

## **D.H. THOREAU'S CONCEPT OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The progress of a nation hinges on its citizens' sense of responsibility. In Nigeria, the constitution emphasizes fundamental rights, duties, and directive principles to foster equality, democracy, and nation-building. Citizens are morally obligated to uphold patriotism, unity, and socially acceptable behavior, which contribute to social progress and peaceful coexistence. Responsible citizenship entails not only obeying the law but also acting ethically to promote national development. However, when citizens' rights, privileges, and safety are compromised by inadequate government policies, they have the right to demand better governance through civil disobedience. Over six decades of Nigeria's socio-political and economic transformation have been shaped by the active involvement of labor unions, political movements, and human rights activism. The peaceful attainment of Nigeria's independence in 1960, despite prolonged struggles, was marked by mass protests, strikes, and sacrifices led by organized groups and unions. This discourse explores the interplay between civil disobedience and nation-building, guided by the ideas of D. H. Thoreau. Key questions include: What is civil disobedience? How does it relate to nation-building? What roles do citizens play in Nigeria's growth and development? What are the challenges to national cohesion and progress? Additionally, it examines the impact of industrial disputes and civil society organizations on public service delivery and considers how Thoreau's citizenship theory could address Nigeria's developmental crises and enhance nation-building. By analyzing these dimensions, the study seeks to illuminate the strategic roles of citizens in shaping a dynamic, equitable, and united Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Analysis**

For vivid understanding of this discourse, it is pertinent to explicate the various terms that mainly apply to the subject matter especially as they form active expression in the discourse. These include, Civil Disobedience, citizenship and nation-building.

**Civil Disobedience:** According to common definitions, civil disobedience involves a public and nonviolent breach of law that is committed in order to change a law or policy, and in order to better society. It is the active, professed refusal of a [citizen](#) or citizens to

obey certain [laws](#), demands, orders or commands of a [government](#) considered as unjust laws. Some philosophers like John Rawls have argued that people have the right to engage in civil disobedience when it is undertaken by the three principles of one, responding to an instance of substantial and clear injustice; two as a last resort; and three in a way that will not destabilize the entire system of law (Forst at 139; Rawls at 326-328).

By some definitions, civil disobedience has to be [nonviolent](#) to be called civil. Hence, civil disobedience is sometimes equated with [peaceful protests](#) or [nonviolent resistance](#) of unjust demands and laws of governments.

Apart from the philosophical ideas of Henry David Thoreau, the philosophical roots of civil disobedience also lie deep in Western thought of scholars like Cicero, Thomas Aquinas, John Locke, Thomas Jefferson, all sought to justify conduct by virtue of its harmony with some antecedent superhuman moral law. The modern concept of civil disobedience was most clearly formulated by Mahatma Gandhi. Drawing from Eastern and Western thought, Gandhi developed the philosophy of 'satyagraha', which emphasizes nonviolent resistance to evil. Civil disobedience acts are performed by people who want to change or end laws they view as wrong, immoral, or unjust. It requires a willingness to accept responsibility for committing an illegal act. It is also a powerful tool for social justice. It occurs whenever anyone breaks a law they view as wrong. It is often non-violent and is usually very public, in order to draw attention and support for ending a law viewed as wrong.

**Citizenship:** The concept of citizenship is a complex one, it does not have a definitive explication, and nevertheless it is a very important category in our contemporary society. Often the way a person is treated depends on whether he or she has the status of a citizen. Citizenship includes protection of a person's rights both at home and abroad. It has legal, political and social dimension: the legal status as a full member of society. It is the recognition of that status by fellow citizens and acting as a member of society. A nation grants certain rights and privileges to her citizens. In return, citizens are expected to obey their country's laws and defend such against her enemies. The value of citizenship varies from nation to nation.

Citizenship implies the status of freedom with accompanying responsibilities. It involves people working together to make positive differences to the society in which they live, locally, nationally and globally. The Universalist or unitary model defines citizenship primarily as a legal status through which an identical set of civil, political and social rights are accorded to all members of the polity.

**Nation-building:** Nation-building is constructing or structuring a national identity using

the power of the state. It aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run. Nation-building is a significant undertaking that governments employ to develop political, economic, security, and social institutions in other countries—especially those emerging from conflict. Nation-building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social harmony and economic growth.

