AM: Rebecca Long Bailey, the Shadow Business Secretary, is part of the Labour Brexit team. Her constituency from which she joins us now, Salford and Eccles voted to leave the EU. Rebecca Long Bailey will you be on the streets of Salford and Eccles, enthusiastically calling for a second referendum, or another referendum, and what do you think your voters are going to say to you.

RLB: Well, let’s be clear about where we are at the moment. We’re in the midst of a constitutional crisis, and there’s no other word to describe it other than that. But what we’ve said very clearly is that our conference policy stated that we needed to leave a number of options on the table to avoid a damaging Tory Brexit or a no deal scenario. We’re consistently trying to push Labour’s deal, which we think will protect jobs and the economy. We won’t stop doing that. In the event that that deal doesn’t get put through parliament we’ve stated that we’ll – well, we’ll continue to push for that and a lot’s going to happen over the next two weeks or so. But we’ll continue to push in the event that that deal does not make it to the floor of the House again. We’ll push for a general election. But we’ve got to recognise that if the prime minister continues on this reckless trajectory that she’s currently on at the moment, hurtling potentially towards a very damaging Brexit economically, or a no deal situation, then we have to look at options such as putting her deal and a number of other options to the people.

AM: But you stood on a manifesto which said, in terms, Labour accepts the referendum result. For a lot of Labour leave voters going back to another referendum sounds like you’re betraying them on that promise.
RLB: What we’ve said is that we respected the result of the referendum. And we’ve done that over the last two years. We also stated that we rejected no deal as a viable option and we’ve consistently pressed the prime minister to take no deal off the table. Indeed, her own ministers have done the same thing. And we don’t want to be in the position where we end up having to have a vote on her deal and a number of other options. We want a deal that secures parliamentary support and puts the economy first, and certainly that’s what we’re pushing for. But we’ve got to leave all options on the table to avoid an economic catastrophe for Britain, and we’ve got to look at that potential option of putting her deal or a number of other leave options to the people.

AM: How many offended and upset Labour leave voters do you think we’re talking about? How many members of the public voted Labour and also voted leave?

RLB: We’re not looking to overturn the result of the referendum, Andrew.

AM: Yes you are.

RLB: We’re not – no, let’s be clear, let’s be clear, what we’ve said is that to avoid a damaging or a no deal Brexit we think that there should be an option on the table to put a deal and a number of other options to the people.

AM: You say it’s – I’m sorry to interrupt - you say a number of other options. Would remain be one of those options?

RLB: That may well be one of the options, and indeed my colleagues have stated that remain could potentially be an option on the paper, along with a number of other options. But it’s important to remember, Andrew, that it’s not within, you know, even the Labour Party’s gift to determine what would be on the
ballot paper in such a people’s vote. It would be up to parliament to decide, and what I would urge parliamentarians would be to look at all of the available options, provide those options, credible options for leave voters, whether it’s Labour’s deal, whether it’s a Norway plus style deal that other colleagues have pushed. We need to be given all of the options. But as I say, that’s not the point we should be moving towards. We need a deal that will pass through parliament, that will secure economic protection for Britain.

AM: Nevertheless, you have put another referendum back on the table. There are nearly four million Labour voters who voted leave and expect the Labour Party to help them get out of the EU and who will be quite upset about that. Can I ask – Caroline Flint, I was quoting her to Tony Blair just now – about the number of Labour MPs who will not vote for a referendum? It could be as high as sixty. Will you remove the whip from them? Will you sack Shadow Ministers who refuse to vote for Jeremy Corbyn’s new policy of a referendum? What will you do?

RLB: Well, we’re working right across our party, and indeed the House, so that when we do put that amendment down in the next few weeks it will be worded in a way that will provide clarity for those members who vote for it. And I understand Caroline’s position. Indeed, you know, I’ve always voiced my own reservations about having a second referendum, that we can’t overturn the result and we’ve got to respect what our voters called for. But equally we can’t put Britain into an economic catastrophe and we need to make sure that we protect businesses and we protect jobs within our communities. And it wouldn’t be fair, you know, for a damaging Tory Brexit – and Theresa May’s spent the last few months, you know, not really doing anything other than going backwards and forwards to the EU. Not moving on any of her red lines and hurtling towards a no deal. That wouldn’t be fair to any of our constituents. And in that situation
we’ve got to keep all options on the table to avoid the damage that could potentially be caused. But I truly hope we don’t get to that point, and as I say, all of the other options still remain on the table and we’re pushing for that Labour deal that will protect jobs and the economy.

AM: Any chance of a free vote on that then?

RLB: Well, ultimately that would be, you know, within the gift of Jeremy Corbyn, as determined by whatever the wording of the amendment is. But, you know, it’ll be a difficult decision for many MPs and we recognise that, but I hope that we don’t have to get to that position, that Theresa May does start to move on her red lines. We know that Europe is amenable to moving on the red lines and can move very quickly on amending the withdrawal agreement and political declaration. And she needs to recognise the crisis that she has imposed within British politics. You know, she can’t even agree within her own party about what amendments to make to the withdrawal agreement and political declaration and it’s a very sorry state of affairs.

AM: Looking at agreement within your party, if you look at social media or you listen to senior members of the Labour Party at the moment, this anti-Semitism row seems to be tearing it apart. The left is attacking the left over this. How concerned are you?

RLB: Extremely concerned. It’s absolutely devastating, and I’ve said previously, you know, in other interviews how upset and ashamed that I’ve been that, you know, historically we haven’t dealt with anti-Semitism cases as robustly and as quickly as we could have done. And the hurt that’s been caused to members of the Jewish community, and indeed members and colleagues within my own party, you know, could have been avoided. And we’ve worked very hard over the last year or so under our new General Secretary Jenny Formby to put in place robust processes
to double the number of staff that are dealing with cases, to introduce you know, legal oversight of cases. But we recognise that we still need to go further, and indeed, educating, you know, right across our membership on some of the insidious, you know, conspiracy theories and subtleties, not just in relation to anti-Semitism but also all forms of hatred and racism, that that education will be necessary so that our members are fully equipped to call it out when they do see it.

AM: Finally, Tom Watson’s new group of social democrats inside the Labour Party. Will you be joining it?

RLB: Well, I think it’s interesting, and I need to find out a little bit more about it. But we’ve always had these sorts of discussion groups within the Labour Party, and it’s good to be having those discussions about policy. But what we’re doing within the Shadow Cabinet, certainly my team and John McDonnell’s team have been putting forward policy discussions and platforms for members of the Parliamentary Labour Party to come to us and have those discussions about how they want to develop policy. And we’ve always had an open door policy on that front. But I mean, you know, any other groups within the party that want to assist that process and have discussions, I think that’s welcome.

(ends)