
The Truth About Colonies

by Herbert N. Casson

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The whole history of “socialist” colonies is blotted with failures on every page. *There is not today, and there never has been, a single successful socialist colony in America.*

I held different opinion, two years ago, and it cost me \$1,000 and an almost fatal attack of typhoid fever to discover the truth. Those who read the *Appeal* may get the facts without paying so much.

A business enterprise is not a success when its promoters are forced to live on dry bread, beans, and cowpeas. It is not a success when it brings a salary of 50 cents a week, with which all necessities except food and lodging must be bought. It is not a success when it can give no better lodging than tar-paper shanties that the miners of Idaho would refuse to sleep in. A colony is not a success when it isolates its members from nearly all the advantages which the 19th Century has developed, and condemns them to hardships of wilderness pioneers. It is not a success when it requires a 10-horsepower heroism from every member to enable him to remain loyal to the experiment. It is not a success when at least one-third of the women members are heart-sick and dejected at the conditions under which they and their children are living. It is not a success when half of the members remain in it simply because they lack the means to get out of it. It is not a success when it fosters the spirit of wrangling, hatred, and intolerance, and leads as inevitably to splits as rivers lead to the sea.

These or similar faults are true of every colony in the country. They are true of Ruskin Colony, in spite of the assistance of hundreds of generous friends, who have been continually sending in gifts of money and tools. Personally, I have a warm affection for the present members. They are noble-spirited and earnest people, but their attempt is impossible and unwise.

The same faults and many others are true of the Equality Colony in Washington, which was founded by N.W. Lermond, and deserted by him in a most inexcusable manner. Its unfortunate members have never had a cent's worth of peace or comfort since they started. Lermond is daring to advertise once more for victims to pledge a million dollars for a colony, and it is for the special purpose of warning socialists against such promoters that these lines are written.

The Christian Commonwealth of Georgia is a similar failure. Its members are in most deplorable need of less religion and more food. The average garment worker here in the East side of New York has better food and lodging and more of the pleasures of life than Mr. Gibson's half-starved disciples. As to the smaller colonies in Colorado and Texas, I have been informed by reliable men who have seen them that their members are having a hand-to-hand fight with hunger. In almost every instance, the members of these colonies work harder and get less for their labor than they did in the world of competition. They necessarily work at a disadvantage. They oppose hand-labor to machine-labor, which is like arming soldiers with bows and arrows against men with Mausers. They ignore the value of specialists in production, and thus produce an inferior quality of goods. They can find no market except by appealing to the sympathy of socialists, who buy their stuff for the sake of the "cause." Even under a competitive system of business, thousands can save enough money to join a colony, but no member ever yet left a colony with more money than he had when he joined it.

The social problem is not one of endurance. It is not a question of heroism and hardihood, else it might be settled by colonies. It is the question of how to raise the standard of living for the average man, not how to lower it. So far as the "spirit of

brotherhood” is concerned, there is no more of it in a colony than there is anywhere else among socialists. Is it not a fact that the socialists who remain outside of the colony do a great deal more for the colonists than the colonists do for them? Every paper published by a colony soon becomes a begging circular, asking for help from the very people whom the colony is supposed to be rescuing from poverty. Instead of being a haven of security to which the plundered toiler can fly, these colonies are generally groups of unfortunate people who have spent all their money for a tract of worthless land, and who are now beseeching the aforesaid plundered toiler to help them out of the scrape.

No one can doubt that men and women of the highest ideals may be found in colonies, but the best way to help them is to find them jobs outside, where they can once more be in touch with the actual world, and not absorbed in building up a little artificial world of their own. Mayor [Samuel M. “Golden Rule”] Jones of Toledo has recently been attacked by a champion of colonies for expressing the following opinion: “The colony idea is too narrow; my socialism includes the last and lowest man on the planet.” The mayor is quite right. He practices what he preaches, without running off to the woods to do it. He has done more to spread the ideas and the spirit of socialism than all the colonies since the days of Daniel Boone. Close-communion socialism is not the kind we need. Our policy is to permeate, not to segregate. If the heroism that is being wasted in colonies were spent in circulating good books and papers a great deal more would be accomplished.

The task of the evolutionary socialist is to remove prejudice, and to scatter collectivist ideas among all sorts and conditions of men. We have no right to huddle together, as if we were saints and all other folks were sinners. We should rather stay with the crowd, teach them what we know, and *learn more*.

Edited by Tim Davenport

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