

The Guardian Whitewashes Biased Coverage of Labour Leadership Candidate Jeremy Corbyn

By [Media Lens](#)

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Region: [Europe](#)

Theme: [Media Disinformation](#)

In our [previous](#) media alert, we described ‘the panic-driven hysterical hate-fest campaign’ being waged against Labour leadership candidate Jeremy Corbyn right across the corporate media ‘spectrum’.

This week, Guardian readers’ editor Chris Elliott [responded](#) to readers’ complaints:

‘I read or viewed 43 pieces of journalism published between 21 and 30 July... Seventeen of the 43 pieces struck me as neutral... there were 10 pieces that could broadly be described as either being comment pieces in favour of Corbyn or news stories reporting positively about him.’

Elliott would only concede that ‘in the early days of Corbyn’s charge, the readers rightly got a sniff that on occasions we weren’t taking him seriously enough. That has changed...’.

We wrote to Elliott:

‘Hi Chris

‘Hope you’re well. Thanks for your piece: “Analysing the balance of our Jeremy Corbyn coverage.”...

‘Could you let us know, please, which 17 pieces struck you as neutral, and which 10 pieces were in favour of Corbyn, or reporting positively about him?’
(Email, August 4, 2015)

Elliott replied:

‘Dear Mr Edwards,

‘I am sorry but I have set out all that I had time and resource to do. I cannot help you further.

‘Best wishes

‘Chris Elliott’ (Email, August 4, 2015)

We were, of course, grateful for the response.

In his article, Elliott rightly warned that, 'This is not a scientific piece of research – we don't have the resources.'

In reality, evaluating Guardian bias on Corbyn does not require scientific method, just simple common sense.

Consider, for example, an [article](#) written by arch-Blairite Peter Hain, who is up to his neck in responsibility for Iraq sanctions, invasion and occupation. Hain's piece was titled:

'Jeremy Corbyn's policies may be popular – but they don't add up to a platform'

The article jumped out at us because it contained rare criticism of two other candidates for the Labour leadership:

'The two most credible candidates – Andy Burnham and Yvette Cooper – have been underwhelming: cautious and austerity-lite.'

This does indeed qualify as mild criticism. But compare it with Hain's comments on Corbyn:

'Those inside the Westminster bubble have been transfixed, indeed bewildered, by Jeremy Corbyn's soaring campaign for Labour leader. The more he is denounced, the better he seems to do.'

'Have Labour members gone mad, party luminaries wonder? Has the Militant Tendency's 1980s entryism been somehow reincarnated from its current impotence, headlines ask?'

Hain continued:

'Nobody – least of all him [Corbyn], ironically – imagines he could be prime minister, or even that as opposition leader he could survive the high noon bearpit of Prime Minister's Questions, or deliver an effective instant response to a George Osborne budget speech.'

And:

'But the reason I won't vote for Corbyn is that, underneath his appealing slogans and rousing values, there is no programmatic substance... His economic policy amounts to an unelectable platform of "tax and spend" – an anguished cry of protest, not a serious alternative for a Labour government... He demonstrates little understanding of the immensely arduous challenge of electing, let alone running, a social democratic or democratic socialist government...'

If this isn't clear enough, a simple observation should make it clearer: there is *more* damning personal and political criticism in this single piece on Corbyn than we found in *several hundred* Guardian articles on Burnham, Cooper and Kendall over the last month combined.

By contrast, the following [comment](#) from a Guardian news report indicates the level of criticism that has only rarely been directed at these three candidates:

'A senior Labour politician... attributed Corbyn's success so far to the failure of Burnham, Cooper and Kendall to grip the imagination.'

We also managed to find [this](#) from Rafael Behr in the Guardian:

'Kendall has misjudged the balance between delivering hard truths to the party and charmlessly rubbing it up the wrong way, which in turn raises doubts about the tuning of her political antennae.'

A Guardian leader [commented](#):

'Mr Burnham's campaign, with its heavy emphasis on emotional reconnection with the party's core electorate, is steeped in nostalgia.'

Again, minor, low-level criticism; nothing that could be considered a personal and political demolition in the style of Hain.

Comedian Frankie Boyle wrote a [piece](#) criticising 'passive' Labour. He referred obliquely to 'leadership candidacy androids' who lack 'personality and charm' in a party that is to the right of John Major. Burnham, Cooper and Kendall were not mentioned by name; their role as New Labour Blairites supporting the Iraq crime and other horrors was not discussed. Seumas Milne, the Guardian's resident leftist fig-leaf, also [referred](#) to the 'New Labour machine politician' alternative to Corbyn, supplying rare, substantial criticism of the other candidates for moving 'sharply to the right'.

The fiercest personal criticism came [from](#) John Harris:

'As Corbyn rises, Andy Burnham is suddenly styling himself as the faux-radical saviour of a party "scared of its own shadow".'

