

[Shifting the Overton Window](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Monday 16 April 2012

Yes, it's wrapped up in unlovely jargon but this is what we exist to do: shift the Overton Window. [Chris Dillow](#) [3]:

But that's what half of me thinks. Another half remembers Richard Cockett's [description](#) [4] of how libertarian think-tanks helped - over very many years - to shift the Overton window; within my lifetime, private ownership of utilities, for example, has gone from being unthinkable by the political class to taken for granted.

It's true that we're largely seen as being right wing but this is a serious mistake upon the part of those so viewing us. We actually want the poor to get richer, something that makes us rather leftie. That we advocate policies like markets, policies that actually do make the poor richer, makes us unique among lefties, this is true but in this sense we are indeed of the left. As we are in desiring to increase liberty, remove legal and economic privilege and so on.

But what is this Overton Window thing? That's the set of policies which at any one time can be plausibly taken as being politically realistic. Our job is to shift the perception of the various policies we propose so that, over time, they become part of that set of plausible, possible, political actions.

Madsen has his own way of describing this, that we start out saying something that by the standards of the times marks us out as being complete loons howling in the wilderness. By the time people are drinking the beer made today they'll be chuckling at the latest weirdness from those nutters. By the time today's production of good Scotch gets drunk it'll be a serious policy proposal that one or more political parties is including in a manifesto. And by the time this year's claret is ready to drink it'll be a settled part of the legislative landscape and no one at all can remember that we haven't always done it this way.

And we'll take such victories from any political party: Red Ken is associated with the Congestion Charge in London but it's us classically liberal think tanks that set that policy running. Privatising the utilities was enacted by the Tories and I know for certain that the current Lib Dem idea of sharing paternity and maternity leave was inserted into party policy as a result of someone reading this blog. From my pointing out that we don't in fact have a gender pay gap, we have a motherhood pay gap. And it really shouldn't be all that much of a surprise to anyone knowing my background that the UKIP flat tax policy has certain similarities to the flat tax ideas of this think tank.

In terms of the future my biggest ambition is to get drug legalisation through in just this manner. We've been saying it for years already, that it's the illegality that causes many of the problems. We're already seeing serious and sensible politicians running with the idea: heck, Portugal has essentially decriminalised even if not legalised drugs. That Overton Window has already shifted and it is possible to at least conceive now of a future government legalising and taxing appropriately all drugs. It won't be by the time today's Scotch is ready to drink, sadly, but I can see it happening by the time this year's claret is ready.

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[3] http://stumblingandmumbling.typepad.com/stumbling_and_mumbling/2012/04/political-reality-and-political-change.html

[4] <http://www.amazon.co.uk/Thinking-Unthinkable-Think-tanks-Economic-Counter-revolution/dp/0002236729>

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