

because it is likely that some hunger and homelessness must be allowed for to avoid unduly promoting the conditions that elicit aid.

However, the individual donor who bears the cost of his own benevolence has an incentive to prevent those in need from taking advantage of his willingness to help. Moreover, in the world of private charity, there is no particular individual or agency who bears final responsibility for letting someone go hungry if he refuses to work in the hope of getting a larger donation. This strengthens the attitude of individual responsibility and the credibility of insisting on self-help as a requirement for aid (Wagner, 1989:173).

The Samaritan's dilemma poses a more formidable social problem in the welfare state. Democratic governments are much less likely than private individuals to deal effectively with the dilemma when the government acts as a 'safety net' or 'charity of last resort'. In this case, individuals whose earnings are just above the government's safety net have a strong incentive to quit working and take advantage of transfer programs. And, as shown above, there is a short-run bias on the part of those who legislate and administer welfare programs. When contrasted with private donors, government employees have an incentive to be less concerned with the long-run effects of aid on a recipient's behaviour.

There is no way to avoid the Samaritan's dilemma in coping with people in need — whether the issue is homelessness, medical care, subsidised credit, or foreign aid. An offer of aid generally will bring about some worsening of the conditions that evoked the initial offer

of assistance. However, the above analysis suggests that publicly funded aid is less effective than private charity in coping with this dilemma for two reasons. First, when compared with private donors, the welfare bureaucracy is likely to be less concerned about the societal dilemma inherent in assisting needy people because government employees benefit personally as the magnitude of the aid increases. Second, no one spends other people's money as carefully as he spends his own.

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*Dr E. C. Pasour is a professor of economics at North Carolina State University at Raleigh. This article was originally published in the June 1991 issue of The Freeman: Ideas on Liberty. It is reproduced with the permission of The Foundation for Economic Education, Irvington-on-Hudson, NY 10533.*

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## Telling the Right from the Left

Scott Campbell

The misuse of political terms continues to increase, leading to absurd results. Journalists, public servants, academics, and venerable members of the general public have distorted terms like 'left wing' and 'right wing' so much that what meaningful content remains is often misleading.

Media reporting of the events in the USSR in August 1991 showed up many TV, radio and print journalists as the worst offenders, with their continual reference to Russian president Boris Yeltsin and his associates as the Russian 'left wing', and the hard-line communists as the 'right wing'.

How is it that a group espousing communism, the quintessential left-wing theory, is labelled 'right wing'?

The reason is that the terms 'left wing' and 'right wing' each have two senses. First, they can stand for positions on political and economic issues; 'right wingers' conventionally support free enterprise, minimal government intervention in the market, and minimal redistribution of wealth, while 'left wingers' support government control of the market, equality of income, and the welfare state. Second, 'right wing' and 'left wing' are used in a similar way to the terms 'conservative' and 'radical' (respectively), indicating positions on whether or not political and economic change is desired.

That the first sense is the principal one is clear from considering how puzzled the general public would be if the Liberal Party was described as 'left wing' on the grounds that it advocated radical changes in the tax system for the common good, or if striking trade unionists were called 'right wing' because they opposed the introduction of voluntary unionism.

However, use of the second sense of the terms is increasing, and the confusion arises from the lack of distinction that is made between the two senses. Indeed, the Collins dictionary defines 'left' first as 'radical

or progressive', and only later mentions the ideals of promoting the interests of the 'common people' (and even then only in the context of 'change, reform or revolution'). And the three political senses it gives of 'right' are all defined in terms of conservatism, reaction, and opposition to social change.

The second sense has developed because many right wingers have been conservatives, and left wingers radicals. As a result it is widely thought that conservatism (radicalism) is a necessary aspect (even *the* necessary aspect) of being right wing (left wing). This is

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especially so in the case of left-leaning journalists, who go even further: in their uncritical assumption that they know what's right, they call anything they dislike 'right wing'. Consequently they apply the term to a variety of reactionary movements, military dictatorships and governments that use unnecessary force or brutality, such as traditional communist regimes. So it is that the communist hard-liners become 'right wing'.

The same journalists also often apply the term 'left wing' to any group that advocates 'progressive' change, which boils down to anything they approve of, whether or not it deserves the epithet. Thus, the Russian democratic reformers become 'left wingers'. This is not totally wrong, because many of the reformers do still sit

on the left, but it obscures the fact that they are to the right of the communists. We do, after all, distinguish between the right and the left of even a leftist party such as the British Labour Party. (Yeltsin himself called the communists 'right wing', but I suspect he caught the disease from the Western journalists he talks to).

This misleading labelling reinforces the common but confused perception that the 'right wing' is one and the same thing as totalitarianism, the use of military force, and the repression of individual rights. So any group that calls itself, or is called, 'right wing' because it advocates free-market principles is immediately and often erroneously assumed to be conservative and repressive. This is why many people who strongly profess not to be right wing prove to be so once their beliefs are revealed; what they are repudiating is conservatism and repression. 'Left wing', meanwhile, becomes associated with democracy, freedom and change, even though left wingers may be as brutal and repressive as the Nazis, as was made clear in Eastern Europe in the decades after World War II.

The strongly pejorative connotations of the term 'right wing' leave the right winger in a difficult situation. He is forced either to make a song-and-dance about the misuse of the term, or to invent new terms that have no unpleasant associations, or to appropriate terms that signify the good things about right-wing politics. Terms like 'capitalist' and 'free marketeer' are an improvement on 'right wing', but they do have their own negative connotations.

However, the confusion of political debate caused by the misuse of political terms could have one beneficial result: people may be forced to give more specific descriptions of their beliefs. This would be welcome, since many politicians tended to be vague about their beliefs so as not to lose the support of voters who may be adversely affected by specific policies. Another reason this would be welcome is that beliefs that have traditionally been strongly associated with the right or the left are now becoming less so. Until the 1970s, most right wingers in Australia were assumed to believe in God, the family and traditional values, to support Britain and the US, and to be against drugs, pornography, promiscuity and all the rest. Left wingers were supposed to hold diametrically opposed beliefs. This characterisation was always a cliché, and now it is simply wrong. Right wingers are just as likely to be drug-taking, pornography-watching, anti-American and atheistic as left wingers, who are just as likely as right wingers to be anti-drug-and-porn Christians who believe in the family.

To promote understanding and clarity of thought, then, we need to be more specific about what we believe, and do our best to clear up the mess. In my opinion it is not too late to rescue the terms 'left wing' and 'right wing' and to give them reasonably stable meanings.

*Scott Campbell is a Tutor in Philosophy at the University of Tasmania.*