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Statement on the left slate for Labour's National Executive Committee

July 11, 2020

Grassroots Black Left (GBL) is deeply unhappy with the way the Centre Left Grassroots Alliance (CLGA) left slate-making meeting on July 8, 2020 was conducted. We believe it brought the CLGA into disrepute by being undemocratic, smacking of an old-fashioned stitch-up between Momentum and the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD) and therefore disuniting rather than uniting the left.

African Caribbean and Asian Labour Party members have been voicing their strong discontentment about this on social media because they feel the socialist principles of Black self-organisation and Black self-determination have been trampled on by the white-run CLGA. It's as if "Black Labour Lives" do not matter, yet African Caribbean and Asian voters are the party's most loyal voters and the party can't get into government without them.

While GBL will not be standing candidates, or supporting any alternative slates, we quite understand why some Black party members will think and act otherwise, threatening the electoral chances of all those on the CLGA slate. This could hand permanent control of the NEC to the right. We note there are currently no African Caribbean or Asian men on the NEC and just one Asian man on the CLGA slate. There hasn't been an African Caribbean man on the NEC since the early 1980s when Colin de Freitas represented the Young Socialists on it.

GBL has attempted to use the mechanisms of the CLGA, to which it is affiliated as its only African Caribbean and Asian organisation, to help forge unity in the deciding of left slates for Labour's NEC, which was done over a grueling period of two meetings on July 7 and 8, that lasted nearly nine hours. Our commitment to the talks succeeding was steadfast despite us facing surprising opposition to the principles of Black self-organisation and Black self-determination on which the CLGA's commitment to Black representation should be based.

Our representations about the two African Caribbean and Asian candidates we put forward were completely ignored. This was even though GBL was the only group that made a major concession, with our Co-Chair Cllr Hassan Ahmed magnanimously withdrawing his candidature, in a spirit of compromise, in favour of his female Co-Chair.

GBL has grave concerns that none of the Black/BAME/Politically Black candidates who have been selected for the left slate came through a process of Black self-organisation and they will therefore be answerable to the white godfathers who handpicked them.

It is non-negotiable that Black political representatives should be chosen by the Black people to whose issues and concerns they must give voice, not least at a time when Black Lives Matter is high on the agenda throughout the world.

While we welcome socialist African, Caribbean and Asian comrades being on left slates, they must be truly representative and accountable to the communities they serve.

GBL was not consulted, and to our knowledge, nor was any other Labour Black organisation, about the inclusion on the slate of any of these candidates and we therefore cannot vouch for them. That is the big danger posed by tokenism.

CLGA's long-standing policy of democratic decision-making by consensus was abandoned by a ruling of the chair on July 8 in order for the Momentum and Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD)-dominated process to drive through a slate based on "indicative" votes. This was followed by an underhand refusal to reveal the number of votes received for each candidate or who cast them.

GBL has written in the strongest of terms to the CLGA Chair about this and what appears to be the widely-discredited back-room deal making of the leadership of CLPD and the new leadership of Momentum, who didn't put forward the organisation's previous representative Huda Elmi, a sitting NEC member, or fight for Tracey Hylton, whom they had at first proposed. They are two Black left women with a track record of fighting for Black rights.

How these matters are resolved will decide whether the CLGA itself survives as the way in which left slates are decided in the future.

End