

Lesson Thirty-One

An Experiment In Communism

LESSON IDEA

To expose communism as the age-old failure it is by recounting the hardships it brought to the Pilgrims — a community of Christians who tried to “share all things in common.”

PREPARATION

Review Lesson 7 (communal living in the Jamestown settlement). And collect some example of life under communism in such countries as Cuba, China, and the former Soviet Union.

OUR STORY BEGINS nearly four centuries ago along the banks of the Witham River in Scrooby, England. Here, in 1606, members of a small church were denied the right to worship according to their beliefs. Indeed, many were jailed for daring to establish a church that espoused doctrines contrary to the official Church of England. By the autumn of 1607 the persecution had become so intolerable that they decided to flee to Holland. But the King, determined to stop such emigration, ordered the ports closed to all who did not have a license to leave England.

One member of the persecuted congregation, William Bradford, was a youth of 17 at the time. He was learned, well read, and fluent in numerous languages. In addition to Dutch and French, a friend would later write, “The Latin and Greek he also mastered. But the Hebrew he most of all studied, because, as he said, he would see with his own eyes the ancient oracles of God in their native beauty.”

In a letter to his parents, apologizing for disobeying their wishes (they supported the official church), he stated:

Wherefore, since it is for a good Cause that I am likely to suffer the disasters which you lay before me, you have no cause to be either angry with me or sorry for me. Yes, I am not only willing to part with everything that is dear to me in this world for this Cause, but I am also Thankful that God hath given me a heart so to do, and will accept me so to suffer

for Him.

And suffer these earnest Christians certainly did. The captain they hired betrayed them to British authorities, and all were seized before their ship reached the ocean. They were persecuted, and many were jailed, but despite such obstacles most managed to reach Holland within a year.

The new arrivals found the adjustment to life in a foreign country quite difficult. Jobs were scarce, housing was poor, and the future at times looked bleak indeed. They had religious freedom, but little else.

After ten years in Holland, these Christians, whom we know as the Pilgrims, decided to hazard the long and dangerous voyage across the Atlantic Ocean to settle in America. Pooling resources and borrowing what money they could, they chartered two vessels and, in July 1620, set off for the New World.

At first, fortune seemed to frown on the voyage. There were quarrels with other passengers, conflicts with the captains, and squabbles among themselves. Within hours of leaving the English coast, the captain of the first vessel (the *Speedwell*) insisted his craft was leaking so badly that it was not seaworthy. He returned to port. Soon the second ship followed. Can you give the name of the second ship? Yes, it was the *Mayflower*.

Following a few repairs, the *Speedwell* was deemed seaworthy, but its captain remained doubtful that it was. After additional delays, the Pilgrims decided to crowd together aboard the *Mayflower* and make the voyage in just that ship alone. Before leaving England for the last time, however, these courageous Christians drew up an agreement (not the Mayflower Compact) declaring how lands, goods, and produce would be divided once they reached the New World. Here are some of the terms of that contract:

The persons transported ... shall continue their joint stock and partnership together the