Nation-building is a normative concept that might mean different things to different people. As scholars like Carolyn Stephenson will talk on the latest conceptualization is essentially that nation-building programs are those in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states" or economies are given assistance in the development of governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as economic assistance, in order to increase stability. Nation-building generally assumes that someone or something is doing the building intentionally.

#### **D. H. Thoreau's Concept of Civil Disobedience**

Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) was a citizen of Concord, Massachusetts, where he lived in the middle of the 19th century. He was a good friend of various literary figures of the time, including Ralph Waldo Emerson, one of the most eminent of American authors and a popular orator. The incident from which his thesis on civil disobedience arose was a night that Thoreau spent in jail for refusing to pay taxes to the government. He was later asked to give a talk about his experiences in jail to the Concord Lyceum on January 26, 1848, and this talk was then committed to paper and published in an obscure journal, where it was promptly forgotten. Although Thoreau's writing achieved little fame during his lifetime, his essay on civil disobedience was later "re-discovered" by Mahatma Gandhi, who came across it while studying law at Oxford as a young man. Gandhi later used the essay as a foundation for his efforts in India resisting the British government through civil disobedience. Through Gandhi, Thoreau's work also became known to Martin Luther King, who made use of it during his resistance in the 1960's to the racial segregation laws in the United States.

Thoreau is probably best known in the United States for his longer work, *Walden*, in which he recounts his two-year stay at Walden Pond. But internationally, Thoreau's fame rests on the brief essay printed in abridged form, although of little consequence in his own day, went on to transform our view of the political world. In stating his motives Thoreau writes...I heartily accept the motto "That government is best which governs least;" and I should like to see it acted up to more rapidly and systematically carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe "That government is best which governs not at all"; and when men are prepared for it, that will be the kind of government which they will have. Government is at best when it is expedient; but most governments are usually, and

all governments are sometimes, inexpedient. The objections which have been brought against a standing army, and they are many and weighty, and deserve to prevail, may also at last be brought against a standing government. The standing army is only an arm of the standing government. The government itself, which is only the mode which the people have chosen to execute their will, is equally liable to be abused and perverted before the people can act through it. Witness the present Mexican war. The work of comparatively a few individuals using the standing government as their tool; for, in the outset, the people would not have consented to this measure.

The practical reason why, when the power is once in the hands of the people, a majority are permitted, and for a long period continue, to rule, is not because they are most likely to be in the right, nor because this seems fairest to the minority, but because they are physically the strongest. But a government in which the majority rule in all cases cannot be based on justice, even as far as men understand it. Can there not be a government in which majorities do not virtually decide right and wrong, but conscience in which majorities decide only those questions to which the rule of expediency is applicable? Must the citizen ever for a moment, or in the least degree, resign his conscience to the legislator? Why has every man a conscience, then? In response to these questions Thoreau argues.

...I think that we should be men first, and subjects afterward.

It is not desirable to cultivate a respect for the law, so much as for the right. The only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right. It is truly enough said, that a corporation has no conscience; but a corporation of conscientious men is a corporation with a conscience. Law never made men a whit more just; and, by means of their respect for it, even the well-disposed are daily made the agents of injustice. How does it become a man to behave toward this American government today? I answer that he cannot without disgrace be associated with it. I cannot for an instant recognize that political organization as my government which is the slave's government also.

Thoreau stressed that all men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government, when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable. But almost all say that such is not the case now. He writes:

But such was the case, they think, in the Revolution of '75. If one were to tell me that this was a bad government because it taxed foreign commodities brought to its ports, it is most probable that I should not make an ado about it, for I can do

without them: all machines have their friction; and possibly this does enough good to counterbalance the evil. At any rate, it is a great evil to make a stir about it. But when the friction comes to have its machine, and oppression and robbery are organized, I say, let us not have such a machine any longer.

In other words, when a sixth of the population of a nation which has undertaken to be the refuge of liberty are slaves, and a whole country is unjustly overrun and conquered by a foreign army, and subjected to military law, I think that it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize. What makes this duty the more urgent is the fact, that the country so is not our own, but ours is the invading army.

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. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy is worse than the evil. It makes it worse. Why is it not more apt to anticipate and provide for reform? Why does it not cherish its wise minority? Why does it cry and resist before it is hurt? Why does it not encourage her citizens to be on the alert to point out her faults, and do better than she would have done? In response to questions like these Thoreau argues:

If the injustice is part of the necessary friction of the machine of government, let it go, let it go; perchance it will wear smooth certainly the machine will wear out. 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. What I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn.

