Building a Real Political Alternative

The economic crisis is resulting in an unprecedented onslaught on living standards, spiralling mass unemployment and a dramatic rise in poverty. Meanwhile billions is being taken from working people and given to bankers, builders and international speculators.

The newly formed United Left Alliance (ULA) is opposed to the governments' bailouts and the slash and burn policies which are only making the crisis worse. In the general election we aim to provide a real alternative to the establishment parties as well as Labour and Sinn Fein, who also accept the capitalist market and refuse to rule out coalition with right wing parties. The approach of a Fine Gael / Labour government in power would not be fundamentally different than this government.

The ULA will be standing candidates throughout the country and we are inviting all people, campaigns and groups that want to fight for real change and who agree with our demands to become part of the Alliance.

The ULA

1. Rejects so-called solutions to the economic crises based on slashing public expenditure, welfare payments and workers' pay. There can be no just or sustainable solution to the crisis based on the capitalist market. Instead we favour democratic and public control over resources so that social need is prioritised over profit.

2. Those elected as part of the alliance will not do any deals or support any coalition with any of the right wing parties particularly Fianna Fail and Fine Gael. We are committed to building a mass left alternative to unite working people, whether public or private sector, Irish or migrant, with the unemployed, welfare recipients, pensioners and students in the struggle to change society.

The ULA has agreed the following key demands:

1. End the bailout of banks and developers.

The ULA says scrap NAMA and end the bailout of the banks and developers. Take the banks, finance houses, major construction companies and development land into democratic public ownership and use them for the benefit of people, not the profit of the few. Democratic public ownership of the banks would guarantee the savings of ordinary bank account holders but would give no commitment to pay the bondholders and financial speculators who helped cause the global crisis.

We want to use resources, including the huge numbers of vacant properties, to provide facilities and social and affordable homes for all, to buy or rent.

Reduce total mortgages and repayments to affordable levels to reflect the real cost of the property and outlaw repossessions/evictions of families from their homes on the basis of inability to pay.

2. Tax the greedy not the needy

Ireland is not a poor country. Massive amounts of wealth were generated during the boom. The problem is that such wealth is in the hands of a tiny superrich minority. We completely reject the notion that all this wealth has suddenly disappeared. It is also the case that many companies, especially multinationals, remain profitable.

The ULA stands for a progressive taxation system where corporation tax on the massive profits made in Ireland would be significantly increased, which together with a steeply progressive income tax would shift the tax burden from working people to big business and the rich.

We also demand a wealth tax on the assets of the rich, increases in capital gains tax and an end to all tax loopholes for the rich.

We oppose all stealth and double taxes including bin charges and plans to introduce water charges, a property tax, or a “household tax”. We oppose the inclusion of the low paid in the tax net.

3. End the jobs crisis

The ULA condemns the complete failure of the government and the private sector to preserve or create jobs. Their policies are deflationary and are making the jobs crisis worse.

We call for a real social development programme that could create hundreds of thousands of jobs building necessary infrastructure like public transport, green energy projects, broadband, child care, schools, hospitals, health centres and other community facilities.

We oppose plans to sell off state companies. Instead these companies should be used as the vehicle for job creation.

End the reliance on the private sector, use democratic public ownership of wealth and natural resources and the banks to provide jobs by the launching a state programme of industrial development and innovation to build the productive capacity of the economy. Take the Corrib Gas Field into public ownership.

Reduce the working week without loss of pay and create tens of thousands of jobs by sharing out the work.

No to compulsory work for dole schemes or fake jobs. We demand real jobs and a reversal of all the cuts in social welfare and benefit payments.

4. Reverse the cuts - Defend public services

The ULA says end the profiteering in health care. We stand for a properly funded and resourced public health system, free at the point of access and paid for through a progressive tax system. No privatisation of health services and end all subsidies to private care. No co-location of private hospitals on public hospital lands.

We demand proper state funding for a democratically run and secular education system, free for all from early childhood to university. For more teachers to reduce class sizes and special needs and language support so the needs of all children are met. End all subsidies for private schools. No re-introduction of third level fees, pay students a living grant instead.

No to the cuts in social welfare payments or pensions and no to the cutting, taxing or means testing of child benefit.

For a mass campaign by the trade union movement and the communities to reverse the cuts in public services.

We want real reform of our public services. Its time to stop copying failed private sector practices. We want an end to inflated salaries, bonuses and expenses for top public servants and politicians. We want a cap on salaries and full public scrutiny of public spending. Public services should be run democratically with the full involvement of the workers, the service users and the wider community.

5. Equality for all

The ULA supports equality for all and the elimination of all forms of discrimination based on gender, race, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, disability or age.

We support a campaign by the trade unions to unionise all workers and for the legal right to trade union recognition.

End all anti-asylum seeker and anti-immigrant laws and bias by the state. Give asylum seekers the right to work and give both asylum seekers and migrant workers the same rights as all other workers, to help fight "the race to the bottom" in pay and conditions.

We support full equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, including the right to marry for same sex couples.

6. Protect the environment

Despite the rhetoric, environmental destruction is continuing apace. We call for major state investment in developing renewable energy. Through public ownership and democratic planning, the economy can be redirected onto a sustainable path.

We need real reform of our planning system, so that people's needs and environmental protection come before the profits of developers. We call for major investment in community facilities, waste management, recycling facilities and public transport.

We are opposed to incinerators as a solution to the waste problem because they pose serious health risks. We call for a proper integrated waste management plan, including a drastic reduction of packaging combined with a serious approach to recycling and composting.

7. Build a real left alternative in Ireland and Europe

The formation of the ULA is part of a process across Europe and internationally of the development of movements and organisations to fight the attacks on workers, the unemployed and the poor and to fight for a new vision for society.

We are opposed to the dictates of the EU and its neo liberal policies of curbing public spending and promoting austerity. The policy of driving down public spending to meet EU imposed targets will destroy jobs and lead to misery for workers, the unemployed and the poor. Workers did not create the debt and should not have to pay for it.

We are committed to building solidarity with workers across Europe to forge a new direction which puts the needs of workers and the unemployed before the greed of speculators and profiteers.

An important part of this is the urgent need to reclaim and rebuild the trade unions and to mobilise the power of workers though mass action. The approach of Social Partnership has left workers defenceless and has led to a massive transfer of wealth from workers to employers and must be scrapped.

Our elected TDs will give full support to those unions and workers who oppose the Croke Park deal and will use the Dail to raise the real issues that affect ordinary working people.