

Socialism
(aka: Privatizing the McCulloughs)
by
J.E. Clarke

FADE IN ON:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY

The camera refocuses. Zeros in on ABBY and TOM (40s), isolated on a couch.

Their mannerisms scream "middle class". But the couples' fading clothes and threadbare couch suggest a "nose-dive into poverty" cataclysmic vibe.

On the COFFEE TABLE: a THERMOS and chipped COFFEE CUPS. Abby fills one, and extends it towards...

An unseen INTERVIEWER.

ABBY

Would you like some before we start? It's not Starbucks like you film folks like, but we make do.

TOM

Spoiler alert. It's instant.

INTERVIEWER (O.S.)

Uh, no thanks. I'm good.

ABBY

Are you sure? Sugar hides the taste.

INTERVIEWER

While we're shooting, my hands are full.

Abby puts down the cup, and the coffee table wobbles. She hurries to steady it, looks around. "Did anyone notice?"

ABBY

We... we're planning to remodel. After the children find places of their own.

TOM

Like that's gonna happen. College costs a fortune now. Damned teachers asking for "living wage salaries".

ABBY

College isn't everything! Being a waiter has perks!

TOM

"Food service". That's what our son Ralph does. He gets free meals. He's 23 and living in our basement.

That hasn't been renovated either. So much for my golden-years-man-cave dream.
(to his wife)

Abby, wake up and smell the Folger's crystals. In this economy, neither kid's ever gonna leave.

ABBY

Sarah'll do better. I know in my heart she will!

TOM

Sweetie, Sarah won't even leave her room. What do they call it: age-euphoria?

ABBY

Agoraphobia. That's just a phase, you'll see! Sarah's our youngest, 16. And she's quite the trooper. Last month, when -

A memory darkens Abby's face. Her words trail off.

ABBY

(to the interviewer, cheery)
Flying off on tangents. Silly me! What was your question again?

INTERVIEWER

I was asking how your family's been faring since the LEO privatization bill of 2025 went into effect. As you know, LEO made police and courts private insurance services, modeled after the 2010 Affordable Care Act.

TOM

But without the subsidy-socialism part! Just good old fashioned competition. It's the American way!

ABBY

Both of us supported LEO from the start. But I won't lie. Adjusting to it's been a bit challenging-

The camera focuses on a wall over Tom's shoulder. On it, an AMERICAN FLAG and sticker: Buttigieg/Romney '24!

The camera travels across the room - reveals just how poor the McCulloughs are. Missing furniture's been sold.

Tom leans into the lens, waves.

TOM

Hey, Documentary Dude. I know, I tune out sometimes, too. But the wife's speaking. Listen up!

The camera returns to Abby.

ABBY

After LEO passed, some *adjustments* were needed. For instance, Tommy here....

She smiles, caresses Tom's cheek. He grunts; pulls away.

ABBY

Had to stop taking night shifts. Too much risk. We couldn't afford a bodyguard. In our neighborhood, copays were just too much! Which meant less income to go around for - well, everything else.

TOM

(snorts)

Who needs a bodyguard? Weaklings!

ABBY

We all do sometimes, honey-bunch.

TOM

Bullshit. I've got a gun permit. If any thug gets frisky, problem solved!

INTERVIEWER

OK, so traveling at night was restricted. But your home's still covered, right?

ABBY

No. Fidelis Security rejected us as clients.

TOM

You can't blame them. They have to make a profit.

Footsteps echo off screen. The camera swerves to:

RALPH - Gen Z with a Free Mumia tee. Seeing his parents, Ralph's face sours. He tiptoes towards the couch.

RALPH

Fuckin' sociopaths. They don't have to. That's a corporate choice.

Tom whirls around.

TOM

Don't you *dare* swear in this house!

RALPH

Dad, don't be such a hypocrite. I heard you say "Bullshit" one minute ago!

ABBY

Sweetie, please. The nice reporter's filming.

