

The tragedy of Spain

The Spanish government has decided to double up its strong arm approach to the Catalan independence movement. The first time it used force, trying to close down the unofficial referendum, it shocked the democratic world and made its position worse.

Once again the Spanish government has decided to take tough unilateral action. This time they plan to close down the Catalan government. What if the Catalan government refuses to be closed? What if it meets in exile? What if some of its employees decline to do the bidding of the Spanish government? Will there now be a struggle to get control of the governing machine in Catalonia? Will this make martyrs?

The Catalan leadership has been careful to let the Spanish state make the tough moves first. Presumably it thinks that will lead to more local and international support for its cause. The Catalans have consistently sought dialogue and requested legal ways of assessing and responding to Catalan opinion.

It is true the Catalan leaders are acting outside the constitutional law. It is also the case that a democratic state has to keep most of the people most of the time in support of the constitutional framework. If a state loses the consent of a large number of people to its rights to pass and enforce laws, it will not be able to govern democratically but will need to resort to using force if it wishes to impose the law without dialogue or compromise.