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## **UK: Alena Ivanova: “Fighting for remain, we need a clear socialist message”**

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**This interview with Labour Party and anti-Brexit activist Alena Ivanova, who works for Another Europe is Possible and is on the steering committee of Labour for a Socialist Europe, was originally published on [The Clarion website](#).**

**There has been discussion among socialist remainers about our assessment of the Labour leadership's stance. What's your assessment of it now?**

There has been some criticism on the remainder left that focusing on the conference policy is not strong enough. I still think, much as it pains me to say it, that the policy was better than you might have expected. Now, though, is the time that we really need to show our credentials and bring pressure to bear. Does the leadership stand for grassroots democracy or not?

The process has been playing its way out, but now our position has to change. There's a question, which leadership are we talking about? Corbyn exclusively, or the people around him? Or other party leaders? People in the inner circles can make those distinctions but from the outside it is very hard to know what is going on and what the divisions are. What is clear is that they want to renegotiate Brexit rather than reconsider the whole thing, and that is the problem.

Saying we need to focus on issues other than Brexit doesn't make sense. Apart from anything else, you can't focus on those issues if you're going through the incredibly resource-intensive process of leaving the EU, with no positive outcomes in sight and major problems everywhere you look.

The message needs to be that it is electorally ridiculous but more than that a political and even historical mistake for Labour to 'deliver Brexit'. It violates our values as a party and a movement. We must say Labour should not collaborate with Brexit.

**What's your response to people who say it's too late to do anything about stopping Brexit?**

First let me say it is wishful thinking of a kind to say that on 29 March it will all be done. This is a process which will have massive repercussions, huge negative impacts on our communities, on our movement and on a Labour government for years to come. It will have a tendency to undermine a Labour government for its entire term, maybe two terms, and so we have to find a way to force a change of course

Is it hard? Yes, but then we have to persuade people of all kinds of things which are an uphill struggle. We didn't win the last last election and we have to win the next one. But beyond that is a much wider battle to convince people of socialist or even basic social democratic values

It seems to be a growing consensus that the timescale will be extended. Any scenario except no deal, even scenarios that we don't want like Labour MPs voting for a modified deal or some kind of

national government, require more time. The scenarios we want require it too. We should demand extension of Article 50 so we have more time to fight.

It's been a strange political time for years but that is being accelerated right now. Whatever the outcome, it will be something unlikely!

**You're on the Steering Group of the new [Labour for a Socialist Europe](#) initiative: what should its role be?**

It's great we have this initiative and important for people to get involved, because most of what Labour members get in terms of remain or People's Vote efforts is about cross-party coalition building which means linking up with the right. Look at the dreadful rally in Parliament on the day of the vote. Because of the failings of the left and the failings of the Labour Party, the space is dominated by right-wing remain campaigns, which draw in plenty of Labour members, but the political narrative they are organised around is awful. On Tuesday you had Labour MPs standing on a platform talking about people suffering under austerity, but not saying a single thing about who is to blame for it. Not a word. As if austerity has come from nowhere and is only the result of Brexit.

They want to obliterate political lines and differences when the lack of these lines is what brought us Brexit. Organising people to have a strong socialist perspective for the right to remain is crucial, and doing it in Labour is crucial too.

If we get another referendum we will suffer if that kind of message is dominant, a pre-2016 status quo message, and we really need a strong labour movement and socialist voice, and Labour for a Socialist Europe is a good contribution to that. We should be the people leading Labour members to fight Brexit, not right-wing or liberal remainers.

**What's your view on the question of alliances in a referendum? How should the anti-Brexit left relate to establishment Remain campaigns? What do you imagine the Labour Party would do and how should we relate to that?**

This whole issue has the potential to be quite complicated. What kind of alliance do you mean? Financial relationships? Data sharing? Sitting on platforms together? The idea of alliances and 'working together' needs to be broken down. There is good reason people are unwilling to work in a coalition where people on the Labour right embrace Anna Soubry as their friend.

On the other hand is there any way we can use the dominant Brexit channels for our own campaign? If we don't, will it limit the size of our intervention? Of course there are other ways to organise; for instance, in terms of fundraising, we can build a coalition with the unions and raise money from the huge anti-Brexit Labour membership.

I've got to say that in AEIP, we need to have that discussion, but we also have to make the case to our members about the problem with certain kinds of alliances. People with a more critical view need to vocalise that and educate people. I think there are a lot of people on the left of the anti-Brexit movement, at the grassroots, who think "I just want to stop Brexit" and don't interrogate that. So education is needed.

In terms of the Labour Party, we need the party to be leading its own campaign, not a section of the party lashing up with a cross-party campaign. I was asked recently how important it is for Corbyn to be front and centre, and I'd say it's crucial. If it kicks into gear and Labour does something effective on the scale of a general election, that would be huge.

Unfortunately there's still potential for the Labour right to manipulate and dominate it. Even if they

do, the fact that the vast majority of members are on the left *and* anti-Brexit means that there's huge potential for people to be self-organised and for a left intervention to key into that. One problem is that Momentum, in its political current state, even if it comes round to remain, will be reluctant to say anything distinctive or different from the leadership. They've spent two years trying to fight off what is happening in terms of trying to turn the tide, so they would struggle to know what to argue. That's something we need to fight about too.

In all cases the way forward out of the difficulties is a clear, political socialist message.

### **What should the left do in any upcoming elections, a general election but also possibly a Euro election?**

Clearly there's a role for Labour for a Socialist Europe there. It will be even more Labour-focused, obviously, but actually the arguments and campaigning would be similar in an election and a referendum – socialist, pro-working class arguments. The issues to address and resolve are the same – austerity and migration, how to change the balance of power and the political balance in society, and how society is organised. The left needs to educate itself and make itself fit to educate wider society. In my CLP the other day we were discussing a [motion about councils and NRPF](#) and a member asked, why are you all so pro-migrants! So there is a lot of work to do. We need to win votes but more than that we need to win arguments with people.

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### **Labour for a Socialist Europe Alena Ivanova**

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