

Roundtable
By
J.E. Clarke

Copyright 2016
Janetgoodman@yahoo.com
917-328-5253

FADE IN ON:

INT. TELEVISION STUDIO - DAY

SIX GUESTS sit in a circle. A packed AUDIENCE watches closely. Excitement in the air.

Host HUNT BIXLOW strolls to the center stage. Perfect hair. Cheesy grin. Maury Povich would be impressed.

A SUPER flashes on screen: The People's Debate, Monday edition. *Socialism, Pro and Con.*

Hunt turns to his guests. Picks the TRUCK DRIVER first.

HUNT

Welcome to the People's Debate. You first, Sir; you look informed!

The truck driver grins around a wad of tobacco, nods.

HUNT

As you know, there's been tons of talk recently regarding what services the government should provide. Everyone'll be voting on the referendum this Friday. One that'll impact folks like you - the hard working cornerstone of society. When you draw the curtain closed and vote... What will YOU decide?

The Trucker wrinkles up his bearded face.

TRUCKER

You call me "hard working"? Well, you're right. Everyone in my family is. From my great grandfather, on down. No-one's takin' my taxes, just to give those slackers free stuff!

Hunt levels his mike at the Trucker's face.

HUNT

So, that'd be a "yes" on the vote?

TRUCKER

You're damned straight. Let them welfare queens pay for services on their own!

Guest #2 - a BLEACH BLONDE HOUSEWIFE (50s) - applauds.

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

You give 'im Hell, Howard!

HUNT

Madam, your turn. What would you say?

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

That this ain't no Socialist country.
Anyone who don't like it, can go home!

A TEEN ACTIVIST (scrawny, 18) raises his arm. At first, Hunt ignores him. But eventually shuffles his way.

HUNT

You, Sir. What's your name?

ACTIVIST

Bernard Stein. I have a rebuttal, if you don't mind.

HUNT

On the People's Debate, we air *all* sides. Our other guests have made sure their formidable voices are heard. Pull up a chair, and have your say.

The Activist points to the Housewife. Who pouts.

ACTIVIST

She wasn't using the term right.

HUNT

What "term" do you mean?

ACTIVIST

"Socialism", Mr. Bixlow.

HUNT

Please, call me "Hunt". And go on.

ACTIVIST

Socialism as a philosophy is defined as government controlling the means of production. Which isn't what we advocate.

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

It's Commie thinking. Which is evil!

The Truck Driver swallows his chew and snorts.

TRUCKER

Philosophy - who needs it? That's Bullshit. Weasel words. True men deal with sweat. And hard work. Not wishy-washy ideas!

Hunt perks up. A terrific lead-in for his next guest.

A COLLEGE PROFESSOR (40s) in a suit. Given the tailoring, he's never wanted for money in his life.

HUNT

Audience, please join me in welcoming Professor Paul from Knoxville University. Dr. Paul: since Philosophy is now a talking point - I believe you have credentials there too?

PROFESSOR PAUL

Indeed, I have.

Professor Paul gestures towards the Activist. Condescension drips from his voice.

PROFESSOR PAUL

I'm afraid our young friend here is cherry picking words out of context. By definition, taxation for "governmental services" is morally wrong. Anything people need will be provided by the free market. Something bureaucrats can't handle. Right?

Professor Paul swivels towards the Truck Driver, next.

PROFESSOR PAUL

I beg to differ with you, too. Just a bit. Ideas and Philosophy *do* matter. But our conclusions do agree.

ACTIVIST

But the free market has it's limits. The greater good -

PROFESSOR PAUL

Has been used to justify atrocities since the dawn of time. Look at Stalin's Russia...

ACTIVIST

But that was a dictatorship. And Communism, which is a different thing.

PROFESSOR PAUL

(laughs)

Lad, that's a slippery slope you're leading us down. As a wise man named Carson once said: "If you buy the premise, you buy the bit." If people can be taxed for services they don't want, that's slavery. What part of *that* do you not understand?

ACTIVIST

But what if it's something that's needed?

The fourth guest pipes up: A GIRL (17) in designer clothes. Fashion's her passion, not debates.

GIRL

What about *my* opinion? This is a democracy. So it counts!

HUNT

(grins)

Especially pretty ones, such as yours.

The audience APPLAUDS Hunt's charm.

GIRL

(points at the Activist)

Well, *I* think that man is un-American. Like the guy with the cap said over there: if you want stuff, all you gotta do is work real hard. Like my Daddy. He's the CEO of *Bylock Industries*.

Hunt's eyes widen, like he's surprised. And he hadn't been briefed before.

HUNT

That's impressive! *Bylock Industries* is a financial powerhouse, generating a billion dollar profit every year.

GIRL

No-one gave my *Daddy* handouts.

ACTIVIST

Henry Bylock commands a salary of ten million dollars per year. That's one million times more than the average person makes annually.

GIRL

So? He earned it. Cause he's smart!

The sixth guest snorts. MIRANDA (30s), hipster clothes.

MIRANDA

Inheriting the family business is smart?

GIRL

Daddy did lots of good business deals.

