

Jeremy Corbyn, occupational health and the Overton Window

Submitted by Kellie Mundell on Wed, 2015-09-23 22:30

The concept of the Overton Window is that certain ideas and perceptions are acceptable at a given time in any society and others, those outside the window, are beyond the pale and can be dismissed without further thought. Changes in what's inside the window often reflect the maturing of a society, as we've seen with changing attitudes to homosexuality, but they can also reflect political shifts, socioeconomic factors and the will of some very powerful people.



An example of this latter influence would be the conversations I imagine took place between Rupert Murdoch and others of his ilk at Davos or the Bilderberg Group circa 1995, which probably concluded “so we're agreed — we *can* work with this Blair chap... I'll have a word with Rebecca about editorial policy.”

Now, most of the media suggests it's an accepted *fact* that Jeremy Corbyn's policies are lunacy that will bankrupt the country and cause the end of civilisation as we know it. That might be true — for example, renationalising utility companies looks pretty tricky to me — but, in truth, I don't know and nor does anyone I've talked to about it.

Do many people think his policies are unworkable because they are, or because a group of powerful people, many with deeply vested interests, have repeatedly told us that they are? In short, what is accepted may not be right and it may not be healthy either.

UK safety has much to boast about. Last year's improved fatality figures reflect both a change in the riskiness of work being undertaken and the fact that driving for work isn't included — but also something safety professionals should be hugely proud about. If the figures jump up significantly there will be hell to pay ... but the figures for suicides of working age people (circa 5000) and the figures for deaths caused by exposure at work (circa 13,000) are horrendous, aren't coming down and don't look to be coming down any time soon.

In short, somehow, these figures would appear to fall within the Overton Window of acceptability. There's no media frenzy. British Occupational Hygiene Society chief executive Steve Perkins sometimes looks like a one man army trying to get business to wake up to the issue.



The acceptance of this level of death (and stress and sickness) is appalling and tackling this inertia and moving the Overton Window on these issues is the biggest fight this generation of health and safety professionals faces.

Challenge: *When an employee says “I wonder if we should get occ health to have a look at this” they are almost certainly right to be concerned. Similarly, if occupational health staff say “we’re worried about this”, it’s almost certainly something important. Does the behaviour and attitude of your organisation reflect these truths? Or does it treat occupational health as something of an inconvenience?*

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