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"Jonesy" on Reconversion and Employment

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A humorous but well-founded presentation of a problem that concerns millions of our people

THIS here reconversion ain't provin' to be so tough as the Guys-With-The-Brains figured. And I could've told 'em that long ago. After all, there was more than a little stuff being made for G.I.'s that could be used for us civilians. Food growin' and preservin', raisin' meat and packin' it didn't change so much so that it was done different. Makin' clothes and pots and pans, radios, and blankets and drawers—long or short—went on in about the same way as before we begun pourin' it on Adolph and the Japs. Why even most of the heavy stuff, bulldozers and graders, could be used right at home so's we'd have "Happy Motorin'." Also Old Lady Nature didn't go pull in her horns-of-plenty, or even change their shapes just because we had a war on.

No sir! Reconversion, like I said, got over-touted. Back of the "Reconversion Jitters" though is a first-class ghost with plenty of Moxie to knock us for a ghoul if we get careless. That ghost is Mr. Unemployment



with a capital U. He never did go away and he's still starin' us in the face. Don't kid yourself that he ain't, neither. But give them credit, the Guys-With-The-Brains know it too. Trouble is they don't know their eggs from a bunch of billiard balls as to what to do about it. "It" meanin' how to avoid unemployment. And this gives me a laugh. Also a pain in the neck.

I laugh 'cause one of my friends, Joe Sonski, who claims he ain't quite bright, knows how to stop unemployment and how to get everything and everybody hummin'. No kiddin'! Course, maybe I told him. But Joe had a chance to tell it to one of the G. W. A. B. (Guy-With-A-Brain). It happened like this:

My friend Joe Sonski is a ten-acre farmer. He's got ten kids and maybe it's good he ain't got twenty acres. The oldest kid is about fourteen 'cause it took some time for

Joe to get started as a farmer. Joe and this oldest kid was cuttin' weeds along their stretch of road when a big car rolls along and blows out a tire right where they're workin'. Out scrambles a guy who Joe knows right away is one of the G.W.A.B. 'cause the guy's got a long haircut, a string tie, a black Stetson, clean hands, a off-color neck and only two numbers on his license plate.

The guy looks sort of helpless like at the tire. Then he looks at Joe and the helpless look vamoosed from his kisser. Joe knowed what was comin'. Without waitin' to be asked Joe tells his kid to go up to the barn and get his tire tools. The guy smiles, nice like, and Joe was sure about sizing him up right.

"Come on up to the house while the kid fixes the tire," invites Joe, democratic like.

"Sure," says the guy, like he was doin' Joe a favor.

So they goes. Now I know Joe's

house. It looks like a Toonerville Trolley off the tracks. It's got five rooms with open-air conditionin' and open-air plumbin' with a catalogue. Once it was painted white, once it was painted green, and once it was painted by Castoria and signed by Fletcher, who has painted more pastorals than any guy I know. The dump has a sway-backed ridgepole and there's about fifty pounds of flattened tin cans workin' as shingles.

The guy looks this choice bit of rural America over. Joe grins. When they gets inside Joe invites him to set down—which is a laugh. When you set down in Joe's house you get corrugated 'cause all the chairs in the place is made of old onion crates or packin' boxes. And if you stay over-night you're either drunk or crazy 'cause all you get to sleep on is a tick full of corn husks piled on a stead made of round poles.

Joe goes in the back and brings out



Joe lifts up a loose floor board and pulls out a tin box

two cups and a jug and pours a slug of Slivawitz for each. This is powerful and enticing medicine for one not expectin' it. Pretty soon the other guy is feelin' high. Then he starts to cry on Joe's shoulder, tellin' Joe how sorry he is to find a fellow American livin' in such a shack and how he has made it his life's work to better the condition of the "downtrodden-one-third-of-a-nation."

Now Joe, while he pretends he ain't quite bright, ain't downtrodden. He rares up on his hind legs and says so.

"But look at this!" the G.W.A.B. protests, while he waves his hand at the interior motif of the Sonski domicile.

Joe's feelin' pretty high by now too, so he lifts up a loose floor board and pulls out a tin box like he was a politician. He opens it. The guy's eyes pop. Joe's got a big bundle of bonds and a bank book showin' over seven grand deposit.

