You see now that power resteth wholly in myself: you must obey this now for a Law, that he that will not work shall not eat (except by sickness he be disabled). For the labors of thirty or forty honest and industrious men shall not be consumed to maintain an hundred and fifty idle loiterers. And though you presume the authority here is but a shadow, and that I dare not touch the lives of any but my own must answer it: the Letters patents shall each week be read to you, whose

¹¹ Douglas Binkley, *American Heritage History of the United States*, Viking Penguin, New York: 1998, p. 30. — cited by William Bennett (see footnote #12).

¹² William Bennett.

¹³ Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen, *A Patriot's History of the United States: From Columbus's Great Discovery to the War on Terror*, (New York: Sentinel, 2004), 17.

¹⁴ Robert Morgan, *100 Bible Verses that Made America: Defining Moments that Shaped Our Enduring Foundation of Faith*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2020), 8.

¹⁵ Schweikart and Allen.

Contents will tell you the contrary. I would wish you therefore without contempt seek to observe these orders set down, for there are now no more Councilors to protect you, nor curb my endeavors. Therefore he that offendeth, let him assuredly expect his due punishment.¹⁶

This, of course, is 17th-century English, and you might not understand all Captain Smith said. Let me paraphrase it for you. Imagine Captain Smith bellowing out these orders at a community meeting at which all the colonists were present.

OK, everyone! Listen up! We've had a tough time as of late, but I hope our hardships will help you correct your ways so our situation will improve. I'm putting you on notice today! If I have anything to do with it, from this point forward, things *are* going to change, and change for the better! And you're going to help me! Jamestown still can succeed, and each one of us is going to work together make that happen! Be forewarned, though — we still have some hard days ahead.

No longer will anyone be able to opt out of doing his share of the work. If you think either I or those who've invested in our effort to settle here will put up with laziness any longer, think again! Not everyone has been lazy — I want to make that crystal clear. Everyone who has done his

part deserves credit. The few who *are* doing their duty, however, can't produce enough food and other resources for everyone. It's that simple. If we have 30 or 40 workers and 150 shirkers, that won't cut it! Most of you, to your shame, have shunned your responsibilities to this settlement and are loitering while less than a quarter of the group are putting forth their best efforts!

So, here's what's going to happen from this point forward. You'll either work or starve — take your pick! Your laziness has been tolerated long enough by the Council, and it will be tolerated no longer. I'm in charge now, and I assure you, I'm no pushover. This is now a law by which we will operate: *If you do not work, you will not eat.* Again, let me be clear so no one misunderstands. I'm not talking about you who *can't* work. If you're sick or for some other legitimate reason are unable to till the ground or plant, we will understand that. Otherwise, excuses not to work will be seen for what they are — lame excuses.

I conclude with a warning. If you think I don't mean what I say or that I don't really have the authority to follow through on what I'm telling you will happen if you continue to shun your responsibilities, stop kidding yourself.

¹⁶ <https://bit.ly/3MjOiwV>

Work or starve! That's your choice! If you're smart, you'll choose to work, and you'll work with a good attitude. If, on the other hand, you choose not to work, then be assured you are making the choice not to eat. No exceptions!

Thanks to Smith's strong leadership, Jamestown survived: "He stabilized the colony, and in the second winter, less than 15 percent of the population died, compared to the more than 60 percent who died just a year earlier."¹⁷

The Social Justice Movement's Ties to Socialism

When Captain Smith laid down the law that only those who worked would eat, Jamestown began to jettison a communal system in favor of one more closely aligned with the free enterprise economic model. Jamestown would transition to free enterprise through a process,¹⁸ not instantaneously overnight. Governor Thomas Dale¹⁹ would implement additional reforms, including the introduction of property rights. With regard to prosperity, property and

property rights are linchpin issues.²⁰ Their importance cannot be overstated.

Because socialism is an unjust system, Smith's leadership moved Jamestown away from practicing injustice, and toward a far more just and fair approach.

Even so, the first step taken by Captain Smith was significant. How significant? Because socialism is an unjust system, Smith's leadership moved Jamestown away from practicing injustice, and toward a far more just approach. Allow me to illustrate.

