

Revival of Rev. King's March on Washington By Faith, Community and Civil Rights Activists

By: Ethel Long-Scott

(Published in the Oakland Post on August 17, 2003)

More than 35 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a different dream, one that we don't give him enough credit for. It was a dream bigger than civil rights. It was a dream of economic rights, the right to adequate shelter, food, employment and medical care for everyone. They killed Dr. King before he could develop a strategy to make his new dream a reality.

It's time to make that long-deferred dream real. The Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) started a march from Marks, Mississippi, on August 2 to retrace the steps and revive the dream that Dr. King proposed in 1968. Our march will reach Washington D.C. on August 23, the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's "I have a dream . . ." speech. In Washington we will build a second Resurrection City on the Washington Mall. We will protest the lack of the economic human rights promised by the United Nations way back in 1948, and we will teach how poverty is an economic human rights violation.

We marchers are poor and working class people and people of conscience from throughout the United States. California is sending a delegation of leaders in the forefront of the fight for economic human rights. People from all walks of life all over this country are realizing that it is time to unify against the immorality of so much poverty in a world of plenty.

Marks, Mississippi, is poorer now than it was when Dr. King's march left there in 1968. The Poor People's Campaign that he did not live to lead was the most ambitious plan of his life. He envisioned a nonviolent, multiracial army of the poor" living in a Resurrection City on the Mall and staying until Congress passed an Economic Bill of Rights. Dr. King understood that the civil right to sit at a lunch counter meant nothing without the human right to affordable food.

Today's marchers represent the poor and the workers, dot-com busters who can't find work, laid-off government and manufacturing employees, the 11 million Californians without health insurance, students who can't afford higher tuitions, elderly and disabled denied medical care, addicts in recovery denied rehabilitation, homeless denied shelter beds, working mothers denied childcare, consumers denied affordable energy. We are uniting to demand the human dignity promised when the United Nations adopted its Declaration of Human Rights way back in 1948.

Too many people have suffered and died because our nation deferred Dr. King's last dream. But we can revive it. The PPEHRC is building a movement to end poverty, because poverty is a human rights violation as defined by the U.N., and because this richest country in the world has the means to end poverty.

We are in the worst economy for workers since the Great Depression. Even as our leaders say this recession is temporary, we see that good jobs are not coming back. Health care for workers is terrible and getting worse. Homelessness is rising. The money needed to rebuild America is going to rebuild Iraq. And yet, President Bush and Congress passed the largest tax cut for the rich in our history. Where is *our* "homeland security"?

We march to Washington to demand our economic human rights—healthcare, education, housing, food and a living wage. As Dr. King said in 1967, “There is a fire raging now...for the poor of this society. Disinherited people all over the world are bleeding to death from deep social and economic wounds. They need brigades of ambulance drivers who will have to ignore the red lights of the present system until the emergency is solved.” Dr. King was killed before the brigades of ambulance drivers could reach Washington, D.C. the first time. The fire is still burning in America and “brigades of ambulance drivers” are needed now more than ever.

We will be marching into Washington, DC on August 23rd, the 40th anniversary of Dr. King’s “I Have a Dream...” speech. We will set up a second Resurrection City until August 30th. We call to the American people—to you and me, to our brothers and sisters—that now is the time to demand all of our economic human rights.

This article was submitted by Ethel Long-Scott of the Women’s Economic Agenda Project. For more information, see these websites: www.weap.org, www.kwru.org and www.justhealthcare.org.