



Alliance on Surviving Covid-19 and Beyond **ASCAB**



Email: ascab2020@gmail.com

5th June, 2020

Dear Comrade Lai Brown,

We are pleased that Socialist Workers and Youth League (SWL) was able to support the *Action Programme* that was drawn up in the wake of the break-out of the Covid-19 pandemic and the possibility of lockdowns and its consequent impact on the poor. This has now been supported by over 70 Organisations (see the attachment to this letter).

The *Alliance on Surviving Covid-19 and Beyond* (ASCAB) has now been established to encourage the NLC/TUC, other trade unions and Progressive Civil Society Organisation to continue to take action to force governments to provide adequate palliatives for all during and after the lockdowns.

We are now asking all the organisations that provided morale support for our *Action Programme* to go one step further and to provide financial support for ASCAB. We would be delighted if Socialist Workers and Youth League (SWL) could help us with this request with an amount related to your financial capacity. Any organisation that is able to provide financial support of at least N20,000 a year to ASCAB will be entitled to one representative on ASCAB's Steering Committee, its supreme body.

The Details of ASCAB's Bank Account are as follows;

Account name: HEDA RESOURCES

CENTER/ASCAB Account number: 0586541327

GT bank.

We look forward to the continued support of Socialist Workers and Youth League (SWL) to the work of ASCAB. Please do not hesitate to contact the Secretariat with any questions or queries that you may have.

Yours fraternally

Femi Falana SAN
Chairman

Mr. Atambi Adesh
Secretary

Mr. Olarenwaju Suraju
Treasurer



Socialist Workers & Youth League

WORKERS & YOUTH, UNITY & FREEDOM

National Action Centre, 20 Yalinga St. OAU Quarters, Abuja
Email: info@socialistworkersleague.org
Tel: +234 813 560 7164, +234 703 620 5150

9/7/2020

Steering Committee

Alliance for Surviving Covid19 and Beyond
(ASCAB)

Comrades,

Towards Deepening Internal Democracy in the Alliance

SWL commends the ASCAB initiative as one which has great potential for ensuring that concerns of poor working-class people is central to the national COVID-19 response. That is why SWL was happy to endorse the Action Plan which gave birth to the Alliance and in different parts of the country, our members have been playing some role or the other in taking the ASCAB initiative forward.

We are however constrained to draw your kind attention to the need for deepening internal democracy within the Alliance for it to achieve its laudable goals. In general and particularly so for civil society initiatives, the democratic process is as important as the objective for change-seeking projects.

We were thus shocked in the early days of ASCAB when we were informed that a shadowy “steering committee” had ruled against the inclusion of some leading members of the SWL on the ASCAB WhatsApp platform.

It was thus a welcome development to read in the newspapers of the emergence of an interim steering committee with identifiable figures at its helm, though we were of the view that such could have best emerge from an inclusive discussion of the myriad of groups constituting the Alliance.

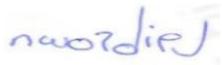
Pointing out the foregoing does not in anyway vitiate the commendable efforts taken thus far. Nor does it represent dwelling on the recent past. Rather, it is to help inform the need for conscious prioritisation of democratic norms and values as we dwell on and beyond the survival of working-class people and youth during and after the pandemic.

We have two key suggestions to make in this regard. Whilst these are not exclusive, we are very much of the view that they would significantly contribute to political transparency and accountability in the Alliance. These are:

- The formulation and democratic 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
- Going by the statement that the “AS-CAB NATIONAL” WhatsApp group is for supporters not members of the alliance, it thus important to set up a WhatsApp group distinctively for members of the organizations within the alliance so as to enhance internal discussion among ASCAB members.
- A more robust feedback mechanism between the organs of ASCAB and the affiliated organisations that constitute the Alliance, which helps ensure two-way communication that enriches discourse and a sense of collective ownership.

Finally, we are happy to pay the subscription of twenty thousand naira (N20,000) only as requested in the ASCAB secretariat letter of June 5, 2020.

