

# **Proposals for the formation of a pro-party bloc within the ULA.**

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In a letter to the steering committee (SC) of the ULA last November on behalf of Joan Collins and Clare Daly it was stated;

‘It is now two years since the ULA was launched and in our view very little progress has been made in developing the ULA as a working alliance, let alone preparing the ground for the creation of a new left party. We believe this is a view widely held by ULA members who are not members of the Socialist or Socialist Workers Parties.

We believe there must be a frank and honest assessment throughout the ULA as to why there has been this lack of progress and identify the problems which have created this situation.

The main problems in our opinion are;

Different political groups, who have existed independently for a long time, have not been able to overcome the hostility/distrust they have for each other and develop a more mature relationship.

They have also failed to put the ULA project and building a new, broad, non sectarian left ahead of building their separate groups.

This has led to a failure to develop an agreed approach and campaigning strategy on key issues facing working people.

There has been a failure to develop a vibrant branch network and internal life which is the key to bringing into political activity (and keeping them involved) a new layer of working people and youth.

Much more of an impact could have been made in general on the national political scene with better co-ordination of the work of ULA elected representatives.

Almost none of the fairly considerable resources now available in staffing and funding have been allocated to developing and building the ULA.

We believe the reasons for launching the ULA now need to be restated and a firm commitment given by all concerned to prioritise putting the ULA on a new footing and developing it as a pre formation for a new left party within a reasonable period.’

Joan and Clare sought a meeting with the SC to discuss these issues. It was intended that this would be the start of a discussion throughout the ULA as a preparation for launching a platform/bloc which would make building the ULA its key and only priority.

The SC agreed to a meeting in January (almost two months after the request) but events have now moved on. We believe it is urgent to take action now to prevent the ULA from collapsing. The withdrawal of the WUAG and more pertinently the SP will be seen as a real setback by many workers and activists and raises a question mark over the ULA.

We believe however that the real battles and left/right polarisation in Irish society are at their very beginnings. Huge opportunities will be posed in terms of building a new left to make a serious challenge to the right and to pose a genuine opposition to them as opposed to Labour and SF. The ULA is the only vehicle which exists to prepare for these tasks.

We believe the ULA needs to be re-launched and placed on a new footing. To this end we are proposing the formation of a platform/bloc based around TDs Joan Collins and Clare Daly and Cllrs Pat Dunne and Declan Bree, along with the groups they represent, Dublin 12 ULA, Dublin North, and the **Sligo People First group**.

These elected representatives and their groups have a strong base among working people in their areas, developed over quite a period of time. These groups are broad based class struggle organisations based on working people.

They meet regularly, have democratic discussion and decision making structures and are active on a wide range of issues affecting working people both locally and nationally. We believe they are a model basis for developing the ULA as a whole.

The bloc will seek to involve all those active members in the ULA who agree with its aims. We invite all those in the non aligned group to co-launch the bloc as a joint initiative.

The key demand of the bloc would be the need for a new, broad based non sectarian party to represent and organise working people and to build the ULA as a preparation for such a party.

The bloc would base itself on the founding statement of the ULA, in particular;

‘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 needs to be revamped to take account of the reality of a new situation.

We have to be realistic regarding the PBPA/SWP group. They will pursue their own agenda, their emphasis will be on building their forces, they will take their own campaign initiatives, decide alone on where and who to stand in elections and in general do as they like.

The task of building the ULA will fall to the bloc but at least we won't be paralysed by vetoes from on high. We should negotiate with the PBPA/SWP group but the reality is there will be a certain co-operation in the Dail but the PBPA/SWP group and the bloc

will operate as separate groups on the ground. The present structures should be wound up and replaced by a small co-ordinating committee representing the two groups. It would have no decision making function. There would be no veto for any grouping but there should be a balanced approach when highly controversial issues come up which need to be discussed over time. **We should also develop a strategy to further build the ULA, by involving other left organisations, campaign groups and where possible trade union branches either as part of the bloc or as part of the co-ordinating committee.**

We need a democratic structure for the bloc and we propose a delegate Branch Council (BC) as the key decision making body. Branches should have delegates based on the number of signed up members. (1 in 5?) Delegates must be elected at a branch meeting called for that purpose.

The BC would need to meet every six weeks or two months at the minimum. A small working body should be elected from the BC to carry out BC decisions. National meetings could be held maybe twice a year.

It goes without saying that we favour registering for elections. Whether we should register the ULA or the bloc as the United Left should be decided quickly. We need to develop an election strategy for 2014 but also for the next general election.

We propose that the bloc has a public launch with rallies in Dublin, Sligo, Cork, Galway and North Kildare. This should be followed up with public meetings in Dub SC, Dub North, North West, and Dublin Central. We should develop a strategy for work in the colleges supported by the public reps.

The bloc should aim to have 250 signed up members in the spring. These are our main proposals. We hope that the meeting on Feb 2nd will agree to establish a bloc and then we can get on with its public launch asap.

The bloc and the ULA should be open to working with, on an issue by issue basis, other left forces, trade union and community groups, and independent TDs /Cllrs etc, who take a consistent stand against austerity being imposed on working people. This does not commit the bloc or the ULA to any long term political alliances.

Joan Collins TD. Clare Daly TD. Cllr Pat Dunne. Cllr Declan Bree.