Thoreau further stressed that under a government which imprisons any unjustly, the true place for a just man is also a prison, and explains that the easiest and safest way for a violent free and peaceful revolution is to refuse to pay tax to an oppressive regime. He explains:

The proper place today, the only place which Massachusetts has provided for her freer and less desponding spirits, is in her prisons, to be put out and locked out of the State by her own act, as they have already put themselves out by their principles. It is there that the fugitive slave, and the Mexican prisoner on parole, and the Indian come to plead the wrongs of his race should find them; on that separate, but more free and honorable ground, where the State places those who are not with her but against her the only house in a slave-state in which a free man can abide with honor. If any think that their influence would be lost there, and their voices no longer afflict the ear of the State, that they would not be as an enemy within its walls, they do not know by how much truth is stronger than error, nor how much more eloquently and effectively he can combat injustice who has experienced a little in his own person.

Cast your whole vote, not a strip of paper merely, but your whole influence. A minority is powerless while it conforms to the majority; it is not even a minority then; but it is irresistible when it clogs by its whole weight. If the alternative is to keep all just men in prison, or give up war and slavery, the State will not hesitate which to choose. If a thousand men were not to pay their tax bills this year that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible. If the tax-gatherer, or any other public officer, asks me, as one has done, "But what shall I do?" my answer is, "If you really wish to do anything, resign your office." When the subject has refused allegiance, and the officer has resigned his office, then the revolution is accomplished. But even suppose blood should flow. Is there not a sort of blood shed when the conscience is wounded? Through this wound a man's real manhood and immortality flow out, and he bleeds to an everlasting death. I see this blood flowing now.

Thoreau's essay *Resistance to Civil Government*, which emerged from his action of refusing to pay the poll tax, explained the meaning of action, and his essay was turned into

action by its readers who found inspiration from it. Henry David Thoreau is conventionally considered as a towering figure who advocated and practiced nonviolent resistance against social evils. But as matter of fact, his essay not only influenced social reform leaders like Tolstoy, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King who insisted on using nonviolent means to achieve their political goals, but also anonymous fighters in the Danish Resistance who used violent means. Initially, Thoreau's action seems to mean nonresistance and anti-government in general. On July 24th, 1846, Thoreau was arrested for refusing to pay the poll tax and was put into jail. Thoreau himself explains why he refused to pay the church tax: "I did not see why the schoolmaster should be taxed to support the priest, and not the priest the schoolmaster . . . I did not see why the lyceum should not present its tax-bill, and have the State to back its demand, as well as the church. Thoreau denied the church's right to tax. He does not object to any particular church policy or practice; he was not saying, "Change this policy and I will pay." He suggested that the schoolmaster and the lyceum had as much right to tax as the church does, and that if all institutions could present their tax-bills, then he would feel at ease in paying them. What matters is not a particular policy but the underlying structure. "This act of non-resistance, you will perceive, does not rest on the plea of poverty . . . Neither is it wholly based on the iniquitous purposes to which the money when collected is applied. But it is founded on the moral instinct which forbids every moral being to be a party, either actively or permissively, to the destructive principles of power and might over peace and love.

To make sense of this, we have first to know what Lane meant by calling Alcott's tax refusal an "act of non-resistance." "Non-resistance" was then a term referring to William Lloyd Garrison's New England Non-Resistance Society, founded in 1838, and to that society's doctrines. Non-resistance opposed both individual violence and state violence, even state violence intended for self-defense. Furthermore, Garrison and his colleagues held that non-resistance are against not only all violence but also all cooperation with violence, for example, holding office in a state that maintains a standing army, or a standing police force, or a jail. "I will hold office on no such condition, I will not be a voter on such conditions. I will join no Church or State, who hold such a creed or prescribe such a covenant for the subscription of her members. All of this is called non-resistance because for thinkers like Garrison and Ballou, the central moral question is how we are to respond to injury and evil. The "almost universal opinion and practice of mankind," writes Ballou, "has been on the side of resistance of injury with injury." And it is this opinion that non-resistants' reject, claiming instead that by adhering to the law of love and suffering is wrong; rather than inflicting it, they shall finally overcome evil with good and exterminate all their enemies by turning them into faithful friends.

