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Reader's Courtroom
 Rudeness Judged
 Pedestrian Rights
 Exceeded Authority
 By Will Bernard, LL.B.

State laws vary. For personal guidance, see your local attorney.
Could a Person Be Fined Just For Being Rude?

A youth was working on a construction job one afternoon when he suddenly felt sick. His cousin, who happened to be working with him, started to walk the young man toward his house. When the youth faltered, the cousin grabbed his hand and half-dragged him along



the sidewalk until they got home. After the young man recovered, he had his cousin arrested for handling him so rudely. However, the court refused to find the cousin guilty—"even though he was not as gentle as one more humane and tender might have been." The judge said rudeness alone was not a crime—so long as there was no intent-to-injure.

Is the City Responsible For the Grassy Strip Along the Sidewalk?

A man was walking home one evening when he decided it would be nice to take a few steps on the grassy strip between sidewalk and curb. Unfortunately, the city had a water meter there, half-hidden in the grass and covered with only a flimsy piece of wood. The man stepped on the cover, broke through, and fell to the ground. Injured, he sued the city for damages. The city argued that the man "should have stayed on the sidewalk," but the court disagreed and allowed the claim. The judge said that pedestrians have a perfect right to walk on that strip if they feel like it, and therefore the city is responsible for keeping it in safe condition.

May an Employer Interfere With His Employees' Social Life?

The owner of a cotton mill opened a store where his employees could buy their necessities. Pretty soon somebody else started a market right across the street. The mill owner was so angry at this competition that he forbade his employees to have any social contacts with the owner of the market or his family. Afraid for their jobs, the mill workers obeyed the order. Finally, the market owner brought a damage suit against the mill owner—and the court granted his claim. The judge said: "It is the legal right of every man to enjoy social relations with his friends and neighbors. He is entitled to visit them and have them visit him. The free and unhampered exercise of this right is necessary to his happiness, comfort, and well-being."

Is it Unlawful to Enjoy Somebody Else's Troubles?

A petty politician had a long-standing grudge against a certain city clerk. One day the clerk got into an argument with two other employees, and the men gave him a sound thrashing. As it happened, the politician witnessed the whole thing and enjoyed it immensely. Later the clerk tried to collect damages—not only from the two



men but also from the politician (on the ground that he had "approved" the attack). However, the court ruled that the politician was not liable for anything. Said the judge: "An onlooker isn't responsible for a beating, just because in his heart he is secretly pleased to see it happen. He is only responsible when he incites or aids in its commission."

At the set hour, a condemned murderer was strapped into the chair and the current was turned on. To everyone's astonishment, the man survived! It seems that something had gone wrong with the electrical mechanism. When prison officials announced their intention to "try again," the convict appealed to the United States Supreme Court. He claimed that going through the same ordeal twice was a "cruel and unusual punishment"—and was unconstitutional. However, the court refused the man's plea.

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