The Slivawitz begins workin' bad on the G.W.A.B. Says he: "But you're just a miser. You got lots of money, yet you live like a . . ."

"Don't say 'pig,'" warns Joe, liftin' the jug and gettin' ready to chuck it. "Anything but a *pig*!"

"All right. So you live like an animal."

"That's better," says Joe, puttin' down the jug.

"You're a miser too, like all these hicks who've been holdin' money out of circulation all these years when you should have been spendin' it," says the guy, holdin' out his empty cup.

"I am a sensible man," says Joe, dignified like.

"Sensible—nothin'!" the guy snorts. "And you're no patriot! It's misers like you that's holdin' back employment. The government ought to take all that money away from you and spend it makin' jobs for other people and expandin' social security to more government employees and farmers. If you repair this p . . ."

"O yeah?" says Joe. "So I'm supposed to work myself to death and feed a bunch of loafers! Why, you blankety-blank pay roller! If you'd ever earned a real dollar in your life, you'd know better'n make them idiotic statements. I work for my money an' I ain't for spendin' any of it so government tax hounds can get any more of it."

"I'm a sensible man," Joe repeats as he fills the guy's cup. "What's the sense in fixin' up my house? Why would I or anyone want to build a new house? Soon as they do around comes the tax snooper and fines 'em for livin' like a human bein'. As though the first cost ain't bad enough, they're fined every year for keepin' up the place. But whatever name it's got on the government books, it's just plain legalized robbery."

"But . . ."

"But nuts," interrupts Joe. "If I put in plumbin' or a heatin' system or get new furniture or give the house a coat of paint or fix the barn or put in new stalls, I'd let myself in for a heavy penalty—tax you call

it. A tax of a couple of hundred bucks. In ten years it'd add up to over a couple of grand and in twenty years more than the whole joint is worth. No—I ain't crazy yet!"

"We ought to tax your bank deposits. That'd keep you from hoarding!"

"Is that so? There's millions of bank deposits bigger'n mine and they ain't payin' taxes. Before the assessor comes round, them deposits goes into tax-free bonds and purchases of land. These guys don't need to make a livin' off their bonds or lands; they just want a place to put their income so they won't have to pay their fair share of taxes. I ain't claimin' to be one of these big guys, but I'm takin' my kind of steps to keep from payin' needless taxes."

"You're a traitor," says the guy.

"Yeah. To the tax collector," says Joe. "Further, I ain't gonna buy the Missus a new stove or a wrist watch or a radio or a washin' machine neither. These tax fellers walk right into the house, look around and then charge you so much a year for tryin' to uphold our high standard of livin'."

"Nonsense!"

"Sure," Joe grins, "that's just what it is. But I'll tell you how the government can make jobs for everybody. There's ten acres of idle ground right next to my place that I allus wanted to take over. Only I can't 'cause the bloke in New York City who owns it thinks he's got gold instead of sand in *his* piece of New Jersey. Twenty years ago he paid

three grand for it and now he's askin' eight. He ain't seen it in ten years and he ain't never fixed a fence post on it. He knows if he did they'd raise his taxes. But he can afford to wait till hell freezes over for his price 'cause he ain't payin' hardly no tax on it. But I who is using my land to raise food for hungry people pays twice as much ground tax. They say he don't need to pay much 'cause he ain't gettin' nothin' out of it, but I gotta pay big 'cause I'm usin' mine to make money."

The G.W.A.B. raises his eyebrows. "You mean you don't think that a New York fellow has a right to do as he pleases with his property?"

"You said it! It's a hell of a system. The guy who improves his place and puts people to work all along the line is fined for his efforts, but the guy who holds his land and keeps other people from havin' a chance of goin' to work, he gets the big hand and the government pats him on the back and says 'Go to it, big boy. You're workin' right in cahoots with our fed'ral program of land conservation.' And anybody knows that's a lot of conversation. No land can be conserved by lettin' it just waste away from 'rosion and rain."

"Ha! Ha!" says the guy, like he's got Joe in a corner. "So! You don't like the American System? Then why don't you go back where you come from?"