To call Alcott's tax refusal an act of nonresistance means that by it Alcott refuses to cooperate with a potentially violent state, one that "spends money on prisons, gunpowder, and halts." Alcott's ground for refusing to pay the poll tax are thus a little more specific than Thoreau's refusal to pay the church practice. But prisons and halts are practices of every government and objection to them is objection to state in general. At its beginning, then, it seems that the Thoreau's action of tax refusal meant much the same as what Alcott's meant. Alcott defends Thoreau's tax refusal on the grounds of a dignified non-compliance with the injunction of civil powers. Thoreau himself, in describing Alcott's arrest, associates himself with Lane, and lays emphasis on "the State" rather than on State policies. And as late as January 26th, 1848, in a Lyceum lecture on "The Rights & Duties of the Individual in relation to Government," Thoreau is still presenting his action much the same as Alcott's.

In conclusion, both the earlier essays and the later ones explain and defend the direct action that Thoreau found appropriate to the moment. And that pragmatic focus on a particular action makes Thoreau's essay legitimately available to sharply opposed readers; both King and Gandhi, on the one hand, and the anonymous fighter in the Danish Resistance on the other, all read Thoreau rightly.

#### The Hermeneutics of Thoreau's Civil Disobedience and Implications for Nation Building in Nigeria

Civil disobedience is considered not only as an attention-getting device, but also as a persuasive technique for galvanizing support for the goals of the society. So where does this persuasive power come from? The answer given by many philosophers and practitioners of civil disobedience is suffering. The voluntary suffering of the civil disobedience volunteers is a great catalyst to win for them sympathy, belief and support. Thus P. T. Sorokin wrote about "love begetting love", while King insisted that unmerited suffering is always redemptive. But the most ardent supporter of the belief that suffering can melt the hearts of the people was Gandhi. He was convinced that the success of the civil disobedience volunteers lies in their willingness to suffer and to be arrested and imprisoned, rather than in their endeavors to avoid imprisonment. According to his view, even if there is but a single unarmed policeman, civil disobedient volunteers should surrender to him instead of running away. He speaks:

The triumph of the civil disobedience volunteers "consists in thousands being led to the prisons like lambs to the slaughter house...If the lambs of the world had been willingly led, they would have long ago saved themselves from the butcher's knife. Our triumph consists in being imprisoned for no wrong whatever. The greater our innocence, the greater our strength and the swifter our victory." Success is the certain result of

suffering of the extremist character, voluntarily undergone.

According to Gandhi, enormous self-sacrifice is involved in the practice of civil disobedience. The practitioners must keep their actions nonviolent and must voluntarily submit to whatever punishment the authorities decide to impose. At certain times, especially in a regime which is not so democratic, the punishment undergone by the civil disobedience volunteers is unusually harsh. Not only criminal punishments may be imposed, but practitioners might lose their jobs, be isolated by social companions, and suffer defamation. That is why King said that civil disobedience is not for cowards; it is the way of the strong. A stigmatic adherence to internal violence and suffering may seem unrewarding at times, in particular when the opponent is determined to suppress the movement with iron and blood, but it does play an important role of communication between civil disobedience volunteers and opponents, as well as the general community. It sends a clear message to the society that the civil disobedient participants have no wish to redress their wrongs or realize their political goals by violence. It also helps civil disobedience volunteers to convince the majority of fellow citizens that their acts are indeed conscientious and sincere. Therefore, the commitment to nonviolence and the willingness to suffer are very helpful in persuading both the opponent and the general public to sympathize with the cause of the civil disobedience participants. In addition, this is also the very reason why civil disobedience is more powerful than normal protests in persuading the audience, including political opponents. According to Haksar, because of the significant sacrifice and suffering on the part of disobedient volunteers, a regime that is generally insensitive to lawful appeals may become sensitized and may ultimately accede to the civil disobedience volunteer's point of view. In Gandhi's words, "the eyes of their understanding (those people who have settled convictions) are opened not by argument but by the suffering of the Satyagrahi."

The power of civil disobedience was well illustrated by the civil rights protests in the American South, which undoubtedly succeeded, at least partly, by convincing the white majority of the evil of the American "apartheid." In that movement, the nonviolent character of the movement greatly helped the protestors win the sympathy of the observing public and reduced fears of whites that blacks intend to retaliate violently for past suppressions. At the very least, it did a great deal of good in winning "neutral" or "moderate" whites to sympathize with the blacks.

