

# CAUTION: POLITRICKS

By Alan Haehnel

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## CHARACTERS

JOE - a student, the leader of the rightists

SARAH - a student, the leader of the leftists

EMILY - uncomfortable with conflict

CARLA - a rightist

MARK - a mercenary who joins the rightists

SUE and DARLA - two leftists, always together; a bit dense

JANITOR

MIKE - the leader of the crowd whom the factions are trying to convince

REPORTER

CAMERAMAN

BETTY - A leftist

CROWD MEMBERS

Since there are no romantic entanglements or other gender issues, all of the above roles can be played by either men or women. The size of the cast can be manipulated easily by increasing or decreasing crowd members. The show could be staged with a cast as small as 15 or as large as 50.

## DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Though this show could be played with a set and elaborate costumes, I think the message is best conveyed with a bare stage and "normal-looking" characters. This way, the audience will be most likely to ask the question, "Is this a depiction of us?"

## PROP LIST

Money

Push broom

Placards

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**TIME:** Present

**SETTING:** A bare stage

**AT RISE:** *JOE enters, looking around. HE stops center stage, looks out over the audience at a point high on the back wall of the auditorium. HE stares at it for a moment, furrows his brow in concentration, squints, moves to one side slightly, then the other, always with his eyes focused on the same spot. HE is cocking his head to one side when SARAH enters. SHE walks to where JOE is and alternates between looking and JOE's face and the spot on which HE is fully concentrating. At last, SHE speaks.*

SARAH: Hi.

JOE: **(still focused)** Hello.

SARAH: What are you looking at?

JOE: **(pointing)** That thing up there. See it?

SARAH: What thing?

JOE: That. Follow the line of my arm. Sight along it. **(SARAH does)**  
What do you see?

SARAH: The end of you finger.

JOE: You're hilarious.

SARAH: I see it. It's crooked.

JOE: You're darned right it's crooked. I don't like it. What if it falls?

SARAH: Is there somebody up there to fix it?

JOE: I don't know. **(calling out)** Hey, you up there! Hey, somebody!

SARAH: **(joining in)** Hello? Whoever fixes things up there, hello. You've got a crooked thing needing attention.

JOE: Hey, listen up! That's a hazard! Push it to the right!

SARAH: **(turning to JOE)** The right? It needs to go to the left.

JOE: What are you looking at?

SARAH: The same thing you are. The crooked thing that needs pushing to the left.

JOE: Which left are you talking about?

SARAH: What do you mean, "Which left?" Left. **(holding up her left hand)** This side.

JOE: You're crazy.

SARAH: Why? This is my left.

JOE: Yes, it is. But if you think that thing **(pointing out)** needs to be pushed to the left, you are definitely, certifiably insane.

SARAH: Well, it just so happens that I feel the same way about you if you think that it needs to be pushed to the right.

JOE: I don't believe this. Anyone with eyes could see... (**EMILY enters and walks across the stage, not paying attention to SARAH or JOE. JOE stops her.**) Hey! Hey, you.

EMILY: Me?

JOE: Yes. Come help settle an argument we're having.

EMILY: Oh, I'm not generally very good at that sort of thing.

JOE: This is easy. All you've got to do is look right up there. (**HE points**)

EMILY: Where?

SARAH: There. You see that crooked thing, the one that's leaning to the...

JOE: Oh, no, you don't!

SARAH: What?

JOE: Don't you try to influence her. (**to EMILY**) Now, do you see it?

EMILY: It's not straight.

SARAH: Exactly. Now, if you had to say which direction it should be pushed in order to make it straight, what would you say – left or right? (**JOE looks at SARAH suspiciously**) I'm not influencing her; I'm just asking.

EMILY: I would have to say...

JOE: Yes?

EMILY: Well...left.

SARAH: A-ha! That proves it.

JOE: That doesn't prove anything – just that she's crazy, too.

EMILY: Did I say the wrong thing?

JOE: Yes.

SARAH: No. He's just upset because you agreed with me.

EMILY: Oh, dear. What does he think?

SARAH: He thinks it needs to be pushed to the right.

EMILY: I see. Does he need glasses?

JOE: No, I do not need glasses. I just need somebody in his right mind to put that thing straight by pushing it to the right.

SARAH: The left. Majority rules.

JOE: Two people who are wrong do not come close to equaling one person who is right.

SARAH: Then you are really outnumbered because we two are right and you one are wrong.

EMILY: (**exiting**) I'm not comfortable with conflict.

SARAH: (**stopping EMILY**) Stay here. You took a stand, the correct one; defend it.

JOE: **(to EMILY)** Go ahead and leave. Go get your eyes checked.

