

The Principle of Secession Defended

General de Gaulle has been reviled, derided, and hooted at by the entire American press for getting up in Quebec and shouting, “*Vive le Quebec Libre*” (Long Live a Free Quebec!). For the American mind seems totally incapable of understanding the principle of secession or the desire of an oppressed ethnic minority to separate and liberate itself from the tyranny of the majority. In the United States everybody laughed and called de Gaulle a senile, doddering old fool; but in Canada, and above all in Quebec, nobody laughed. They were either angry and bitter, or they cheered; but they didn’t laugh. For they knew that Canada is two nations, and that the British have been dominating the French in Canada ever since Britain invaded and conquered New France (as Canada was called) in the mid-eighteenth century.

Why *shouldn’t* the French of Quebec have the right to secede from Canada and form their own nation, where their own language and culture prevails? None of the territorial boundaries of the current governments of the world are God-ordained; they are all products of historical forces, most of which were unjust and coercive, with many resulting in oppressed minorities and plundering majorities. There is every reason, then, why these boundaries and state areas should be changed to conform more with the principles of freedom and justice.

Many libertarians cannot understand why one should take any stand on such a matter as secession. Wouldn't the French only be setting up a Quebec state, and why would this be better than a Canadian state? One answer is that decentralization is itself a good, because the Canadian state will then be weakened and deprived of power over a territorial area; the more states the world is fragmented into, the less power any one state can build up, either over its own hapless subjects or over foreign peoples in making war.

But another answer is that as long as states exist it is a net gain to eliminate the tyranny of a state over a minority ethnic group, and the secession of that group into its own state is therefore an important net gain for freedom. And there is another important reason for hailing the principle of secession *per se*: for if one part of a country is allowed to secede, and this principle is established, then a sub-part of that must be allowed to secede, and a sub-part of *that*, breaking the government into ever smaller and less powerful fragments ... until at last the principle is established that *the individual* may secede — and then we will have true freedom at last.

And on so many grounds: principle, ethnic freedom, pragmatic destruction of State Leviathan power, ultimate principle of individual secession, it is incumbent upon every lover of liberty to hail secession movements wherever and however they may arise. Therefore, let us hail them all: the Quebec Liberation Movement, Scottish nationalism, Welsh nationalism, the secession of the Ibo people of Eastern Nigeria into the independent republic of Biafra, the “left-wing” secession of the Eastern Congo and the “right-wing” secession of Katanga and, last but not least, the prospect of a black republic seceding from the U.S. Hence the tragedy of the southern defeat in the Civil War, for that defeat has buried the very thought of secession in this country from that time forward. But might does not make right, and the cause of secession may rise again.