The persuasion of civil disobedience is aimed at both opponents and on-lookers, but opponents, at least those with strongly settled minds, are sometimes difficult to persuade. Indeed, studies show that though the suffering of civil disobedience volunteers plays a great role in winning the hearts of the moderate opponent, the pacifist approach of civil

disobedience practically has no positive effect in inducing the most hardened opponent to adopt a cooperative attitude, and perhaps even has a negative effect. Because of the nonviolence and self-suffering character, it is highly probable that the most hardened opponent may develop a false impression that civil disobedience are cowardly, powerless, troublesome rather than courageous, self-confident and honest. This may further enhance their contempt of the civil disobedience. For example, after studying what happened in the Civil Rights Movements of America, Zashin points out that civil disobedience had very limited effect in changing the hearts of the dominant whites in the South. In a simulated game, some scholars also prove that the pacifist approach practically has no effect in inducing the dominant group to be cooperative.

The scope of a conflict can often determine who will be the winner. It has been noted that in a conflict the general tendency of the weaker is to broaden it and to expand the battle lines in order to involve more parties, whereas the tendency of the stronger is to privatize it, to contain it and to limit attempts to involve larger audiences. The reason is that the stronger can win the conflict without the intervention of the third party, while often the only chance for the weaker to win is to change its status as weak by inviting more supporters to join in the conflict. When compared to their opponents (often the regime and its most loyal supporters), civil disobedient are generally weaker. Therefore, it is often in the interests of civil disobedient to expand their conflict with the opponent by inviting the intervention or support of third parties. Indeed, this is the main reason why the civil disobedient try to publicize their protest, whereas the regime seems more interested in avoiding publicity. Thus, it is essential for civil disobedient to persuade the non-involved audience to support their goals. In Kuper's words, civil disobedience "wins, if it wins, not so much by touching the conscience of the masters as by exciting the sympathy of disinterested onlookers."

As we have seen, one of the most important ways for civil disobedient to persuade is to suffer. The suffering, on the one hand, can legitimize their own claims, showing their integrity and honesty; on the other hand, can show the injustice, cruelty and tyranny of the regime. Moved by the sufferings of civil disobedient or angered by the cruelty of the government, otherwise latent supporters of the civil disobedients may decide to act on their behalf. When a large number of on-lookers get involved, civil disobedients may be elevated to the position of the stronger, while the regime becomes weaker. As described by Michael Lipinsky, "the essence of political protest consists of activating third parties to participate in controversy in ways favorable to protest goals." If civil disobedients successfully mobilize the larger, on-looking populace to stand with them, it becomes easier for them to achieve their goals.

This technique of persuading the audience to one's side becomes all the more important considering the fact that there are always lots of politically inactive citizens in a democracy. In almost every democracy, a large segment of the adult population is indifferent to or only superficially involved in political affairs. They have no interest in the political campaigns, are unconcerned about the outcomes, and are uninformed about the candidates and issues. Moreover, there are many others who are so uninvolved that they have no wish to vote most of the time. But, when these inactive citizens are mobilized to participate in the political process, sometimes they are strong enough to change the status quo. This is why it is essential for the challenger of the status quo, certainly including the civil disobedients, to activate these citizens.

A third party can show its support to the civil disobedients in many different ways, not necessarily in the form of participating in their civil disobedience. For example, they may choose to show their support by voting against those candidates who are hostile to the civil disobedients, retreating from their cooperation with the regime, taking part in all kinds of legal protests, writing letters to the government and the legislator, and so on. As long as they are activated to show their support, the political battle lines will be changed. Lastly, the third party need not be limited to the citizens of the civil disobedients' state. The whole international society could be involved and become a third party, which is even more so in the age of the "global village". The anti-apartheid movement of South Africa is a good example and who says it would not work for the Nigerian civil service if adequately mobilized and employed? For a very long time, the movement led by Mandela failed to find enough support in South Africa to abolish the discriminating system; it was abolished only after international society was stunned by the injustices and began to act actively against the regime.

