

WHAT IS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE?

We understand civil disobedience as a public, non-violent, conscientious, and political practice taken by civil society against a law or order of authority considered to be unfair or illegitimate, for the purpose of invalidating said law or order and inaugurating a new rule of law in which the social and civil rights denied by the law are in fact recognised. When, as it occurs in the Spanish state, the ways of political expression are limited to institutional channels and to voting every four years, without mechanisms of direct participation and consultation, civil disobedience becomes an essential element to denouncing and expressing the rejection of an unfair policy or law.

A few features:

1. In general, civil disobedience is exercised by conscientious people who are committed to society. They are what Hannah Arendt calls qualitatively important minorities, and they are driven to be as active as they are critical with respect to certain political decisions that have become law. The activity undertaken by those who exercise civil disobedience is so intense and of such a nature that it overcomes the traditional channels of formation and execution of the political will. Citizens who practice civil disobedience are capable of imagining a better social order, and in the building thereof, civil disobedience becomes a necessary and useful procedure.
2. It is understood that the behaviour of these citizens is not motivated by selfishness, but rather by the desire to universalise proposals that will objectively improve life in society. This condition does not refute the fact that, occasionally, personal or corporate interests may coincide with general interests. It simply reveals the impossibility of consolidating a civil disobedience movement that might be limited solely to defending particular conventions.
3. Consequently, citizens who practice civil disobedience feel that they are consistent in how they think and how they act. For them, civil disobedience is one more civic duty. It is a requirement that comes from certain convictions, to which an objective and constructive value could be attributed.
4. It is therefore easy to guess that exercising civil disobedience must be public, and the aim of those who practice civil disobedience —convincing all other citizens of the fairness of their demands— contributes to this.

The reflection of civil disobedience in a political system such as the democratic system must necessarily start from the fact that civil disobedience is an illegal activity, because it violates valid and current legal rules (even though they may be morally and legally reproachable), albeit with the commitment to generate change. In this regard, civil disobedience not only violates legal rules, it also exceeds those ordinary channels, both legal and political, that exist in a democratic system for causing a change of laws or governmental policies, meaning that civil disobedience is beyond the rules of the game on which the political system is based.

In the event of any act or process of public opposition to a law or policy adopted by an established government, the author thereof must be aware that their acts are illegal or are of disputed lawfulness, regardless of the fact that they may be carried out or maintained to achieve specific social aims.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

Between 1846 and 1848, there was a war between the United States and Mexico. In 1846, at the start of the conflict, Thoreau announced his refusal to pay taxes for two specific reasons: he was opposed to financing the military conflict, and he was not willing to contribute financially to maintaining a government that continued to consider slavery legal in the United States.

"It costs me less in every sense to incur the penalty of disobedience to the State than it would to obey. I should feel as if I were worth less in that case. [...] Unjust laws exist; shall we be content to obey them, or shall we endeavor to amend them, and obey them until we have succeeded, or shall we transgress them at once? Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil."

H. D. Thoreau.

"If the injustice has a spring, or a pulley, or a rope, or a crank, exclusively for itself, then perhaps you may consider whether the remedy will not be worse than the evil; but if it is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine."

"Under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison."

H. D. Thoreau.

Gandhi's civil disobedience campaigns were a form of protest that consisted in refusing to obey certain laws; meaning, he objected to complying with them when they were considered unjust or illegitimate. This way of non-violent protest had the aim of publicly demonstrating the unfairness of British colonial laws.

His fight to free India was based on this right of resistance, which acquired a collective, public, and peaceful form. When members of the Congress Party were arrested, they did not recognise the right of English courts to try them. The movement of non-cooperation with British authorities included Indian civil servants giving up their posts. Other historical examples of actions of disobedience, or resistance to law, could include not fulfilling the obligation to serve in the military, deserting under exceptional circumstances (such as what young North Americans did during the Vietnam war), or, in the case of blacks in the US, sitting in a public place prohibited for coloured people.

RIGHT OF REBELLION.

INITIATIVE TO GENERATE A STRATEGY OF MASS CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE

As a people, if we organise, we'll be able to create and defend spaces that are free from control and submission to power. When we achieve this, the powers that be will not be immediately blocked and will try to repress us and do in our popular power in order to establish itself as holding sole legitimacy in the territory. Thus, we are initiating a period in which action strategies will have to be very well defined in order to become solid options that might include a significant part of society.

Within this context, we propose civil disobedience to the state decisions that affect us. As individuals, as free beings, civil disobedience and self-management give us two fundamental tools of political action. As a people, organised in mass, we have the responsibility to make the world in which we live and in which we act how we want it to be.

We understand civil disobedience as an illegal action taken conscientiously and communicated publicly to be able to achieve the partial or overall transformation of society. Venturing on civil disobedience is a venture on pedagogy through action to generate a constructive way to make the conflict visible, to communicate by way of example and personal and collective commitment. It is an action route that empowers the popular movement, and it has had major precedents in the history of the last century.

more info: www.derechoderebellion.net, desobediencia.es, radi.ms, cridadesobediencia.cat