Thank you,



Lai Brown

National Secretary



Alliance on Surviving Covid-19 and Beyond **ASCAB**



Email: ascab2020@gmail.com

Socialist Workers & Youth League (SWL)

29th July 2020

Dear Comrades,

Support for ASCAB

ASCAB was very pleased to receive the subscription of N20,000 from the SWL and your message of support. We hope that more SWL members will be active in ASCAB, especially at state level.

Like you we are committed to active democracy. We are a young and growing organisation and we recognise that our democratic structures will have to evolve as we grow. You may recall that the current leadership structure and offices are all just for the interim, to help set up the organisation. A more permanent structure and election of officers would follow whatever is democratically agreed in due course. We thank you for your specific suggestions which will, of course, be taken into account at the appropriate time.

Thank you once again for the support that SWL has so far provided in building ASCAB. We hope that our two organisations can continue to work positively and constructively in future. ASCAB also hopes we can continue to respect our different roles and discuss issues in an open comradely fashion.

Yours fraternally

Atambi Adegbe
Interim Secretary



Socialist Workers & Youth League

WORKERS & YOUTH, UNITY & FREEDOM

Mr Atambi Adeh
Interim Secretary
ASCAB
Iva Valley Bookstore
Labour House Abuja

Dear Atambi,

ON ASCAB AS AN ALLIANCE

Your letter of 29th January titled “support for ASCAB” refers, please. There are a few issues of concern for us in this, and with retrospect, your earlier letter as well, which we believe need to be addressed, particularly in the light of upholding the tenets of democracy in truth and in deed.

From all its nomenclature, public statements and any cursory look at its evolution, ASCAB is *an alliance*, which was initiated with the Action Plan endorsed by organisations. We as SWL are a bona fide component organisation of this alliance.

However, looking at your letters, it does seem that ASCAB is being presented as a distinct organisation, which is not the case. In paying the subscription of N20,000 we are not merely providing “moral support” from one organisation to another. We are rather living up to the duty of *affiliation*.

In an alliance, coalition, united front or by whatever name an organisation that is a body of organisations is so called, the affiliated/component organisations have both duties *and rights*. Both duty and right involve being part and parcel of the process of *evolution* of such an alliance, in this case ASCAB.

We do respect and salute the initiative of ASCAB. But the apparent blurring of the lines between what an alliance is and the relation between the alliance and its component organisations on one hand, with bi-partite relations between two organisations on the other is not healthy. And we are constrained to speak against this, in as much as we challenge undemocratic approaches in the broader polity.

And this is particularly so, because as you can recall from our earlier letter and the statement made by a leading member of our organisation at the July ASCAB stakeholders webinar, we had faced the most anti-democratic of acts in relation to the involvement and at the same time barring of SWL members from the alliance.

We do appreciate the interim nature of the current leadership of the alliance and have noted that what exists now is a step forward from its earlier informal and opaque nature. It is however pertinent,

we must say, for all members, being up to date with their affiliation responsibilities, to be involved in democratic discourse informing the evolution of the structures and programmes of ASCAB as an alliance that they are part of.

Unfortunately, this is not presently the case. For example, your letter of 5th June speaks of the Steering Committee as the supreme body of ASCAB, without a word on related issues. Where and when was this decided? What other structures of ASCAB are being proposed or are currently existing? Even if in a temporary basis, what is the basis for involvement or non-involvement of any of the component organisations of the alliance in these?

It is nor our pleasure to appear to be taking up issues time and again on these. But we will keep pointing out what are obvious and fully avoidable democratic deficits in the ASCAB both with the intent of changing these and for posterity.

SWL and its members have been involved in the formation and evolution of several united front bodies in this country over the last three decades including Campaign for Democracy (CD), United Action for Democracy (UAD), Joint Action Council of Nigeria (JACON), Joint Action Front (JAF) and the Coalition for Revolution (CORE). In all of these, the democratic involvement of affiliated organisations in the evolution of the united fronts have been respected.

We urge you, both for the health of the alliance and for posterity to respect this fundamental tenet of building a united front. We look forward to the needful being done, please.

