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ECONOMICS

# The Rhetoric of the Right

Language change and the spread of  
the market

David George



Economists and financial journalists rarely contemplate the processes by which theoretical ideas shape and inform the public discussions that, ultimately, render certain ideas or policies acceptable, unacceptable, or simply beyond the pale. Those who have considered such matters are aware that over the past several decades the language of conventional economic discourse has shifted dramatically to the right. In this book, Professor David George has checked the validity of this supposition by gathering and presenting an analysis of the language deployed in reporting on the economy, and how it has evolved over time. Stated simply, the evidence he uncovers overwhelmingly confirms the existence of a pronounced rightward shift in the way that stories about the economy are framed and presented. Anyone interested in economic policy, American politics, current affairs, and public administration will want to read this book.

Robert E. Prasch, *Professor of Economics, Middlebury College,  
Middlebury, Vermont, USA*

David George's new book makes a significant contribution to our understanding of shifts in public discourse on the economy in the past 50 years. His fascinating analysis of newspaper coverage documents how things that used to be discussed favorably (like government policies to offset abuse of corporate power or collective actions by unions) came to be portrayed negatively – while things that used to be portrayed negatively (like concentration of wealth and income) came to be represented as inevitable corollaries of social gains from market-driven growth. The book's long-term perspective helps illuminate how prevailing views of economic questions and problems tend to be shaped by prevailing economic structures and institutions, and in turn dynamically change with them. By denaturalizing our economic understandings, then, George's book can help clear the way for better-grounded, less ideological thinking about how economies and societies should best be structured and coordinated to sustainably meet human needs.

Martha Starr, *Associate Professor, Department of Economics,  
American University, USA*



# The Rhetoric of the Right

This study seeks to demonstrate the subtle ways in which changes in the language associated with economic issues are reflective of a gradual but quantifiable conservative ideological shift.

In this rigorous analysis, David George uses as his data a century of word usage within the *New York Times*, starting in 1900. It is not always obvious how the changes identified necessarily reflect a stronger prejudice toward laissez-faire free market capitalism, and so much of the book seeks to demonstrate the subtle ways in which the changing language indeed carries with it a political message. This analysis is made through exploration of five major areas of focus: the broader “economics rhetoric” scholarship and the growing “behavioral economics” school of thought; the increasingly negative flavor of the discourse associated with government and taxation; the changing meaning of “competition” and “competitive,” and the increasing favorable contexts in which these words appear; changing attitudes toward labor; and the increasing celebration of growth at the same time that economic justice and social equality decline in the attention they are given.

This is a fascinating and uniquely detailed study, which will be of great interest to all economists and students of economic thought, political economics and political science.

**David George** is Professor of Economics at La Salle University, USA.

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Language change and the spread of the market  
*David George*

# **The Rhetoric of the Right**

Language change and the spread of the market

**David George**

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