

Alan Gibson (Cork branch)

Election statement for independent representative on the ULA national steering committee



Background

Originally from New Zealand, I have been involved in working class politics since the 1980s, in London from 1995 and in Cork since 2007 where I have played a leading role in Cork Women's Right to Choose and, most recently, in the Campaign Against the Household and Water Taxes. In these and other single issue campaigns, and in collaboration with others within the ULA, I have had useful experiences working with a wide variety of different forces in the workers' movement in a non-sectarian and principled manner. I joined the ULA because I believe it could have a part to play in the historic project of our class – building a workers party that will fight for our interests as a class and provide effective leadership for all those who suffer under the existing capitalist state. Below are the key points I believe are necessary.

A democratic and inclusive organisation

A healthy socialist party can only be created if there is a lively culture of political education and discussion, with all members free to argue for their views, individually or collectively, subject only to their willingness to abide by the democratic decisions of the majority. I am committed to the process of transformation from an alliance into this kind of party.

Electoral politics and working class independence

Participating in the capitalist electoral process is primarily an opportunity to put forward the key elements of the overall socialist programme to a much broader audience. Election to capitalist parliamentary structures should be seen as completely secondary to this and at no stage should the impression be given that we expect fundamental social change to come through reform of the institutions of capitalist rule.

I will actively seek to ensure that any TDs or councillors who are members of the ULA will carry out the democratically decided policies of the party like any other member and will have no special privileges as a result of being an elected representative.

Most importantly, the ULA must uphold the principle of working class political independence and refuse to participate in alliances with any capitalist parties – including “radical” small capitalist parties like Sinn Féin and the Greens.

Women's rights

The question of women's rights is not even mentioned in the ULA platform. This is a serious mistake – the struggle against

women's oppression must be front and centre in the ULA's politics.

Women's oppression in capitalist society is chiefly rooted in their role in the family, which creates relative poverty and reduced access to educational and work opportunity. The increasing pressures on the family through the reduction of community and social services we are currently seeing also contribute to domestic violence and sexual abuse. Women need financial independence in order to choose their own living circumstances and the ULA should therefore fight for full employment at a living wage, equal pay for equal work, substantial maternity and paternity leave, free quality childcare, free healthcare and decent housing for all. As a campaigner for women's right to choose, I firmly believe that the ULA must actively champion women's right to control their fertility, including access to free contraception and abortion on demand. The ULA should be committed to challenging sexist behaviour and attitudes wherever they manifest themselves, including within our own ranks. We must also advocate for the rights of gays, lesbians and other sexual minorities, who are targeted by the Church and other purveyors of social backwardness on the grounds that they challenge the institution of the nuclear family.

Anti-racism

The ULA must uphold the equality of all workers, both Irish-born and immigrants, including asylum seekers, on the basis of full citizenship rights for all, including jobs, education access, social welfare benefits and all state services in the language of their choice. The ULA must therefore fight for the closure of direct provision centres and an immediate end to all deportations, including, where possible, organising physical defence against deportation raids.

The ULA should stand against the discrimination and racism inflicted on Traveller communities – supporting provision of full services to halting sites, free access to education (including adult education) in the language of their choice and no restrictions on access to social services – in other words, full civil rights like all other residents in Ireland.

Workplaces and trade unions

So far the ULA intervention into workplaces and trade unions has been limited to co-operation between individuals and small networks of activists, such as my own experience in IMPACT opposing the Croke Park deal and moving anti-household tax and anti-austerity motions. As the ULA becomes a party, we need to go beyond this, forming caucuses that fight within the unions for our programme, rather than being submerged in generic anti-bureaucratic

rank and file movements. Within the unions the ULA should stand in opposition to the politics of “Social Partnership” (continued today in the Croke Park deal) and against those who want to acquiesce to the capitalist legal framework in the futile hope of a better deal from the bosses and their government.

The ULA must stand firmly on the principle of honouring picket lines and for solidarity with other workplaces and unions. We should resolutely proclaim the right of workers in struggle to take whatever action is necessary, including so-called illegal actions such as workplace occupations, solidarity strikes, roving pickets, breaking from the straitjacket of the Industrial Relations Act.

We should always remember that as soon as our workplace actions, demands and campaigns begin to pose a serious threat to the wealth and power of the capitalists, they will use every means at their disposal to stop us – the courts, the Gardaí, the army, all the forces of the capitalist state. The truth is that mass resistance can succeed, but only on the condition that we are prepared to defend ourselves by creating mass-based organs of physical defence. We should not shy away from telling the working class this truth.

Internationalism

In the public statements of the ULA there is a tendency to present our political alternative in an exclusively Irish context. The domination of the Irish economy by multinationals, international linking of the banking system and proliferation of Irish tax exiles all highlight the global nature of capitalism and it is clear to me that we need working class internationalism in response.

The ULA must oppose the military interventions of Ireland, on behalf of the imperialists, in Chad, Lebanon and Afghanistan, even if done under the flag of so-called United Nations “peacekeeping”, and we should call for the immediate withdrawal of those troops. We should defend the right of self-determination for all nations and oppose all imperialist attacks on non-imperialist countries, such as Iraq, Libya, Syria or Iran.

The ULA defends all advances for the working class against attacks by the capitalists. For me this necessarily should include the gains of the remaining countries where capitalism has been overthrown (China, Vietnam, Cuba and North Korea), while recognising the need for workers' revolutions to overthrow their bureaucratic mis-rulers.

The ULA rightly calls for a “no” vote in the referendum on the austerity (fiscal compact) treaty but we should make it clear that this does not mean we have greater faith in the Irish government than the EU to save us from austerity policies. Opposition to the EU based on advocating an alternative of protectionism and nationalism will do nothing for Irish workers. We must fight for unified workers' struggle across the EU, and further afield, to repel these attacks.

It is socialist ABC to call for the immediate and unconditional withdrawal of British troops from the north of Ireland. We should demand the release of Republican prisoners and the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The ULA should be for the highest possible political and organisational integration of workers' organisations north and south of the border.

One of the central slogans of the ULA should be – *For an Irish Workers' Republic within a Socialist Federation of Europe!*

Nationalisation, expropriation and socialism

There are several weaknesses in the ULA's statements on economic questions. The budget submission in December last year and other ULA statements fail to mention the crucial role of multinationals and the extent to which they dominate the Irish economy and influence government policy. We call for nationalisations, but don't point out that the nationalisation of Irish banks in the face of capitalist crisis has shown that this slogan is not enough – we need to call for nationalisation with no compensation to the capitalists and for nationalisation under workers' control.

ULA statements have relied on the perspective of “tax the rich”. While we should not oppose increased taxation of the capitalists, including the multinationals, the reality is that the rich will always give themselves tax loopholes. The real problem is an economic and social system based on legalised theft, i.e., exploiting labour for profit. We need a completely new system and should not be afraid of saying so.

A socialist economy organised on the basis of conscious planning for social need rather than competition and maximisation of profit will require control over all the important levers of economic life. I therefore believe that the ULA should be committed to building a movement capable of expropriating the banks and multinationals, and all the other big-business parasites, along with all natural resources such as the Corrib gas fields – without compensation. Not as a nationalist project of building “socialism on one island”, but within an overall programme for socialist planning with our brothers and sisters across Europe and the world. Such a revolutionary project cannot be realised through the institutions of the capitalist state but requires new democratic governing bodies rooted in the working class.

We must concretise a socialist programme by fighting for demands such as a shorter working week with no loss of pay; equal pay for equal work; higher wages; higher benefits and pensions; equal benefits for youth; free, quality education, healthcare, housing and childcare for everyone. I will argue for all component groups of the ULA to show their commitment to the project by participating in campaigns for these sorts of demands, such as against the household and water taxes, primarily under the banner of the ULA.

I see our task as socialists as being to concretely link these immediate objectives with an overall programme that points the way to the need for working class state power and the socialist society we want to achieve.

Vote for Alan Gibson

If you want a representative who will actively struggle to transform the ULA into a fully democratic and inclusive party that will consistently fight for the rights of working people, up to and including the socialist transformation of society, then vote for Alan Gibson for independent representative on the national steering committee.

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<http://revolutionaryprogramme.wordpress.com>