Yours in the struggle

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

Lai Brown
For SWL



Socialist Workers & Youth League

WORKERS & YOUTH, UNITY & STRUGGLE

National Action Centre, 20 Yalinga St. OAU Quarters, Abuja
Email: info@socialistworkersleague.org
Tel: +234 703 620 5150

September 11, 2020

The Chairman,
Interim Steering Committee
ASCAB

Dear comrade,

We are constrained to express our displeasure and concern once again at the rather brazen abuse of power by Drew Povey, in exploiting democratic deficits in the otherwise commendable united front project which ASCAB is.

- On 4 September, the National Secretary of the SWL Lai Brown was thrown out of the Zoom Coordinating Committee meeting of ASCAB thrice, with the excuse that he was not a member of that committee. There was equally an attempt at that same meeting by Povey to throw out Sola Olorunfemi the General Secretary of AUOBATE, because he is a member of the SWL, until the later informed him (in their private chat at the meeting) that he was there on the request of the TUC General Secretary because he is serving as secretary of the TUC Day of Action mobilisation committee

This was at a time when all other coalitions were actually expanding their decision-making processes to, as broadly as possible, involve all forces that could contribute to discussions and concretely mobilise to build popular response to the increase in fuel pump price and electricity tariffs that had had been put into effect just days earlier

In the history of activist coalition-building from the “Expanded Secretariat” of CD days to the “Action Committees” of the UAD to CORE’s “Plenary Sessions” never before have members of affiliates of a united front been bounced from such coordinating bodies

And in these different efforts, such coordinating bodies have emerged from democratic discussions and decisions of affiliate organisations.

SWL is an affiliate of ASCAB which has paid its affiliation subscription as due. Not once have we been invited to a meeting of affiliates to discuss not to talk of contribute to deciding on the mechanisms and processes of the Alliance’s governance.

More than three months though, we were invited to pay affiliation dues presented as “financial support” of N20,000 and which we have done (see the correspondence between

ASCAB and SWL from 5 June to put things in perspective, please). There has been no further talk on any duly paid affiliate having a right to membership of the ASCAB Steering Committee.

- It is pertinent to note that this is not an episodic event, but part of a worrisome pattern which we have cause to draw your kind attention to;

As we pointed out at the first general meeting called by ASCAB, there had been a deliberate attempt to shut off some members of our organisation from the WhatsApp group of ASCAB, despite the fact that it is open for all and sundry i.e. including even non-affiliates of the alliance.

At the ASCAB Education sector open meeting in the last week of August, Mr Povey also refused to call Baba Aye, a member of our organisation to speak, despite raising his hand (electronically and several persons that did so after him were being called). Baba Aye was called only when he posted in the open chat box of what was happening. And immediately after this, Povey first sent him a stinker message privately, claiming that Baba Aye should not expect to be called every time because he was fighting ASCAB! And thereafter he also posted further accusations of being forced out of the SWL and its Central Committee on the open chat box!

- There are two important issues involved here, which whilst interrelated should be separated one is the abuse of processes by a tendency in the Alliance i.e. the neo-SL and the other, which is more fundamental is the question of the democratic principles of coalition-building
- It is unfortunate that there will be this kind of toxic tendential politics at this crucial point in time and in such a nascent and promising alliance as ASCAB, but we must call a spade a spade

Mr Drew Povey, a British socialist who has spent extensive time in Nigeria has been a member of the SWL since its formation nine years ago. He left the group with Femi Aborisade to form the Socialist Labour along with Jaye Gaskie. The three no doubt have played commendable roles in building ASCAB

There is however no doubt, including from his public statement, that Povey in particular and his comrades in the new SL seem keen on vilifying SWL in relation to ASCAB and shutting us out of the decision-making processes of the alliance

This would be wrong for any affiliate in an alliance irrespective of the relationship between such organisation and those who by their actions appear to be defining the alliance as a tendential project.