RALPH

(to the interviewer)

You gonna Bleep out my Dad in post?

The camera/interviewer shakes his head sideways: no.

RALPH

Then keep recording while I lay down truth. Human rights aren't a "service". They should be guaranteed!

Abby wrings her hands - anxiety rising with each word.

TOM

Son, how many times must we go through this? You live under my roof. My rules! Socialistic propaganda is not allowed!

RALPH

Do you even know what socialism is? "Democratizing the means of production"-

TOM

Making others pay for YOUR stuff!

RALPH

What's wrong with universal public goods? You think the library is "socialism"?

TOM

It's a huge waste of my taxes. You want a book? Buy it at Amazon, lazy mooch!

RALPH

You wanna privatize the roads, too?

TOM

President Buttigieg's working on that now. And taxing mileage. Infrastructure quality's sure to improve!

RALPH

If you live in a rich neighborhood. But here? Us "peasants" get major screwed.

ABBY

Honey, please. Language!

RALPH

Dad, wanna tell Mr. Documentarian here how we lost the car? The pothole I hit wrecked the transmission.

TOM

That's your doing, son. You should've driven around it.

RALPH

How? It took up the entire road!

TOM

You radical leftists want everything for free, don't you? Free shelter in my home. Free food, even.

RALPH

Dad, I eat table scraps customers think are gross.

TOM

From your employer. Take, take, take. Working for it never crosses your entitled minds.

RALPH

I work 80 hours a week at the new minimum wage, for Christ-sake!

ABBY

Darling, Congress had to lower the rate. Don't complain.

TOM

It was needed to reduce the deficit.

ABBY

And to stimulate the economy, grow jobs!

RALPH

Jobs that don't keep you alive? Hmmmph. So, you think privatizing roads, libraries and police is cool? Then how about the military? Their budget increased 1 Trillion this year.

If you're gonna outsource stuff, here's an idea: maybe start there?

TOM

Well, maybe... wait - no! "Provide for the Common Defense." That's why we have a government. Read the Constitution for once, and find out.

RALPH

It's the Preamble. I did. "To Promote the General Welfare" is a biggie there, too.

TOM

You want communism? Move to Venezuela.

RALPH

No, I'm staying right here. But no-one should have to live like this!

Ralph waves to the interviewer, points off camera.

RALPH

Look!

The camera swings to the windows, films SECURITY BARS. Welded STEEL PLATES.

RALPH

That "decoration" is thanks to the LEO privatization act. "Competition under capitalism" has abandoned us as "not worth protecting". You forget what happened to Sarah?

ABBY

We don't talk to strangers... about that.

TOM

You're upsetting your mother. Zip it, Ralph.

RALPH

Nuh-uh. This guy needs to know.

TOM

You *need* to go to your room.

Ralph sneers at the camera.

RALPH

Ask 'em about Sarah. There's your scoop.

He stalks off. Abby and Tom lapse into silence. The interviewer clears his throat.

INTERVIEWER

Everything concerned, I have to ask.

TOM

No, you don't.

INTERVIEWER

Maybe Sarah would like to talk?

ABBY

She needs peace and quiet. Leave her alone!

INTERVIEWER

Oh, right. Agoraphobia. I'm sorry. Is that a lifelong affliction?

TOM

No. A group of boys followed Sarah home a month ago. They tried some funny business. Really, not so funny after all.

ABBY

You know how it is. Girls. Boys. There was a Blue Cross bodyguard nearby. But they were out of network. Thank goodness she ran off before they got too far!

Abby's about to cry. Tom rubs her shoulder reassuringly.

TOM

Sarah's a trooper, give her time. What matters is we have freedom to choose. Access to private police if we want them. Times might be tough, but the McCullough family never, EVER asks for handouts. We'll work hard as usual, and everything'll be fine!

Abby breaks down, sobs. Tom freaks, lunges at the camera.

TOM

Edit that part out. Shut it down!

FINAL FADE OUT: