

1-9-3-1

CAST

STEPHEN
RACHEL
MATHEW (in audience)
JOHN (in audience)
MARY (in audience)

A table and two chairs. A young man (Stephen) and a young woman (Rachel) are seated. He wears a working man's cap, a white scarf and a clean but worn suit. She wears a long fairly dowdy dress, buttoned up to the neck. She has a pencil and note pad. Both are nervous and apprehensive. There's a bible on the table. There are three characters in the audience (Matthew, John and Mary) one centre, one left and one right. They are dressed similar to Stephen and Rachel. Stage is dark.

MATHEW

Before the lights go on - he shouts out
Well, get on with it.

JOHN

What are you waiting for?

MARY

Stop wasting our time. I've got to get home to feed the kids.

Lights come up.

STEPHEN

Removes his cap and rises
Brothers and sisters...

MATHEW

Don't give us that socialist bull shit.

STEPHEN

Ladies and Gentlemen

MARY

Oooo... Ladies and gentleman ... la di da...aren't we posh.

JOHN

We're fellow workers, Stephen.

STEPHEN

Right. Fellow workers, I...

MATHEW

I hope you know we're all taking risks coming here.

STEPHEN

Well...yes, I do understand that...

MATHEW

We could get fired. You know the company's a closed shop.

STEPHEN

I know that but legally we're allowed to form a union if there's 75% support. It says so here. Union Law. It's the law of the land.

He brandishes a small book he had in his pocket.

JOHN

Union Law? Stephen, I told you, forming a union when it's a closed shop won't make us very popular with management.

STEPHEN

Yes, but you've got to agree, over the last five years conditions at the factory are worse.

MATHEW

There's a recession on if you hadn't noticed.

STEPHEN

They've used the recession as an excuse. We haven't had a single raise. But you know and I know that the price of what we produce has gone up. The Chairman's salary has gone up, Profits have gone up. It's not fair. We all need to do something about it.

MARY

I agree Stephen. And... all the women here will agree with me that prices in the shops have gone up in the last four years.

If I didn't have my husband's money from his job in the Merchant Navy me and the kids would be out on the street. AND... Why is it we are paid less than what you men get when we do the same job? Well?

MATHEW

That's cus we do it better.

MARY

That's a lie Mathew. My production figures are the same as yours every week, if not better.

JOHN

Don't you two start that again. I'm sick of hearing it. To add to what Stephen said, the company offered a dividend to its shareholders.

MATHEW

Well that's how you make money you stupid bugger. They're the investors. They have the money in the first place. They're investing in our labor. They take the risk. We do the work. Why don't you invest your money?

JOHN

Because I spend it all on food and rent and education for my kids. Where does their money come from? Do they inherit it? Or do they make it from slave labor in some foreign country where some poor bastards have to work eighteen hours a day in a factory that's about to fall down on their heads or because they pay us so poorly? There's got to be something more in the system than just profit. Everyone's got to benefit.

MATHEW

John, you're a bloody socialist. We can't help what happens in foreign countries and anyway those people have too many kids without thinking about the cost. They breed like flies. This company has always been good to us. We get bonuses at Christmas. There's also talk of overtime in the Spring when we can all make extra.

JOHN

Mathew, don't you see that as long as they can keep you worried that you might lose your job if you ask for more money, then they can pay you less and less. They don't care if you starve or have to go down to the soup kitchen. And look at the way the owners live. They all have second houses and the boss's son drives a posh car. Where did he get the money for that? It wasn't working on the production line. The company depends on idiots like you and me to keep them in their fancy lifestyles.

MATHEW

You're just jealous. Envy's a sin, don't you know that?

MARY

All right, all right. Stop it you two. Stephen... say what you have to say. You and Rachel called the meeting. We're here because we're your friends.

STEPHEN

Thank you Mary. I've called this meeting on our own time and we have the right to do so. We haven't gone behind anyone's back. We're not on company property. If we can get enough fellow workers to sign on we can form a union and begin negotiations with management. I approached all of you because you're people I know, people I've worked with and you're my friends. If each one of you, how many are here? Forty eight. Okay, if each one of you signs up another five workers we'll have our 75% and we can form a union.

MATHEW

You're my Godson Stephen, I worked next to your dad for over twenty years but I'm telling you if the company thinks you're a threat they'll bring in the police because the police take orders from those in power and... they'll be armed. It's not worth it. As the economy improves, our wages will be increased, I'm sure of it.

JOHN

Wrong...Wrong...Wrong. Capitalism doesn't work like that.

MATHEW

Oh, Mr. Bloody Karl Marx is it?

JOHN

It's all about cutting costs. The working men and women never got anywhere without organization and the threat of revolution.

MATHEW

That's nice. Let's start breaking things. Your trouble is you have no ambition. You want everything on a plate...

JOHN

Mathew, you're a bastard.

MATHEW

No, my parents were married - which is more than can be said for yours.

MARY

Will you two shut up? I want to hear from the women. We're the ones that have to make ends meet. Rachel, you've been very quiet. You haven't said a word.

RACHEL

I'm here to support Stephen... I have great faith in him... and in God that what we're doing is right and just. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."

MARY

Well that's great. Let's all top ourselves which will save us another half century of poverty.

JOHN

He also said, "Sell what you own and give the money to the poor." I don't see much of that going on.

MATHEW

If the rich gave all their money to the poor, how the hell would they invest in building factories and businesses so that you can have a job?

MARY

Shut up you two.

RACHEL

I know it's not easy. I've worked in the factory since the age of sixteen and it's hard, ten hours a day and the looms are dangerous, but I put my faith in Jesus. Those who store up treasures for themselves are not rich toward God. I think we have to make a stand.

STEPHEN

Listen everyone. We can't afford to squabble and fight among ourselves. We must show a united front. I'm not trying to make trouble but we live in a democracy. All men are created equal.

MARY

Don't the women get a look in?

JOHN

Oh yes, I've read that before. How does it go? All men are equal and some are more equal than others.

MATHEW

When it comes to me, that's definitely true.

MARY

Excuse me. Am I invisible? Is the world just made up of men.

JOHN

Can't you just be serious for one moment Mathew? The lad's trying and I think he may be on to something. I don't want my kids settling for a factory job like I did. I want them to get an education. I want them to have better chances than I had and I'll be honest, I'm finding it difficult to pay the bills.

MATHEW

You shouldn't have had so many kids.

MARY

Am I invisible or something? If you hadn't noticed - fifty percent of the world's population is made up of women. We're expected to run the home AND go out to work.

STEPHEN

If we all earned a decent wage maybe you wouldn't need to work.

JOHN

You're right. Just because we're poor doesn't mean we shouldn't have children and a wife who could stay at home and take care of them ...or if she does work, get equal pay. Stephen, I'm with you. What about the rest of you?

MATHEW

Well I'm not. This will come to no good. People will get hurt.

STEPHEN

We have got to try. I've always had a good relationship with management. I was worker of the year three times. I'm proud of what I have achieved and I am willing to put it all on the line because I believe our cause is just. I know they'll listen to me. They'll behave fairly. We just have to get that 75%.

RACHEL

Stephen is a good man. At first, when he asked me to help him I didn't want to be involved because I thought it would just cause trouble. Then I thought more about it and asked myself what Jesus would do. The Bible teaches us we can't be half hearted in our faith. Jesus never ignored good people and had no time for the moneylenders. I'm standing with Stephen because it is the right thing to do, not because I am in love with him. Whatever the danger, whatever happens. I'll be by his side. .

STEPHEN

Rachel you....

RACHEL

I'll not take no for an answer. I've got my five women co-workers all lined up and ready to join.

MARY

I'll join too and do my bit but only on one condition and I know I speak for all the women here. Equal pay for equal work. I know the girls I work with and they'll all join a union for that. Right ladies?

STEPHEN

Mathew? Will you change your mind?

MARY

Ask his wife.

MATHEW

Leave my wife out of it. I can make up my own mind.

MARY

Oh yes, we all know that.

MATHEW

I'm sorry I don't agree with you. What I will do however, is recruit five men from my department to come to your next meeting. And I'm only doing that because my dad was your's best mate.

STEPHEN

Thank you Mathew. Then brothers...sorry...fellow workers. We'll all meet back here next week, same time, same place. Is that agreed?

MATHEW/JOHN/MARY

Agreed.

A shot rings out. Stephen slumps over the desk. Rachel grabs him.

RACHEL

Stephen. Stephen. Oh no...

JOHN

The shot came from over there. Behind the grassy knoll.

Curtain