"It ain't the American System. Anyway, I come from Brooklyn and they got the same crazy tax col-

lectors there too. They tax real estate improvements till nobody can improve no buildin' an' they go easy on the vacant lots so's to help land speculators keep people from buildin' on 'em. Buildin's in Brooklyn is like trees and they don't want no more of 'em."

"Well, maybe you know how the country ought to be run," says the G.W.A.B., sarcastic like.

"Sure. And if I didn't I never could of paid for this farm and saved up these deposits. Even a half-baked farmer knows that if you guys in Washington would..."

"How do you know I'm fr..."

"Never mind. If you guys in Washington who know all the answers really want to make jobs for everybody all you gotta do is to cut taxes on improvin', buildin' and ownin'. Then a feller can afford to keep up a place and buy a home or farm if he ain't got one. Then we'd have a tremendous buildin' boom."

"And then everybody would go busted," says the G.W.A.B., curling up his lips but thinkin' better about spittin' on the floor after he sees Joe's eyes. "So you're a land reformer."

"Thanks," says Joe. "You can't call me a nicer name than that. When I was a kid I was cabin boy on a ship that sailed out of Singapore. Some place that! For 150 years all the taxes they raise to run the place is a land-values tax. They wasn't no tax on improvements or buildin's and no screwball tariffs either. And everybody had a job. When a guy

by the name of Sir Raffles got there in Napoleon's day it was only a village of fifty mud huts. When I got there it was the fifth biggest port in the world. And all they collected in taxes came from land values. Use the land or not, you paid the same tax if you owned it. So everybody found it paid to use their land and everybody had work and there never was no depressions."

"So. You think you'd build and buy and improve things if you wasn't taxed for doing it," says the G.W.A.B., at last gettin' part of the idea through his pay-roller head.

"Yes. Me and ten million other guys."

"And that'd put men to work?"

"You know it would. Look what it done for Singapore!"

Just then Joe's kid comes to the door, yelling, "Hey, Pop. The tire's fixed!"

"Okay," says Joe. "Now put the tools away."

"But Pop," the kid yells, "the guy can't get away. He ain't got no gas in his tank."

"Haw, haw! An' I took him for a guy with brains!"

"Cut it out," says the G.W.A.B. "A fellow can't think of everything."

"Do tell!" Joe says, sweetlike. "I allus thought you fellers thought you did."

The guy claps his hands over his mouth and mumbles while his face gets red and green. It seems his gullet ain't educated to Slivawitz.

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"The plumbin's outdoors, mister. Better make a run for it," says Joe.

"My Gawd," the G.W.A.B. groans and heads for the door mutterin' somethin' about the wages of economic sin bein' extra long end-runs in the hinterlands.

Anyway, this is what Joe tells me the next day after the guy left with some of Joe's gas.

Joe said he'd never had a chance to tell that story before, but he was sure the G.W.A.B. got the point all right only he was too smart to admit it. Like everybody else eatin' comfortable like out of the public trough, he knowed blame well that takin' the taxes off buildin' would mean the

puttin' up of a million homes for returnin' veterans and lower prices for buildin' lots and for boards and brick for homes and stores.

And there wouldn't be no business crash either 'cause everybody would have jobs, and government expenses—which means taxes—would hit bottom and stay there. You don't need three million or more people directin' what we wear and how many kids we can raise when everybody has a job without askin' the government for it.

Maybe Joe don't, as he says, "know nothin'." But compared to some of the Guys-With-The-Brains ... Well, Jonesy's money is on Joe Sonski.

More Trade—More Jobs

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such they reduce the ability of the foreigner to buy from us, and in so doing they limit our production.

Cartel arrangements, international trade quotas and "exchange control" are likewise barriers to trade. These restrictive practices are in operation in many foreign countries, even where "free trade" is the declared national policy. Britain, for instance, penalizes trade by cartel contracts and by

legalized restrictions on "exchange."

In human terms, these barriers result in curtailment of job opportunities in our own land, then general unemployment and finally bread lines. Just as the breaking of a thread in a fabric may weaken the fabric to the point of disintegration, so restriction of the foreign trade which is naturally ours can throw our entire domestic economy out of gear.