



## Grassroots for Europe Round Table #29 – 04/10/2022 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Title: "Some Perspectives from the Labour Conference" Chair: Lisa Ryan Burton [Vice Chair, Bremain in Spain]

Speakers: Seema Syeda [Another Europe Is Possible], Richard Corbett CBE, Francis Beckett, Alex Toal [Make Votes Matter].

All our invited speakers attended and participated in the recent Labour conference. Labour's leadership were reticent to discuss Brexit but there were several lively and well-attended fringe events on Labour and Europe. Our speakers agreed that Labour's long-term destination must be to lead the UK to rejoin the EU, but differed about feasible pace and timescale.

Although Starmer has officially ruled out rejoining the Single Market, **Richard Corbett** says that Labour's limited proposals to 'make Brexit work' can be read as partial incremental steps towards Single Market participation, a policy which it would not be difficult to extend further. **Francis Beckett** agrees but comments that Starmer (influenced by some key advisors) is an extremely, perhaps excessively cautious politician and should not be expected to shift his public Brexit stance before the next GE, nor move decisively towards Rejoin during a first term of office.

Starmer's reasons for caution are questionable. There is now undeniably a (so far) slow but steady and significant shifting of public opinion towards Rejoin. There are misconceptions in Starmer's office about Labour's northern voters, and in purely party electoral terms – leaving aside the national interest - Labour's Brexit stance may well be a net handicap in terms of winning a GE with a stable progressive majority. Starmer is desperate to avoid an all-out attack by the right-wing tabloids, but this may be pointless timidity because they will attack him anyway. Labour is afraid to be publicly seen to be seeking rapprochement with the EU but their team is in fact doing so behind the scenes, building mutual trust as a base for future positive action.

**Alex Toal** recounted the huge, well-organised successful campaign by MVM and its allies in Labour to achieve an overwhelming Conference vote for PR. It now remains to convince MPs, party candidates and the leadership that putting PR in the next GE manifesto is electorally advantageous. RC remarked that a pro-PR position will help Labour garner tactical votes where it needs them.

**Seema Syeda** updated on current and recent actions of Another Europe is Possible, including a public statement and other news. AEIP is now focussing on the current economic crisis and the need for public awareness of its deep links to the Brexit project. Other key campaign themes include Ukraine, Islamophobia and threats to the environment. AEIP will continue to organise and mobilise against anticipated new anti-democratic threats by the current government.

Other points emerging in Q&A included:

- Labour will shortly need to challenge the severe regressive implications of the Retained EU Law (Revocation & Reform) Bill.
- New findings on broad public support for Freedom of Movement are important and should be disseminated.
- Labour's current proposals for point-based immigration rules are unhelpful in terms of better EU relations.
- There is wide scope for progress in UK-EU relations within the current trade and cooperation agreement given political will on the UK to pursue this.

The full report of this meeting is available on our webpage: <u>https://qrassrootsforeurope.org/summary-reports/</u> Campaign asks are available in a separate briefing note.

Next Meeting: Round Table #30. Tuesday 1<sup>st</sup> November at 5pm. "Russia and Brexit: hybrid war and dark influence", with Christopher Steele and Turlough Conway.