

## **What Does it Mean to be a Leftist?**

Some people try to avoid the label “Leftist.” They think the word is off-putting, and leads to unnecessary division. But I think it provides a framework for describing and understanding a very particular and profoundly positive and liberating political ideology. The clarity of the term promotes real solidarity, as opposed to false agreement that happens when we fail to speak plainly.

The term Leftist originated in the political and social landscape of the 18th and 19th centuries. It emerged during a time of significant social, economic, and political upheaval, as traditional power structures were challenged by new ideas and movements. Interestingly, the term itself is derived from the seating arrangement in the French National Assembly during the French Revolution.

During the French Revolution, the National Assembly was divided into various factions based on their political beliefs. Those who supported the monarchy and conservative values sat on the right side of the assembly, while those who advocated for radical change and egalitarian principles sat on the left side. This seating arrangement soon became a symbolic representation of the political spectrum, with the left side representing progressive and reformist ideologies.

The leftist movement gained further prominence during the 19th century with the rise of socialism and the labor movement. Socialists sought to address the social and economic inequalities brought about by industrialization and capitalism. Leftists unapologetically advocated for workers' rights, fair distribution of wealth, and collective ownership of resources. Leftist ideologies also encompassed other movements such as anarchism and communism, which called for the abolition of hierarchies and the establishment of a classless society.

Over time, the term Leftist expanded beyond its original French context and became a widely used descriptor for groups with generally progressive or radical political beliefs. It has been associated with a range of ideologies, social democracy, eco-socialism, feminism, and anti-colonialism, among others.