And yet his campaign began 'with a speech at the City offices of a corporation associated with huge tax avoidance...'

Yvette Cooper exhibits 'that awful modern Labour tendency to boil even the great causes of the age down to borderline inanity and talk to people as if they are stupid'.

Not that Harris is a Corbyn fan: 'I am less interested in him than what his candidacy, in tandem with Labour's new voting system, has let loose.'

Vanishingly rare exceptions aside, the other three leaders have been criticised for being charmless, overly nostalgic, dull, hypocritical, inane, and so on. Clearly, none of this compares to the many articles passionately warning readers against the '[madness](#)', the '[catastrophe](#)', of voting for Corbyn when 'Nobody - least of all him, ironically - imagines he could be prime minister.'

The Worm-Eating Stage - Think Of Your Children!

Anne Perkins was outraged by criticism of the female candidates in a Guardian [article](#) titled: 'How bad must it get before Labour elects a woman?' Perkins wrote:

'Yvette Cooper and Liz Kendall are cringingly quizzed about their weight, fertility and fashion choices, and the implication from one of the other camps that they might not be tough enough for the five years ahead.'

By ironic contrast, Perkins wrote an impassioned [piece](#) titled:

'Labour party members, please think before you vote for Jeremy Corbyn'

She commented:

'Jeremy Corbyn as leader would fit tidily into the pattern the Conservative party established in its wilderness years.'

The Corbyn vote is a vote for self-destruction, then. Perkins added:

'There is room for a party of the emotional spasm in British politics but that is a party of protest, not a party of government.'

Corbyn and his supporters are part of 'an apocalyptic tendency'. In conclusion, Perkins pleaded with her readers:

'Think what kind of country you want for you and your children and, even more importantly, think how you might get there. Now think, is Jeremy Corbyn in the middle of that picture? I don't think so.'

Last week, we noted how senior columnist Polly Toynbee had [described](#) support for Corbyn as 'summer madness' promoting 'a 1983 man', 'a relic'. This week, Toynbee [commented](#) again under the title:

'Free to dream, I'd be left of Jeremy Corbyn. But we can't gamble the future on him'

Toynbee wrote:

'At hustings he shines by offering virtue, while the rest wrestle with the wretched realities of British politics.'

As so often, then, Corbyn was depicted as a fantasist divorced from the real world inhabited by serious politicians. Once again, Toynbee warned voters off:

'Can Corbyn overcome all with sheer conviction? I wish it were so. But Labour people, motivated by the plight of the needy in a grossly unjust society, shouldn't gamble the future of the weak on such a slender chance... A Cooper leadership offers an infinitely better hope of success than a Jeremy Corbyn/Tom Watson ticket.'

Tim Bale wrote an [article](#) under the title:

'A Corbyn-inspired split would be a Labour catastrophe'

The Guardian's Suzanne Moore [described](#) Corbyn as a 'slightly less feral version of Ken Livingstone'. Moore understood why the less enlightened were attracted to Corbyn's authenticity, 'but Blair is right, surely, to talk of the challenges of the future'.

Moore thus respectfully cited, and sided with, one of the great neocon war criminals of our time. If Corbyn's campaign achieves nothing else, it has already exposed the reality that the deaths of one million human beings in Iraq have done nothing to alter the Guardian Blairites' view of their idol.

Moore bitterly rejected the self-harming lunacy of supporting Corbyn:

'The Labour party can choose to be part of what is happening or it can further cut itself off. Right now they appear to be in the process known to post-Marxists as the "Nobody loves me. Everybody hates me. I am going down the garden to eat worms" stage.'

Martin Kettle followed his earlier [dismissal](#) with a [second](#) under the title:

'Labour can back from the brink. But it seems to lack the will to do so'

Kettle added:

'His socialism, though, is more a matter of faith than a viable programme... Corbyn's position is essentially made up of attitudes and slogans...'

The Guardian's Zoe Williams was [amazed](#) that she was even discussing Corbyn:

'How did this man... get on the ballot in the first place?'

Williams was not suggesting that this is an exciting opportunity to support genuinely progressive policies - her focus was on how to 'neutralise Corbyn'. Of his enemies, Williams wrote:

'On a more profound level, though, they're coming at him with the wrong truncheon. The charge of being unrealistic actually oxygenates rather than smothers the spark Corbyn has created... The most memorable, salient, powerful thing about Blair was that he embodied hope... That's what made him

unstoppable. And that, in the end, is what would neutralise Corbyn: not ever-shriller accusations of the danger he poses but a more forceful articulation of what hopeful Labour would look like, and what its hopes would be.'

The 'most memorable, salient, powerful thing about Blair' was that he sold himself to one of the most vicious hard-right US regimes in living memory. And of course no journalist in the Guardian has sought to identify the right 'truncheon' to 'neutralise' Burnham, Cooper or Kendall. Chris Elliott [recommended](#) this piece to a reader outraged by the Guardian's negative coverage.

