

Ireland: Behind Clare Daly's resignation from Socialist Party

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On September 1 Dublin North TD (Teachta Dála—member of parliament) and long-standing Socialist Party member Clare Daly announced she had resigned from the party following a row over her political connection to the disgraced property developer and Independent TD Mick Wallace. She said she will “redesignate” herself as a United Left Alliance (ULA) TD.

Daly's move demonstrates once again the thoroughly unprincipled character of the Irish ex-left as a whole, as it lurches ever further to the right. The ULA was founded against the backdrop of the collapse of Irish state finances and the negotiations with the Troika of the European Union (EU), International Monetary Fund (IMF) and European Central Bank (ECB) over an 85 billion euro bailout in November 2010. It is an opportunist alliance between the SP and Socialist Workers Party (SWP), designed to channel growing anger over the vicious austerity measures of the ruling elite back in to parliamentary politics and to maintain the control of the trade union bureaucracy over working class struggles.

Daly herself now expresses concern over the failure to fully exploit the ULA, illustrating the fears within the ex-left as a whole over Ireland's deepening economic crisis, the danger posed by a possible second troika bailout, and the threat of the emergence of an independent working class movement. She wants complete freedom to deepen her political alliances with sections of the establishment.

The SP responded to the resignation by pouring scorn on Daly, declaring that she had “placed more value on her political friendship with Mick Wallace than on the political positions and work of the Socialist Party”.

She offered him “political support”, “publicly vouched for him” and “consciously and consistently”

sat next to him in the Dail (parliament). She was accused of “promoting” Wallace in the campaign against the household charge—a non-payment campaign which the ULA led alongside a collection of Sinn Féin and “independent” TDs against the government's introduction of a 100 euro charge on all homeowners—and of refusing to work collectively with her colleagues.

Daly's political relationship with party leader Joe Higgins has, since her resignation, disintegrated rapidly. She was summoned to explain herself on three occasions before the SP national committee but refused to make the break with Wallace.

Daly's political relations with Wallace were in fact no aberration. The SP within the ULA has included itself in building the foundations of a new populist organisation, and the ruling elite in Irish society knows it has nothing to fear from such a party. The mantra of the ULA has been that capitalism needs to be regulated in a “fairer” way.

Proposing ideas built on one big lie to the working class makes it easier for the opportunist to formulate smaller ones. The fact that Clare Daly took the big lie to its conclusion and moved to cement her career and her political and personal friendship with Wallace should come as no surprise. Figures such as Wallace were systematically promoted by the entire ULA leadership for over a year through initiatives both inside and out of parliament.

During Ireland's economic boom, Wallace reaped the profits of his construction business, MJ Wallace Construction. At his height, he owned a string of developments in Dublin, most notably the Italian Quarter, a culinary corner on Dublin's quays. He stocked his restaurants with produce from Italy, sourced from his own vineyard. He was a representative of a

newly-enriched layer of the bourgeoisie with which the ULA as a whole was willing to collaborate.

The ULA formed a so-called “technical group” in parliament, which has acted as a vehicle for the building of political ties with such individuals, as well as former members of the Labour Party and Fianna Fáil. The ULA saw an opportunity to use its ties with dissident former members of the establishment parties and the trade union bureaucracy to pressure the Labour-Fine Gael coalition which had just come to power.

Building such a new fake-left party is entirely compatible with the inclusion of capitalists like Wallace, who are seen as “progressive” on certain issues. Because Wallace had protested against the Iraq war and portrayed himself as a “caring individual”, the parliamentary members of the ULA including Joe Higgins (SP), Richard Boyd Barrett (SWP) and Daly herself were completely silent on the nature of Wallace’s dealings with those building workers his business employed.

In October last year, the Commercial Court ordered Wallace to repay more than €19 million owed to ACC bank. Two months later, he pleaded guilty to five charges of deducting pension contributions from his employees but failing to pay them into the Construction Workers’ Pension Scheme over five months in 2008. In June, he disclosed for the first time that his firm defrauded the Revenue Commissioners of €1.4 million by making false VAT returns on apartment sales and reached a settlement of €2.1 million.

Even when Wallace’s criminality hit the headlines, leading members of the ULA still hedged their bets and refused to call for his resignation from the Dáil. Daly didn’t call for Wallace’s resignation. But neither did Joe Higgins. Boyd Barrett declared that it was “up to the people of Wexford to decide at the next election”.

This strategy was backed fully within the leaderships of the SP and SWP, with any criticism of the orientation of the ULA labelled as “sectarian” and playing into the hands of the right wing press.

For the SP to now condemn Daly for not distancing herself from Wallace is hypocritical in the extreme. It was the politics of the SP and ULA, based squarely on an acceptance of capitalism and its state institutions, which laid the basis for Daly’s present course.

Daly now wants to build the ULA into a “real, serious political alternative to Labour, which I think is badly

needed”, and the SP has indicated in a statement it will support this.

This is the same ULA which held discussions with the Troika at the beginning of September. They had met before, but this time there was no call for demonstrations. There was no clear statement to workers to reject what the Troika represented. It all went quietly. The ULA after the meeting bemoaned the fact that the Troika were still insisting on deeper cuts to social services and wage reduction, meekly stating, “Unfortunately there were no positive proposals whatever from the Troika on the urgent need to kick-start the economy”.

At a time when the working class in Ireland is seeking answers to their plight caused by the crisis ridden capitalist system, the pseudo-left gives a clear message that it is working to preserve capitalism. The ULA as an alternative to the Labour Party is no alternative at all.

The author recommends:

Ireland: Disgraced property developer Mick Wallace and the United Left Alliance
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