

NYT: Corbyn Has Marginalized Britain's Labour Party With His Popular Positions

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Much of the power of the New York Times derives from its ability to declare what the serious center is and who is relegated to the dismissible margins. You can see that power being exercised in a recent Times report ([9/4/16](#)) on British politics by [Steven Erlanger](#).

The story focused on Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn—or “its left-wing leader, [Jeremy Corbyn](#),” in the Times’ formulation. The point of the piece is to blame Corbyn for the fact that “the Labour Party is in shambles: Its leader and its members of Parliament are in a virtual civil war, and it is deeply unpopular with the broader electorate.”

Labour’s unpopularity is easy to exaggerate; its [projected national share](#) of the vote in the last local elections, held in May 2016, was 31 percent, a percentage point ahead of the Conservatives; this is [considered unpromising](#), as opposition parties that are soon to become governing parties generally do better than that, but it’s an improvement over May 2015 (four months before Corbyn assumed leadership), when Labour trailed by [6 percentage points](#).

Corbyn’s responsibility for Labour’s woes, however, is taken for granted by the Times—because he’s just too far left:

Mr. Corbyn, a man of the hard left who also wants to renationalize the utilities and make Britain non-nuclear, is deeply skeptical of the United States and considers NATO an outdated, aggressive alliance.... First elected to Parliament in 1983, Mr. Corbyn had always been on Labour’s fringe. He supported Hugo Chávez, the leftist Venezuelan strongman; has pushed hard for more spending for the poor; and has been a persistent critic of Israel and supporter of Palestinian statehood.

The thing is, some of these “hard left” positions are widely popular in the United Kingdom. A 2013 YouGov poll ([11/4/13](#)), for example, found 68 percent of UK voters in favor of nationalizing energy companies, and 66 percent supporting railroad nationalization. When recognition of Palestinian statehood was considered by the UN in 2011, a BBC poll ([9/19/11](#)) found 53 percent of Britons in favor, only 26 percent opposed.

As for pushing for more spending on the poor, given a choice between “Labour should offer more for people in poverty” and “Labour should offer more for people on middle incomes” in a poll sponsored by the Trades Union Congress ([5/20/15](#)), 44 percent of UK citizens picked the former, vs. 29 choosing the latter.

The British public is more mixed on the UK's nuclear force, with 51 percent expressing support for the nation's submarine warheads in an ORB poll and 49 percent advocating scrapping them (Independent, [1/24/16](#)). I couldn't find any polling on how the British public felt about Corbyn's attitude toward Hugo Chávez, perhaps because no one thought that this issue was a particularly vital one for the UK electorate.

It's probably true that Corbyn is more skeptical of the [United States](#) and [NATO](#) than the average Brit. But it's hard not to get the impression that certain positions are identified by Erlanger as problematic not because they're unpopular with Corbyn's constituents—but because they're unpopular with the New York Times.

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