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## ***Private Citizens Practicing Civil Disobedience***

### ***Vs. Public Officials Betraying Oaths of Office***

**A Published Letter to Howard Rosenberg, TV Critic of the *Los Angeles Times***

December 29, 1986

*Here is the portion of my letter that was published with other letters as replies to an article by the Times' distinguished television critic ...*

Because they run the government of, by, and for us people, elected officials and those appointed by them are sworn to uphold the law—the alternative to dictatorship.

*Here is my complete, unedited letter, with a quote from Mr. Rosenberg's article ...*

You noted that White House Communications Director Patrick Buchanan "was able to raise a valid question about the Iran/contras affair: If [former National Security Council aide Lt. Col. Oliver] North did circumvent a law he felt was unjust, does that make him less an idealist than others who did something similar? Less than anti-Vietnam War activists who broke laws to protest a war they felt was unjust or civil rights activists who violated segregation laws they felt were unjust?" Well, if North was involved and if the unaccounted-for tens of millions of dollars did indeed go to the contras, whom, in spite of their atrocities, North apparently does believe in, he *would* be just as idealistic as the others; however, there is something else to consider.

Because they run the government of, by, and for us people, elected officials and those appointed by them are sworn to uphold the law—the alternative to dictatorship. Although Robespierre said in the French Revolution that "any law which violates the indefeasible rights of man is essentially unjust and tyrannical; it is not a law at all," he also stated that "any institution which does not suppose the people good, and the magistrate corruptible, is evil."

North et al. had ample opportunity and resources, including the Attorney General, to challenge the laws banning arms sales to Iran and military aid to the contras; but they did not take their cases to the courts. Regardless of idealism, any handful of people running *our* government for their *own* purposes has no justification, in our democratic republic.

In contrast, private citizens who practice typically nonviolent civil disobedience, facing the threat of prosecution, in order to make laws conform to justice, have been in the best tradition of America, from the Boston Tea Party, through Thoreau, the Underground Railroad, those opposed to Prohibition (which didn't include the murderous, bootlegging gangsters,

profiteering on the black market), and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

In America it is we the people who have the rights and responsibilities of power: Public servants who violate the law betray the public trust.