

Toward a Language of Democracy

Frances Moore Lappé

“How forcible are right words.” -- JOB

Widely Used Terms	Confusing Connotations	Alternatives to communicate more accurately & powerfully
Activist	Rabble-rouser, extremist with own agenda	Engaged citizen, active citizen, empowered citizen
Anti-globalization	Backward, selfish, isolationist	Pro-democracy, pro-strong communities, anti-corporate control, anti-economic concentration
Citizenship	Burden, duty, boring	Public engagement, community building
Conventional farming	Sounds benign and time-tested when it is neither	Chemically-dependent farming, extractive agriculture, factory farming
Conservatives applied to those of the far Right	Implies devotion to preserving the environment and communities	Far Right, anti-democratic Right
Democracy	Limited to voting and government	Living Democracy: a way of living in which the democratic values of fairness, inclusion, and mutual accountability infuse all dimensions of our public lives, including economic life
Free trade	Implies absence of government control, an automatic mechanism. It doesn't exist.	unfair trade, corporation-favoring trade
Globalization	Implies positive interdependence, connection, free trade, cheaper goods	Global corporate control, economic centralization, economic feudalism, downward pressure on global wages
Social justice	Associated with radical Left, forced equality	Fairness, fair opportunity, freedom
Liberal	Favoring big government	Progressive, democratic
Minimum wage	Fails to convey human impact	Poverty wage (vs. living wage)
National debt, per person	Lacks meaning to most people	“Birth tax” – share of nation's debt each newborn faces, \$150,000 in 2005*

From *Getting a Grip: Clarity, Creativity and Courage in a World Gone Mad*
 Frances Moore Lappé, Small Planet Media, 2007 www.smallplanet.org

Nonprofit organization	Defined in negative	Social-benefit organization, citizens' organization
Organic farming	Focuses on the absence of pesticides; sounds like going backward	Ecological farming: using the science of ecology to increase quality and productivity while enhancing the environment.
Pro-life	Misleads; cross-country studies show that making abortion illegal fails to prevent it.	For criminalizing abortion
Protest, demonstration	Negative	Civic obedience -- positive acts to defend democratic values
Public life	Restricted to officials and celebrities	What we each do as buyer, worker, employer, parent, voter, investor and in all the other roles we play daily that have huge ripple effects.
Regulation	Big Brother, top-down intrusive government, inefficiency	Standards protecting ownership diversity, competition, health, and the environment; public protections; "values boundaries" within which the market serves community well-being
Right to same-sex marriage	Focuses on sexuality	Freedom to marry, equal marriage
Taxes	Burden, rip-off of "our" money	Membership dues for a strong, healthy society; or "the price of civilization," as Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr., put it.
Welfare state	Coddling people, big bureaucracy	Fair-opportunity state

* Thank you, Nicholas D. Kristof, *New York Times* columnist, for suggesting this term.