And we dare say that for this to be done to an organisation with roots in the labour movement, including officials at all levels (three of whom are General Secretaries of TUC affiliates, and two of whom initiated democratic discussion in their unions which resolved to join the alliance), by an alliance keen on “putting pressure” on the trade union centres borders on the absurd

It was known to all on the left that CD was initiated by two respected Marxist-Leninist tendencies. But they did not relate to other groups the way our Trotskyist comrades are now doing. If this kind of tactics which they are utilising had been brought to play by a Marxist-Leninist organisation they would have shouted “Stalinism! Stalinism! Stalinism!” how do we now describe this gambit on their part?

- The second and more important issue at stake here is that of internal democracy within a united front in relation to ASCAB and its governance

In a debate in the Canadian socialist movement several decades back, someone spoke about “the tyranny of structurelessness”. This was to give a clear understanding of how a few people informally wield power and undermine democratic processes by eschewing the establishment of clear structures, often due to some assumed exigency or the other

In ASCAB we see a tyranny of semi-structuredness emerging. We have affiliates who are never consulted as affiliates and an unelected coordinating committee effectively replacing an Interim Steering Committee which ordinarily would have amongst other things helped guide a more democratic evolution of the alliance, which then calls “general meetings” which really are more or less open for all (affiliates and non-affiliates alike and without any form of representativeness of any/all affiliates participating in such general meetings within its amorphous milieu).

We respect the fact that ASCAB is a nascent and evolving alliance. We also appreciate and respect the calibre of people whom we gather are on the Coordinating Committee. But there are a number of issues that arise and should be addressed

The excuse of time might not hold water as much as it would appear. The initiative of ASCAB in March was inspired by that in South Africa which evolved into the COVID-19 Peoples Coalition C19PC earlier that same March. But within weeks, C19PC had taken steps to democratically ensure inclusive structures were put in place – involving all affiliates in this process all the way. Yet, C19PC itself also stresses that it is evolving. The morning shows the day. It is now half a year since both C19PC and ASCAB were initiated, we do not need years to do the needful. Indeed, how we take things at the emergent point has consequences on the nature of organisational culture that develops

The main reason we have had to call out the neo-SL here is that, our discussions with several of the Coordinating Committee meeting points at two things. First almost everyone was contacted by either of the three neo-SL comrades mentioned earlier. And second, when we point out Mr Povey’s rather spiteful approach to his engagement with SWL in ASCAB, almost all of these comrades say that once Comrade Aborisade and Gaskie were also involved, it was difficult to get any action towards democratic remedy done.

This is dangerous for lasting efforts at building a united front. Democratic principles should be applied without fear or favour in coalitions as in the larger society. We cannot fight for rule of law from the bourgeois and favour direct or indirect rule of persons or particular group(s) over and above a democratic and inclusive dynamic in an alliance if we want its healthy growth and development.

It was Voltaire who said, 'I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it'. The neo-SL and any other person(s) or group(s) does not have to like or not like us, or any other affiliate for that matter. But our right as an affiliate and a fully subscribed one for that matter should be respected.

To the extent that all decisions being made in our collective name as an alliance is taken by the Coordinating Committee and in the absence of elections into that, as it were now, sole governance body of the alliance in praxis, we are strongly of the view that it should be that it inclusiveness be enabled and concrete steps towards furthering democratic ethos in all ramifications in the alliance are taken, please.

Our prayers

In the light of the foregoing, our prayers are two:

- 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
- Steps should be taken to initiate a structured affiliates-based alliance, commencing with a meeting of all affiliates. These should include initiating the process for formulating an ASCAB constitution

Conclusion

We look forward to your favourable consideration of our prayers. We are strongly of the view that these are correct steps to take for an alliance which presents an alternative to the impunity and anti-democratic reign of the regime and ruling class as a whole.

We also do not think that it would be healthy to have wage a long-drawn internal struggle for democratising ASCAB. We are committed to harmonious relations within the alliance based on robust discussions, inclusive governance and democratic ethos.

While looking forward to your kind response as soon as possible, do be assured of our high esteem.

In solidarity,



Lai Brown

National Secretary

CC

All Interim Steering Committee members