Civil disobedience is not performed only in words, but in actions as well. Despite the insistence of a few scholars that civil disobedience is always persuasive and never coercive, it does contain some elements of coercion or pressure. Civil disobedience is a provocative act against the government. By engaging in law-breaking (disobedience) the dissenters pose a question to the government to which the government must respond immediately. Just as Thoreau responded to the oppressive regime in the United States by refusing to pay taxes and thereby compelling the government and the on-lookers to do the needful. The Nigerian labour leaders may consider massive and ceaseless protest against the anti-people's policies of the government than the infertile industrial actions that has over the years yielded little or no result. The government in the case of civil disobedience has only two choices, either recognizing, explicitly or implicitly, the cause of the disobedients by refraining from punishing them, or rejecting their appeals by punishing them. No middle ground, such as playing the technique of delay or keeping silence, is left

for the government. In other words, the government is placed on the defensive in the case of civil disobedience, having to defend its actions or inactions in public. In short, civil disobedience is a question posed to the government demanding a decision for or against it and the government has to answer immediately, unlike the usual memoranda of understanding and action that has been counter-productive for decades now in Nigeria.

By persuading non-cooperation from the government, acts of civil disobedience exert pressure on the function, even subsistence, of the government. As has been noted, the smooth function of the government is dependent on the voluntary cooperation of great numbers of people even when the government seems to rely on repression. But civil disobedience tries to persuade the public to withdraw their cooperation from the government on some laws in order to protest their undemocratic nature. Once large numbers of people are convinced to withhold their cooperation, the ability of the government to fulfill its functions may be adversely affected. It may become helpless in enforcing its rules and regulations, and, moreover, may lose its justification for existence and its claim to legitimacy. Therefore, civil disobedience exerts considerable pressure on the government by threatening to erode its support, and that is what the labour unions in Nigeria are by this piece recommended to explore as an alternative to the impotent strike action that has hitherto, failed to yield any result.

In addition to indirectly eroding the basic support of the government, civil disobedience also constitutes a direct burden on the government. For example, civil disobedients may temporarily block the entrance to or trespass on government buildings as the exemplified during the #ENDSARS mass protest. In the case of mass civil disobedience, too many arrests may make the prisons and the courts of the state congested, even totally disabling them. Therefore, civil disobedience sometimes consumes many resources of the government that otherwise could be allocated to other areas. If too many resources, whether in the form of personnel or economic resources, were redirected to cope with civil disobedience, the normal functions of the government would be undermined. Mass civil disobedience can not only make the government inefficient but can also inhibit the performance of its functions as occurred in the United States during the anti-Vietnam War movement, and in Nigeria during the #ENDSARS in 2020. Coercion or pressure is a very efficient way to induce change because the responses of the governments to the suffering of people often depend on the pressure that is put on them. Just as an individual is reluctant to admit his mistakes, the government is often unwilling to acknowledge its wrongdoings and reverse its policies unless external pressure is imposed. Pressure can induce the government to change its policies by making it realize that not compromising or not making concessions may be too costly in relation to the benefits of maintaining the status quo.

## **Conclusion**

Civil disobedience is normally a persuasive action. It tries to persuade rather than coerce the government to listen to the appeals of the disobedients. In Thoreau's words, it is an action appealing to the sense of justice; in Gandhi's words, it is an action aimed to change the hearts of the opponents. But the hearts of the opponents are not always readily changed, especially for those opponents with dogmatic convictions. Their hearts may be insulated from any kind of rational or emotive appeal. Under such extreme circumstances, the only alternative way in a democracy to open their hearts is to persuade them through pressure, making them understand that maintaining the status quo is a much higher cost than compromising with the protestors. According to Elliot Zashin, civil disobedience, sometimes, is a question of convincing the opponents that the costs of concessions are smaller than the costs of enduring the protest campaign. History also proves that civil disobedience often succeeds most fully when it imposes direct economic and political pressure on the opponents. In civil disobedience, persuasive appeals are important, but it is often backed by such nonviolent direct actions such as sit-ins, boycotts, mass marches, strikes, trespasses, and upsetting of government works. Therefore, civil disobedience is not merely a persuasive or spiritual power as claimed by some scholars; it is also a political and economic power that exerts considerable pressure. It remains predominantly nonviolent, but nonviolence also can be used as a powerful way to press for change, and if employed by the Nigerian union leaders alongside the ethics of strike, the sky would be her starting point in realizing their desired change.

## **Endnotes**

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A. Mozia & I. Ogugua D.H. Thoreau'S Concept Of Civil Disobedience: Implications For Nation Building In Nigeria.

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