

LAST WORDS

A QUESTION OF MOMENT

WOULD YOU EVER BREAK THE LAW IN SUPPORT OF AN ENVIRONMENTAL GOAL? UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES?

Yes, I would, I have, and I will again. When I'm concerned about an environmental issue, I write letters (lots of them), attend hearings and rallies, support boycotts, and vote. If I have exhausted my legal options, I believe that civil resistance is the most effective form of action. Wearing buttons and Earth Day T-shirts is not enough. We have to walk our talk and be willing to take risks. As I tell my opponents, we environmentalists may be a pain in the neck to live with, but we make great ancestors.

C. R., Washington

Only under extreme circumstances, when human lives or well-being are at stake, would I feel justified in breaking the law. I would not do it to save the spotted owl or protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I might do it to protect children from lead poisoning.

J. K., Connecticut

I would break the law if the goal involved the protection of animals.

J. R., New Hampshire

The ends never justify the means. This is a country based on law, not emotionally charged, elite environmentalism.

G. W. C., Massachusetts

There are times when a person is not only justified in violating the law, but morally obligated to do so. The United States for the last ten years has been governed by administrations that have been both overtly and covertly hostile to environmental protection and wilderness preservation. The first line of defense for those opposed to such destructive policies is, of course, legal action. However, as Reagan-Bush appointees come to dominate the federal judiciary, that recourse may become inadequate. The choice could be to surrender or to fight, be it by a form of passive resistance or by active monkey-wrenching with the Earth First! forces.

R. A. W., Texas

When we accept the premise that we can break the law to suit our purposes, we give up the "moral high ground" in our society. It doesn't matter whether we are "right" or "wrong." Witness the backlash against Earth First! for their unlawful tactics. They've done more harm

to the environmental cause by turning away potential supporters than they can ever offset with their small victories.

T. F. S., California

Nonviolent civil disobedience has a long and proud tradition—Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King were the inspiration for movements that brought down the regimes of Eastern Europe and almost did the same for China. An act of civil disobedience is the last resort of the individual when the government no longer listens. Whether it involves one person sitting in front of a bulldozer or millions marching through the streets, it forces the government and the world to acknowledge their existence.

T. K., California

Civil disobedience is usually a flash in the pan.

M. S., Pennsylvania

Without civil disobedience, Jim Crow would be alive and well, and civil rights would be an unfulfilled dream.

J. W., New Mexico

We who care about this planet and its creatures have been manipulated, lied to, patronized, threatened, and physically assaulted by bureaucrats, industry leaders, and elected officials—so yes, I will nonviolently defend the Earth that sustains us all and I will speak for the voiceless.

M. H., New Jersey

FOR NEXT TIME ...

**CAN YOU BE A
MEAT-EATER AND CONSIDER
YOURSELF AN
ENVIRONMENTALIST?**

Send your pithy responses to "Last Words,"
Sierra, 730 Polk St., San Francisco, CA 94109

Of course! There is a higher law that governs the universe and the natural systems inside it. That is the law to be obeyed. Civil disobedience and monkeywrenching are acceptable. These methods have been called radical. I consider the unchecked destruction of a delicate ecosystem that supports so many to be radical. Hell,

I'm a conservative.

J. B., Ohio

I would like to believe that if it became untenable to obey the law, I would not do so. But I don't think that my children could understand that Mommy was in jail because the "bad guys" had to be stopped. What they would see was that Mommy was not with them. So at this point in my life I couldn't violate the law because of these prior living commitments to which I owe myself.

M. W. B., Virginia

Having worked within the court system for 17 years as a probation officer, I'm well aware of the risks involved in violating laws. There are expenses and inconveniences which I would not be prepared to undertake at this point. However, if I believed that the lives of my family and friends were in jeopardy due to an environmental problem, I might violate the law if all other means of getting attention or assistance were exhausted.

C. F., Ohio

Based on my present surroundings, I would have to think very hard before jeopardizing my freedom in support of an environmental goal. I am writing to you from an 8' x 12' jail cell, my home for the last ten months. Though my crime bears no connection to an environmental cause, I can attest to the fact that being in jail is no "day in the park." I've come to a new understanding of the value of freedom and I cannot see putting myself through this again for any reason. I feel very strongly about the environment and I plan to make a career in fighting for it, though I'll stick to lobbying for change through legal means.

E. P., New Jersey

I would not break the law. I can't think of any way to bring the environmental movement into disrepute quicker.

R. F. J., Michigan

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