**(unnoticed by JOE, SARAH, and EMILY, CARLA enters and looks out at the spot in question)**

SARAH: **(to EMILY)** Pay no attention to him. He's simply being a poor sport. A sore loser.

JOE: And you're simply refusing to see the truth. Leftist.

SARAH: Well, if we're resorting to labels, then, I guess you're just a rightist.

JOE: Right as in correct.

SARAH: Right as in the opposite of left. Right, in this case, as in wrong.

EMILY: Right as in might need some eyeglasses.

SARAH: **(to EMILY)** That's the spirit!

JOE: **(to EMILY)** Who asked you?

SARAH: **(to JOE)** Don't you yell at her!

CARLA: **(coming forward between SARAH and JOE)** Excuse me. Has anyone noticed that crooked thing up there?

ALL OTHERS: Yes!

CARLA: Well, have you told anyone? That looks dangerous. If it doesn't get pushed to the right, it could hurt someone.

JOE: At last, a sensible person. Forgive me, but just for the record, would you repeat what you just said?

SARAH: We heard her. She said the thing needs to be pushed to the left or it might hurt someone.

EMILY: **(to SARAH)** But I thought she said...

SARAH: Shhh.

CARLA: I most certainly did not say that.

SARAH: That's what I heard.

JOE: Then you'd better get both your ears *and* your eyes checked.

CARLA: I said it needs to be pushed to the right or someone could get hurt.

SARAH: The left, did you say?

JOE: Now, cut that out.

CARLA: **(to JOE)** Is she brain-damaged?

JOE: I'm beginning to think so.

EMILY: All right, fine. So now there are two of you. Two rightists. What does that prove? Only that one more person in the world can be totally wrong.

JOE: I think you two proved that quite a while ago, thank you.

CARLA: **(to JOE)** Do they actually think the thing needs to go to the left?

JOE: Hard to believe, isn't it?

CARLA: But what if one of them should get a hold of the thing? If they go pushing it to the left, there's no question it will fall. Their sort of thinking is a menace.

JOE: I couldn't agree with you more.

***(CARLA and JOE pantomime discussing the issue more as SARAH and EMILY begin speaking. The two factions – the “LEFTISTS” and the “RIGHTISTS” – have gradually moved away from one another to opposite sides of the stage.)***

SARAH: You know, I have got a very bad feeling about this.

EMILY: Me, too. I really don't like conflict.

SARAH: Buck up! You're in this now, and I need you to be strong for the cause.

EMILY: I'll try.

SARAH: That's the spirit.

EMILY: Just one question.

SARAH: What is it?

EMILY: Couldn't we just disagree about that thing up there but still get along otherwise?

SARAH: That would be a fine idea except for the fact that those two over there...

***(The focus shifts to JOE and CARLA as SARAH and EMILY pantomime their continued conversation.)***

JOE: ...are just not reasonable.

CARLA: Absolutely. You can't talk to them. They don't think the way we do.

JOE: That's precisely the problem. How can we even consider trying to deal with them when we have nothing in common? There is something radically wrong with their brains.

CARLA: Meanwhile, while they're off talking nonsense, that thing is still crooked, still in extreme need of being pushed to the right.

SARAH: ***(overhearing the last words CARLA has spoken)*** To the left!

CARLA and JOE: The right!

SARAH and EMILY: The left!

CARLA and JOE: Right!

SARAH and EMILY: Left!

***(MARK enters, whistling and oblivious)***

MARK: Hey, everybody, what's going on? **(ALL turn to MARK suddenly, both sides eager for a new recruit)** Whoa, there. Whatever you're talking about, I didn't do it.

**(The four other characters run to MARK and pull him forward to show him the object of their argument. JOE and CARLA pull him on one arm, SARAH and EMILY on the other.)**

JOE: Look up there!

SARAH: Look!

MARK: I'm looking, I'm looking!

CARLA: Answer yes or no. Do you or do you not see that thing tilting dangerously up there?

MARK: Yes. I see it.

JOE: Yes or no, remember...doesn't it need to be moved to the right?

SARAH: **(to JOE)** Wait a minute! Whatever happened to not making suggestions?

JOE: **(to SARAH)** These are desperate times! People need guidance and protection when you leftists are around.

SARAH: **(grabbing MARK and pulling him close)** Listen, I've got to warn you – those people are crazy. Bonkers. Out of their minds. **(to EMILY)** Right?

EMILY: Left! I mean, bonkers. Crazy. They are.

JOE: **(pulling MARK to his side)** You're an intelligent person. Anyone can see that.

CARLA: I could see that right away.

