



Right to Secede: Seditious Tyranny or Self-Evident Truth?

As the government of Spain holds Catalonia hostage to its sense of sovereign supremacy, the larger — perhaps more pertinent — questions are being asked around the globe.

Do people retain a right to separate themselves from a larger political entity? If so, when may that right be rightly exercised?

The American answer to these questions is set out in the Declaration of Independence. This proclamation by our patriot forefathers was meant to lay before the world the moral and legal justifications for the severing of the political ties that for over 150 years had bound the American colonies to the crown of England.



In fairness, an American (or English) explication of the propriety of pulling away from a larger political society would not necessarily be persuasive in the case of the Catalans.

As James Madison wrote in *The Federalist*, No. 39, the particular political tenets professed by Americans are unique to the “genius of the people of America.” Our sense of secession and its lamentable necessity has been given a voice by Englishmen and Americans from Algernon Sidney to Thomas Jefferson and their reasons, though sound to our minds, may seem selfish or seditious to the understanding of those descended from other social and political traditions.

While most Americans accept the arguments laid out in the Declaration of Independence in support of the secession of the 13 colonies from the British Empire, they have stored that subject away in a box marked “1776” and placed it on the crowded, dusty shelf of history. To suggest secession could cure much of the political and societal ills that have enervated the American body politic is generally considered contrary to the will of the majority of Americans.

Which leads to the next difficult question.

Supposing the majority of a population wants to withdraw from the larger society to which they have been bound politically. What becomes of the minority of that people who wish to remain a part of the greater government?

There are at least two possible answers to that important inquiry.

First, assuming that an independent Catalonia would be a socialist state (one observer described the goal of secessionists in Catalonia to be “the creation of a larger welfare state”), the would-be citizens of the country of Catalonia who didn’t wish to be robbed of resources in the name of social justice could emigrate to Spain, France, or some other nation with something closer to their own conception of a good government.

This solution would rid Catalonia of that segment of their population who would obstruct the new



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government's goal of establishing a socialist economic system. Additionally, those departing for other shores would be free from the fetters that a socialist scheme would place on their property.

Next, there is the paradoxical fact that the perceived problems of secession are solved by more secession. As Ryan McMaken explains, "a larger number of states is preferable to a smaller number. A larger number of small states provides more practical choices to taxpayers and citizens in choosing a place to live under a government that more closely match their personal values."

In other words, that government functions best that is closer to the ideal perceived by the people who live in that society.

How much sunnier would the current political and social climate become if those who wished to live in a country such as the one the so-called progressives are trying to create in the United States were empowered to seek such "equality" and those who prefer to live in a land where liberty is given its fullest expression and traditional values are held dear were able to enjoy such a society?

Finally, there is the irrefutable fact that any segment of a population who finds that their values and governmental goals are not being pursued in their present country — who are forced to remain under that nation's regime — are hostages. As humans, it is our inherited right to create governments, create confederacies, create coalitions, and it is our right to abrogate those things as well.

These are truths that, as Americans, we hold to be self-evident. Spain? Maybe not so much. Therein, though, in the right of self-determination, lies the solution to the question of Catalonia and to calming the crisis that has her people stuck between Spain and sovereignty.

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