Justice Is Hindered by the Social Justice Movement and Socialism but Is Given Fertile Ground in Free Market Economies

In his book *How Capitalism Saved America, The Untold History of Our Country, from the Pilgrims to the Present*,²¹ Thomas J. DiLorenzo cites two experts in the history of economics — Gary Walton and Hugh Rockoff. Walton and Rockoff illustrate in simple terms what happened in Jamestown — and what essentially happens everywhere workers are put under a socialist

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ <https://bit.ly/3ehdAPH>

¹⁹ <https://bit.ly/3RQjAwu>

²⁰ <https://bit.ly/3CLdLwk>

²¹ Thomas J. DiLorenzo, *How Capitalism Saved America, The Untold History of Our Country, from the Pilgrims to the Present*, (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2004), 55.

economic system and instructed to contribute to a community store through their labors and to draw from that same store to address their needs. Here's a summary of the scenario Walton and Rockoff present.

Ten workers collectively "own" land (actually, the government owns it) on which they are to produce 100 bushels of wheat. Thus, each worker will, according to the plan, have 10 bushels to consume once the wheat is harvested. One worker, however, begins to slack off. His slothfulness, the willful neglect of his duty, his napping, or any other distraction causing him to work less than everyone else — any of these or a combination of two or more — result in a reduction of his work contribution and output by 50 percent. If everyone else performs as planned (this is highly unlikely to happen) but this one worker does not, the collective output of wheat will be 95 bushels as opposed to 100.

The other nine workers are not stupid. They understand they'll receive 9.5 bushels of wheat at the end of the harvesting season, even though they worked as much as called for by the original plan — one that said they would receive 10 full bushels. The nine also realize that that the worker who shirked

his duty labored only half as much as everyone else.

Do you see what has happened? *One worker* performs 50 percent of his expected work load, and *everyone* gets 5 percent less than the plan originally called for. While it's true the shirker gets a half bushel less than the plan originally stipulated, he gets *4.5 bushels for which he did not work*.

Realizing the communal arrangement may also afford them the opportunity to get more by working less, *all the other workers* will substantially reduce their efforts. The collective output soon will be reduced to almost nothing.

Soon, realizing that the communal arrangement may also afford them the opportunity to get more by working less, *all the other workers* will reduce their efforts, and more than likely, reduce them substantially. Soon the planned output of 100 bushels becomes a real output of next to none!²²

Unjust!

Aside from the practical, ominous reality of a real lack of productivity, please do not miss this vital point: Despite all of the

²² Gary M. Walton and Hugh Rockoff, *History of the American Economy*, 8th ed. (New York: Dryden Press, 1998), 30. — cited in Thomas J.

DiLorenzo, *How Capitalism Saved America* (see footnote #21).

cries in favor of this kind of system to achieve justice through equal outcomes, *equality of outcomes is an unjust goal!* Just ask the nine workers who didn't shirk their work responsibilities and received a half bushel less than they expected, even as they watched an individual who worked only half as much as they did receive four-and-a-half bushels for which he did not work! Do *you* think such a system is just? What would you say about this system if you were one of the nine laborers in the wheat field?

Socialism is inherently *unjust* — and so is the social justice movement, which seeks to push society toward socialism!

The social justice movement calls for²³ “the redistribution of wealth supposedly for the common good of all.” Socialism is set up²⁴ to achieve this kind of redistribution — all in the name of “justice” and “the common good.” Yet, if we truly are honest, if we are advocating a biblical definition of justice or even just a conventional definition,²⁵ it

is *undeniable* that a system producing equal outcomes for unequal amounts of work (as the social justice movement advocates and as socialism does), is inherently *unjust*.

Exercising and promoting authentic justice means²⁶ “rendering (1) impartially and (2) proportionally (3) to everyone his or her due (4) in accord with the righteous standard of God’s moral law.”

**Remember Plymouth;
Remember Jamestown.**

This Thanksgiving and all year round, don't allow yourself to be misled about the social justice movement and socialism. Despite all the “feel good” rhetoric, these don't promote justice, but *injustice*.

And it is authentic justice America needs to rediscover and uphold. Will you help her recover true justice?

²³ <https://bit.ly/3SPxAYT>

²⁴ <https://bit.ly/3SPxAYT>

²⁵ <https://bit.ly/2K2vwcz>

²⁶ <https://bit.ly/3ee2qvh>