JOE: No intelligent person would want to get mixed up with those leftists over there. They are bad news. Totally disreputable. Now, all you have to say in order to join us is, "Yes, that thing clearly needs to be tipped to the right."

CARLA: Believe me, it's the only right thing to do.

SARAH: **(pulling MARK back)** You'll regret it! Just say "Left," and you're home free.

EMILY: Left. Left, left, left.

JOE: **(to the "LEFTISTS")** Unhand him! **(to MARK)** For your own good, listen to me.

EMILY: **(to MARK)** They can't be trusted. Be with us.

**(MARK suddenly breaks free from both sides, raising his hands for silence. Everyone quiets down. MARK looks up at the thing for a long moment. All of the characters behind him lean forward, waiting for his decision. Finally, MARK's face relaxes as if HE has come to some conclusion.)**

MARK: I have only one thing to say.

ALL: What?!

MARK: (**looking first to one side, then the other before speaking**)

How much? (**the other four characters look at each other and mumble questioningly before MARK interrupts them**) To tell you the truth, folks, after examining the situation carefully, I have concluded that I could easily go either way on this issue. What I am asking you is, how much, in exact dollars and cents, do you value my loyalty?

SARAH: That's blackmail.

JOE: Have you no morals?

MARK: (**exiting**) Suit yourselves. I'm a busy guy.

CARLA: (**stopping him**) Wait. Look, I have \$36.00 with me right now. What do you say?

MARK: I say, gee, it looks to me as if that thing is in definite need of a push to the right. It's amazing how clear that is now. Unless, of course, there is a counter offer.

SARAH: (**to EMILY**) What have you got on you? I've only got \$10.00.

MARK: How could I have missed it? To the right it is. Although I still might be persuaded...

EMILY: (**to SARAH**) I was on the way to give a donation to the homeless shelter. I really hadn't intended to...

SARAH: Listen, when you join a cause, you have to make sacrifices. Let the homeless take care of themselves. How much have you got?

EMILY: I have \$42.00.

MARK: (**overhearing SARAH and EMILY**) I don't believe it. All of a sudden, that thing looks to me as if it needs to go to the left. How did that happen? It's as clear as day.

JOE: Hold it right there. I have in my pocket, right at this very minute, 23 dollars and (**counting change**) 78 cents. That puts our offer at \$59.78.

MARK: Oops, I guess I was mistaken about that left idea. Going once to the right...

SARAH: (**to EMILY**) Don't you have any more?

EMILY: What about you? You're only putting in \$10.00.

MARK: Going twice to the right...

SARAH: (**to MARK**) Listen, how about an I.O.U.?

MARK: Strictly cash. The bidding stands at \$52.00 for the left and \$59.00...

CARLA: \$59.78.

MARK: \$59.78, thank you, for the right. Do I hear any further offers?  
**(JOE and CARLA look smugly at one another, SARAH looks desperately at EMILY, but EMILY signals that SHE doesn't have anything else to give.)** Nothing? Last chance... Sold to the right for \$59.78!

**(JOE and CARLA cheer as MARK walks over to them to collect his money and join "the RIGHTISTS".)**

SARAH: **(to EMILY)** Why don't you carry more money with you?

EMILY: It's all I have right now.

JOE: **(loudly)** Well, I guess this just goes to show that right does, indeed, happen to be right. The majority has spoken yet again.

SARAH: The only thing it goes to show is that the rightist are not only blind but also foolish enough to carry gobs of money around with them.

MARK: **(to the other RIGHTISTS)** Do you know what you get when you crush a bunch of sour grapes?

CARLA: No, what?

JOE and MARK: A big whine!

**(The RIGHTISTS laugh heartily at their joke while the LEFTISTS stew. Two other characters, SUE and DARLA, enter and cross the stage, whispering together. EMILY notices them and turns to SARAH.)**

EMILY: Quick, what's half of 52?

SARAH: Half of what?

EMILY: **(pointing to SUE and DARLA)** 52. What's half of 52 dollars?

SARAH: **(catching on)** Oh! Well, half of 60 is 30. Does that help?

JOE: **(to SUE and DARLA)** Have you two seen that thing up there?

SUE: What thing?

DARLA: Yeah, what thing?

CARLA: That thing right up there. The one that looks like it's going to fall.

SUE: **(to DARLA)** Do you see anything?

DARLA: I don't see anything. Do you?

SUE: I don't. Do you?

MARK: **(to SUE and DARLA)** Listen, the fact of the matter is, whether you see it or not, there is something very dangerous up there.

DARLA: There is?

SUE: Where?

MARK: Trust me? There's no time to explain. We need you.

SUE: Me?

JOE: Both of you.

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SUE and DARLA: Us?

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