

Ireland's United Left Alliance collapses

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The attempt to bring the main nominally left groups together in Ireland has come to a swift end. With the exit of the Socialist Party (SP) and continued infighting, the United Left Alliance (ULA) has imploded.

The SP stated on January 25: “The alliance had already been in a weakened state as ordinary working class people had not joined it in any significant numbers.”

The ULA was launched in January 2010 by the SP, the Socialist Workers Party/People Before Profit (SWP/PBP), the Workers Unemployed Action Group (WUAG) and some independents. It was formed supposedly to offer a united opposition to the Fine Gael/Labour government’s austerity programme accompanying the €85 billion bailout package agreed with the troika—the European Union (EU), European Central Bank (ECB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The ULA stated that the reason for its formation was to bring the “left” groupings together to lay the foundation for a new left-of-centre party as an alternative to the official Labour Party. Instead of representing a genuine struggle against the dictates of the ruling class, it used its five representatives (TDs) in the Irish parliament to mislead working people, meeting the troika on several occasions for discussions on “fairer” implementations of austerity measures.

The cynical and unprincipled manoeuvring of the SWP/SP has caused most of the membership of the ULA who were not aligned to either of the groupings to leave, with the UWAG having already pulled out last June.

The SWP/PBP, despite pretensions to “openness” and “rigorous democratic discussion” within the ULA, had already decided a year ago to pull the plug on the sorry mess that was rapidly developing. One of its bulletins stated in February last year, “The space that the ULA

should occupy is now the realm of Sinn Fein spokespeople. We should put down proposals for action in ULA branches—especially the protest at the Labour Conference.”

This protest was planned by SWP as a non-ULA event.

With the gallop to the right of the SWP/PBP group, the anger of working people over the vicious austerity measures of the ruling elite is channelled back into parliamentary politics while the pseudo-left build cosy careers based upon disseminating the lie that the whole Irish people are in the same boat—that it is “our economy” and we all have an interest in its restored global competitiveness within the EU. The SWP through its People Before Profit front has constantly repeated the mantra that the capitalist system can offer a viable future if only its worst excesses are regulated. They refused to allow even the word “socialism” to appear in the 2010 ULA election programme. When involved in the Campaign Against Household and Water Taxes (CAHWT), they opposed any effort to direct this movement into a struggle against the government.

Whatever socialist phraseology was used at its inception, it rapidly became clear that the ULA was being used to propagate ideas to the working class based on national regulation of capitalism by the state with some minimum income distribution measures introduced through parliament. The ULA offered absolutely no threat to the ruling class or to its massive attacks on working class living standards. It set about making alliances with sections of the establishment and, in the minds of tens of thousands of workers, was left with egg on its face when its constituent parts finally fell apart over their attitude to the Mick Wallace scandal.

Last September, Clare Daly TD resigned from the SP because of her connection with and defence of building

contractor and independent TD Mick Wallace, who was a member of the ULA. He had allegedly evaded payment of €1.4million in VAT. He made a killing during Ireland's economic boom prior to 2008 and has since provoked political outrage when he spoke on a radio show about toying with the idea of hiring a hitman to recover money owed to him from a building firm.

Daly's fellow SP/ULA TD Joe Higgins at first refused to call for Wallace to resign, despite calls from Seamus Healy (UWAG) and others for him to do so. Higgins first insisted that the ULA was being targeted by the "right-wing media". Wallace was "different to the political establishment having opposed the invasion of Iraq in 1993 and opposed the austerity measures against working class people," he wrote.

Richard Boyd Barrett, the leading light in the SWP and of People Before Profit, stated evasively that it was "up to the people of Wexford" whether Wallace should resign his seat in the Dail (parliament).

When Daly refused to distance herself from Wallace and the full scale of his tax evasion and treatment of his workers hit the headlines, the SP did a face-saving about turn and insisted that she break her political connection with the property developer. She refused and resigned from the SP.

Since then, the SP has stated that for the ULA to have succeeded, "it needed to attract large numbers of new and fresh layers of workers—primarily so that it would take on a life of its own and not be dominated by its component organisations."

The reality is that the programme of the ULA was based squarely on a pro-capitalist agenda, which differed little from the policies of the trade union leaders and Labourites that have collaborated with viscous austerity and wage cuts. There was no reason for workers to join an alliance that failed to offer a revolutionary and internationalist alternative firmly based on the overthrow of the ruling class.

The coalition government budget for 2013, introduced in December, is now hitting the working class hard. Child benefit payments have been cut, prescription charges increased, respite carer grants reduced, and payment periods for jobseeker benefit claimants cut substantially. The €25 billion of austerity measures introduced since 2008 have exacerbated the economic crisis and impoverished huge layers of the

population.

The Irish ruling elite will continue to implement the dictates of European capitalism. What is needed now is an independent working class and principled socialist movement, which breaks organisationally and politically from the unions and the pseudo-left. The International Committee of the Fourth International is laying the basis for such a movement.



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