

from  
**Upholding the Law  
and Other Observations**  
by  
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**The Sublime Harmonies Of Social Justice In The  
Upcoming Worker's Paradise**  
(A Laborious Mental Exercise)



Imagine that you're a homeowner and over the years you've had some landscaping done to your property: a few decorative trees planted, a stone wall built, a flagstone path installed, etc.. All the work has been done by what had been your favorite contractor, Joe's Landscaping Service.

Joe and his guys have done good work, for the most part, but as time has passed, Joe has been a bit reluctant to invest in new equipment, so his speed has gone down, and his hourly rate has been inching up at the same time. You've brought this to Joe's attention more than once, but he's just shrugged and said, "Hey, a guy's gotta make a living. But I'll try to get the boys to move a little faster."

Eventually, when Joe announces that he's raising his rates yet again you pull out the Yellow Pages and find a new outfit, Sam's Quality Landscaping. The ad claims that Sam has all the latest gear, and a crew of hard workers. You meet with

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Sam, and even though his hourly rate is the same as Joe's, Sam is energetic and sharp, and gives you a good feeling about his work ethic. So, you make a deal, and then give Joe a call.

"Don't bother to schedule that re-sodding that we were talking about," you tell Joe, "I'm going to have someone else do it." Joe glares at the phone as he hangs up, and mutters, "We'll see about that!"

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Now, imagine that on the day that Sam shows up to start on the project, he finds your driveway blocked by Joe's rig, with Joe and his helpers marching in front of your house, yelling ugly threats at you and your wife and kids. Sam and his crew are promptly made targets of the abuse as well, with Joe loudly calling out, "We're doing this for you, too, you know! You should be here picketing with us, you damn scabs!"

Imagine that when you call the police, a cop arrives, sizes up the situation and smirks, "Sorry, Bub, there's nothin' I can do. You're Joe's customer. You gotta work it out with him."

"What are you talking about?" you protest. "I don't belong to Joe! I can hire whoever I want to work on my yard!" The cop laughs. "This is a union neighborhood, pal." One of Joe's boys hurls a rock through your picture window.

"Hey!" you yell at the cop, "Arrest that guy!"

"Not sure I saw who did that," replies the cop, "and besides, brother Joe and his boys are just trying to protect their jobs."

Eventually, you prevail upon the cop to make Joe move his rig so that Sam and his crew can get in with theirs and start to work. At the end of the day Sam notices that one of the taillights on his truck is smashed and there's a long, deep scratch down its side. As he backs into the street, a tire blows. Seeing Joe and his boys moving toward him, one of them thoughtfully bringing his own tire iron, Sam elects to drive away on the flat, heading down the street with a "whup, whup, whup". Joe and his lads laugh. Sam calls you later that evening and tells you he can't come back until things have settled down. He says he needs the work, but he can't risk his equipment. You tell him you understand.

Early the next morning you roar out of your driveway past the pallets of wilting sod. A couple of Joe's men, yawning and nursing steaming cups of coffee, heave rocks in your direction, but it's early and they're not really trying, so you get away with only one small ding in your trunk lid. You head for the city office, intending to demand some of the police service for which you have been paying taxes all these years. Your salary is going to get docked for taking the time off work, but the sod is already paid for; Sam is counting on the job; and besides, you can't just give in to extortion. When you arrive, you're surprised to find Joe there. A man from the National Labor Relations Board is with him.

"I hope you brought your bank statement and 1040 with you," the bureaucrat says brightly, "so we can get a good idea of what you can afford to pay Joe." Catching sight of the shocked expression on your face, he frowns and says, "Well, you're a private citizen of course, so you don't HAVE to produce the documents; but I'll be obliged to take your lack of cooperation into account when I make my decision about this matter. Furthermore, if we can't work things out and this ends up in court, the judge won't look very favorably on that, either.

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Such uncooperativeness suggests you're not really bargaining in good faith"

"I'm not bargaining at all!" you protest. The bureaucrat shakes his head and smiles tightly. "Well, I'm afraid we can't very well have that! Your failing to bargain would almost certainly lead to serious discord in the community."

Just then, one of Joe's men hurries in and whispers in Joe's ear for a moment before turning to you with a grin. "I've just been down to that shop where your wife works," he says. "I told her boss that as long as she and her husband were messing with our jobs, we're going to boycott his business. He was not a happy camper!"

Your face suddenly hot, you scream, "You son of a bitch!" while your hands ball into fists.

"Hey, now," the NLRB agent says to you sternly, "let's keep this civil!"

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Weeks later-- exhausted, numb, and defeated-- you take the pen that is handed to you and sign a contract guaranteeing all your landscaping business to Joe for the next three years at his current rates plus automatic 5% annual increases. Joe smiles. "Don't worry, pal," he says, "now we'll get that sod laid pronto!"

"The sod is all dead," you mumble.

"Well, there's more where that came from, right?" All you can do is stare blankly at him. It's suddenly struck you

that, under the circumstances, your home-improvement days are over.

You head for what's left of your car in a daze, visions of the Mad Hatter's tea party running through your bruised mind, when Joe asks conversationally, "Say, how's business down at that grocery store where you work?"

Although chatting with Joe would be the last thing you would do if your brain were fully in gear, you answer reflexively. "Okay, but we're expecting a bit of a slowdown. My boss says that with the cost of labor going up lately, we're going to have to raise our prices."

Joe frowns. "Man, that's a drag! I shop there myself. I guess I'll have to find a new store."

A strange light begins to shine in your eyes as what Joe has just said slowly sinks in. With a wicked, satisfied smile you turn to look at him. "Oh yeah? We'll see about that!"

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*For the record, I fully support the inalienable right of anyone and everyone to associate, combine, and coordinate with anyone else, and to strike at will. However, I also fully support the inalienable right of anyone and everyone to the uncompromised control of their own property; and the right to refuse to associate, combine, and coordinate with anyone else-- which includes the right to decline participation in a union and the right to refuse to enter into contract with anyone or any group.*