As one reads through the hundreds of articles mentioning the four Labour candidates, it becomes overwhelmingly clear that serious, much less harsh, criticism of the New Labour triumverate is not on the agenda. It just becomes obvious that there are no forces within the Guardian willing to support such a focus. Burnham, Cooper and Kendall are to be treated as serious, respectable politicians; potential leaders worthy of due deference and respect. Corbyn can be dissed and dismissed, treated any which way - almost literally *anything* goes.

Thus the Guardian's Simon Hattenstone, who [interviewed](#) Corbyn before his leadership campaign dramatically surged. Imagine any journalist writing anything comparably disrespectful of an Obama or a Cameron before an election; or indeed of a Burnham, Cooper or Kendall:

'If this were a job interview, Corbyn would have already been shown the door. And not just because of his age - 66. Corbyn is the anti-Blair, in every way. Whereas you cannot be unaware of Blair when he is in the room (he is all charisma), you might well not notice Corbyn arriving or leaving.'

'You would expect Corbyn to have charisma by the bucketload and a leonine ego, but he doesn't... He still has a touch of Citizen Smith about him (without the laughs) and even his biggest fans admit he can't open his mouth without expressing the need for peace, justice and solidarity.'

For younger readers, 'Citizen Smith' was a reference to a 1970s BBC [comedy series](#) that mocked a deluded, preachy, unemployed London leftist who had dreams of leading a Cuban-style revolution from Tooting, with his grandiose dreams always ending in pathetic farce.

Hattenstone reported questions that might have been asked of a child rather than a leadership candidate in a democratic election: 'How would he feel if he actually won?... Would it scare him?'

The conclusion was as haughtily dismissive: 'Like the rest of the country, Corbyn doesn't think he has a chance of winning.' Elliott also recommended this piece to the reader angered by negative Guardian coverage.

By dramatic contrast, the Guardian's front-page [interview](#) with Yvette Cooper was deferential to the point of cringe-making idolatry.

Or consider this small comment in a Guardian news [report](#):

'Labour leadership candidate Liz Kendall has said it will be a disaster for the

party if polling proves accurate and the leftwinger Jeremy Corbyn wins the contest.'

No comparable news report has warned of the 'disaster' – for the climate, for victims of US-UK 'humanitarian intervention', for the poor in Britain – if one of the three other candidates is elected.

Corbyn is also alone in having been the butt of Guardian 'humour'. One [article](#) title asked:

'Can Jeremy Corbyn ever be funny? Only on my joke Twitter feed'

[Another:](#)

'Did you hear the one about Jeremy Corbyn on Twitter?'

The piece mentioned Corbyn's 'self-proclaimed "parsimonious MP's" lack of visible humour'.

Assistant editor Michael White also [sniggered](#) beneath the title:

'Did Jeremy Corbyn used to wear open-toed sandals around Westminster in hot weather? Does he still?'

White added:

'So Jeremy Corbyn may actually become leader of the Labour party. I struggled to type those words because I still find it hard to believe. Not since it elected the admirable but unworldly pacifist, George Lansbury (1932-35), after the great Ramsay MacDonald split, will it have been so reckless.'

A news [piece](#) was titled in all seriousness:

'Jeremy Corbyn caught looking gloomy on night bus'

A 'gloomy' Corbyn was pictured simply looking at the ground, or perhaps talking to someone. This was somehow perceived as material for a negative news story – perhaps the campaign was already too much for the ageing fantasist. *Real* leaders – the people we are trained to admire and respect – ride in smart, chauffeur-driven cars at high speed. Corbyn rides a bus. We [tweeted](#) the journalist responsible, Jessica Elgot:

'Have you written stories about other politicians looking gloomy/melancholy/pensive? Could you send links?'

We received no reply.

Finally, as this alert was being written, the Guardian published a [piece](#) by former Labour Health Secretary and Education Secretary, Alan Johnson. Yet again, the title focused on the

insanity:

'Why Labour should end the madness and elect Yvette Cooper'

Corbyn 'never had the ambition or the appetite that this job requires'; he has 'been cheerfully disloyal to every Labour leader he's ever served under', and so on.

Conclusion

Chris Elliott's response mocks his claim to be a genuinely independent readers' editor. Has the Guardian published favourable comment pieces about Corbyn? Quite obviously, yes. Does that mean the Guardian has been fair, impartial and unbiased in its coverage of Corbyn's campaign? Absolutely not.

As we have seen, high-profile Guardian journalists and others have been lined up to direct a flood of 'disaster' warnings, dismissals, derision, disbelief and mockery at Corbyn, *and only Corbyn*. Nothing remotely comparable has been directed at Burnham, Cooper or Kendall. This is a spectacular example of bias.

Put simply, like the rest of the 'mainstream' media, the Guardian – a major corporation deeply embedded in the 'centrist' political and economic establishment – is waging a propaganda war on British democratic choice.

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