MIRANDA

Your *Daddy* went bankrupt three times. If he'd invested passively in the S&P500, he'd be worth far more now.

The teen girl puffs out her augmented chest.

GIRL

You're just jealous. This is the land of opportunity. If you want money, get a job!

MIRANDA

You mean, one that pays minimum wage? Not near enough to live?

GIRL

Then that's *your* fault, not his. You want more? Then go to college. Get a degree.

MIRANDA

I did. And graduated with top honors.

GIRL

In Basket Weaving 101?

The audience ROARS approval. This is what they came for: a catfight. Miranda lowers her tone, won't take the bait.

MIRANDA

No. Programming. But now my skills are... out of date.

TRUCKER

Then go back to college again. Shit!

The housewife mutters under her breath.

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

Bitch.

MIRANDA

College is too expensive. How?

TRUCKER

Use whatever you bothered to save. Instead a' wasting it on trivial things.

ACTIVIST

Trivial? You mean paying the rent?

Hunt raises a manicured hand.

HUNT

I know this is all important. But it's not like it's life or death. I say we should all calm down.

ACTIVIST

Life or death is *exactly* what this is.

PROFESSOR PAUL

(takes a deep breath)

That's the problem here. These days, people think with *emotions*, not their minds. If you study Economics, you'll know the free market is a marvel of equilibrium. Which works wonders when left alone. Regulation's the problem. Capitalism is not. It's the only moral solution there is.

MIRANDA

We're not saying Capitalism is "wrong". Just that - in *certain* markets - alternatives are required for meritocracy to survive.

PROFESSOR PAUL

How so? Be specific.

ACTIVIST

The pharmaceutical industry, for instance.

TRUCKER

What about it? Commie punk...

The Activist turns to Professor Paul.

ACTIVIST

Since we're talking Economics, you know companies will always price products as high as they can, to maximize profits. Not that it's evil. But -

TRUCKER

Damned straight. It's freedom, boy!

ACTIVIST

But the result is people are sometimes priced out of the market. Even for services they need to survive.

PROFESSOR PAUL

Tell that to Adam Smith.

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

Who's that? A new host?

PROFESSOR PAUL

A man who wrote *The Wealth of Nations*, long ago. The best Economics primer the world has seen.

ACTIVIST

Doesn't *Wealth of Nations* assume a level starting point for competitors? Equal opportunity, and a rational consumer base?

The Trucker jumps to his feet. He's had enough.

TRUCKER

Boy, stop playing tricks with words. Anyone really wants something, they oughta work hard for it and save. Don't ask honest folks to pay. You try to take my money, I'll punch your lights out.

The crowd HOWLS, satisfied. Blood lust fills the air. Hunt steps forward, all smiles.

HUNT

Everyone in favor of Liberty, Hard Work and the Free Market, clap your hands!

The crowd responds in unison. Music to Hunt's ears.

HUNT

And who prefers "Socialism"?

The applause cuts off. Not a peep.

HUNT

I guess that says it all.

He points to the Housewife, Trucker, Girl and Prof. Paul.

HUNT

As these good people have made clear, Socialism is a mistake.
(to the Trucker)
You're voting "yes" on the referendum?

TRUCKER

Hell, yeah! Who needs public police?

ACTIVIST

Who's going to protect us, then?

TRUCKER

Hire a bodyguard. Don't steal from me!

MIRANDA

What if a poor woman gets raped because she can't afford Pinkerton?

TRUCKER

Gall darnit, she shoulda saved.

Hunt turns to the Teen Girl.

HUNT

And Public Fire Departments?

GIRL

(sniffs)

Daddy has his own service. He earned every penny he makes. Everyone should pay their own dues.

Hunt nods to the Housewife next.

HUNT

How about public education and libraries?

BLONDE HOUSEWIFE

That's dirty socialism. They can educate their own damned kids!

Prof. Paul is last. Hunt arches a journalistic brow.

HUNT

And the privatization of public roads? I'll leave that last for you.

PROFESSOR PAUL

Under governmental control, roads and bridges crumble. When they're rightly privatized, they'll be better maintained.

ACTIVIST

Why?

PROFESSOR PAUL

For fear of losing customers.

MIRANDA

But who would be *their* competition? Aren't there barriers to entry?

PROFESSOR PAUL

Not if entrepreneurs are free to operate.

MIRANDA

What if some can't pay the toll?

PROFESSOR PAUL

Then they can walk. That's clear.

The Activist raises a trembling hand.

ACTIVIST

In order for society to work right, don't people need certain things? Whether or not they can pay?

TRUCKER

If you want "services" pay your own. We don't need no welfare queens!

Hunt grins at the cameras.

HUNT

All good points, but enough. Sadly, we're out of time. So, now a word from our sponsors: *Baylock Industries*. Providing the *best* euthanasia drugs on the market today. Got Cancer, but no way to pay? Those at *Baylock* feel your pain. For just Two Thousand dollars down, they'll make it stop - right away.

The audience applauds, lesson learned. And entertainment wins again!

FADE OUT: