



Socialist Workers & Youth League

WORKERS & YOUTH, UNITED & FREED

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The Chairperson/Secretary
ASCAB
Abuja.

Comrades,

A YEAR AFTER FORMATION: THE URGENT NEED FOR DEMOCRATISATION OF THE ALLIANCE

SWL finds it worrisome that ASCAB continues to be run in an undemocratic manner, one year after its formation. Time and again we had cause to raise our concern on this approach last year, to no avail. To spare you time whilst refreshing your memory, our correspondence with the ASCAB secretariat in this direction are hereby attached.

From our very first letter to the ASCAB secretariat on 9th July 2020, we have called for internal democracy in the Alliance. It cannot be overemphasized that internal democracy is as important for the life of any radical organisation or coalition as oxygen is for human life. And for alliances or coalitions it is exceedingly so, as an important basis for building trust.

What we have had in response has been two-fold. On one hand, excuses have been given that ASCAB is “a young and growing organisation” and its “democratic structures will have to evolve as we grow”. On the other hand, as we reiterated in our letter of 11th September 2020, which was circulated to the Interim Steering Committee members, SWL has faced attacks in the hands of leading operators of the alliance.

It is pertinent to interrogate the claim of evolution of structures. This would ordinarily appear to be a legitimate claim. Political structures as a rule, do of course evolve – including those of alliances. But is one year not enough to have democratically constituted structures of an alliance, even if provisionally?

It is noteworthy that the Action Plan with which ASCAB was founded was an adaptation of the Program of Action by activists in South Africa who formed the COVID-19 People’s Coalition (C19PC) in March 2020. This was the same month that what would become ASCAB published its Action Plan, which SWL adopted that same month.

As we earlier pointed out in our letter, C19PC set up its political and thematic structures within three weeks! And this was done with the *active participation of every organisation that endorsed its programme of action*.

While it has also, and still is, evolving as any living organisation or coalition is bound to, democratic involvement of its component organisations has been an integral element of this evolution every step of the way.

The opposite direction has thus far been taken by the primary promoters of ASCAB. There is an unelected Coordinating Committee which meets every Friday. We hasten to state that, pointing out the undemocratic *process* of their constitution is in no way an affront on the members of this CC. Indeed, there are a number of them who are well respected leading activists.

But to discountenance the fact that this is not the way to go about building a body that aims to provide a popular political alternative beyond the pandemic, because of that fact, would be a disservice to the spirit and ideas of democracy from below, which we should all hold dear.

This is also important because almost every single one of these CC members was contacted to come and serve on the CC by members of one organisation. The secretariat of this organisation, the new-SL (Socialist Labour) also simultaneously serves as the ASCAB secretariat. Its members, through a myriad of fronts, also constitute a significant proportion of the unelected CC. This, we dare say is both politically and morally inappropriate.

Further, there has not been a single meeting of affiliates of the alliance, nor has the Steering Committee (which, almost a year ago, the ASCAB secretariat claimed would be constituted with every paid-up affiliate entitled to one representative) been established.

We will not be surprised to be told that affiliates meetings have been called because zoom meetings so designated in their notices have been held. But let us make it clear those are general meetings open to everybody and anybody. Not a single one of those was organised as an affiliates meeting. To claim they were such would be, to borrow from a proverb, *putting a piece of meat in the mouth and declaring that it simply disappeared*.

At this point we want to stress that our demand for democratisation of the alliance is not simply about SWL. From informal feedback we received from a few members of the CC, on receiving our September letter, the committee members had resolved that SWL should be welcomed into the CC.

This was not put into effect. And we dare say not surprisingly, considering the overbearing influence of the new-SL in the alliance. This is quite unlike the approach that even more significant organisations have taken in the history of alliance/coalition-building in the country.

We are not bothered though, as we do believe that ASCAB does have promise. And we have a legitimate basis to state our fears as much as aspirations on the fate of the alliance. Thus, we have participated actively in ASCAB & ASCAB-driven activities like the people's alternative political summit (TPAPS), as best as we can in the circumstances.

Our demand for democratisation of the alliance is political. We cannot give what we do not have. Left and left-leaning alliances/coalitions aim to conquer the battle for democracy in society. They must thus be foregrounded on democratic principles.

In the light of the foregoing, as a bona fide affiliate of ASCAB, we demand as follows:

- An urgent convening of all ASCAB affiliates (i.e., every organisation which has endorsed the Action Plan),
- The democratic formulation and ratification of a set of ASCAB rules even if these were provisional. This would clearly define the different structures, mechanisms and processes of ASCAB decision-making and action-taking,
- All subscribed affiliates, who are interested should have unhindered access to participation in the Coordinating Committee until when governance structures are duly put in

place to ensure democratic and inclusive decision-making in our collective name as the Alliance.

In conclusion, it suffices to point out that all of these have been presented as prayers/suggestions to, first the secretariat and subsequently the Interim Steering Committee between June and September last year, but all to no avail. But it should be clear that we cannot go on like this if we are indeed serious about building an alliance or movement representing an alternative to the anti-democratic and sectarian antics of the bosses.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'naordie'.

Lai Brown
National Secretary

CC:

All ASCAB affiliates