

MLK Global 2018

A Poor People's Call to Action

April 2018 marks 50 years since Reverend Dr Martin Luther King was assassinated. His 'last great exertion' in 1967/68 was the Poor People's Campaign and Economic Bill of Rights.

MLK Global proposes the **internationalising of the 1968 Poor People's campaign** with the first of 5 global mobilisations over the coming decade 2018-2028 linking USA social justice movements with other social justice movements around the world.

MLK Global proposes linking these mobilisations with a renewed international recognition and call for Dr King's ambitious 1968 Economic Bill of Rights – updated for today, it offers a universal economic bill of rights fit for the 21st century that will reverse economic inequalities, racism, militarism and climate change. All these factors combined are destroying families, communities, nations and the very planet we live on.

MLK Global – international mobilisations **and** a renewed Economic Bill of Rights.

1. THE VISION

"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jnr (1963)

The Quest for Peace and Justice were the first words uttered by Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jnr as part of his Nobel Prize acceptance speech given on 11th December 1964. Dr King's lifelong quest has become our unfinished business agenda. The task of seeking justice, exposing poverty and confronting war and conflict is still a quest worth pursuing as part of our common humanity and shared future together. It is not true that things cannot change, they can! If we have a collective conviction of action and hope, then together we can transform the political environment to bring about the change needed to ensure peace and justice is secured for all people.

A shared vision of justice embodies a sustained hope that poverty eradication is possible and is an achievement worth striving for. Hope is not just a time bound concept, it's also a love bound concept that requires an analysis of the realities, a definition of what is wrong, and clarity of what needs to be changed. We cannot get away from the injustice, the inequalities, the poverty, the conflicts and wars by ignoring them or delegating them to corporate or political institutions to play out power games. Dr King's lifelong vision, work and campaigns pursued justice and equality for all. His Christian faith compelled him to express and affirm a common humanity, which united all people on earth, irrespective of religion, race or culture that might separate us from each other in one human family. Every human struggle endured encourages us to change attitudes and behaviours, leading us towards transformation of ourselves and of the world.

Our world has never been more prosperous, and, at the same time, more inequitable than it is today. Inequality has reached a level that we can no longer afford to ignore. People who have been submerged into poverty, driven into overwhelming debt, marginalised, and displaced are crying out with a greater sense of urgency and clarity than before. The global community must recognise the need for all of us to join hands together to do justice in the face of unparalleled and catastrophic inequalities in the distribution of wealth.

Therefore, we call out the fatal intertwining of the global financial, socio-economic, climate and ecological crises accompanied in many places of the world by the suffering of people and their struggle for a decent life. We call out market deregulation and unrestrained privatisation of goods and services that exploit whole societies and dismantle social programs and services. We call out uncontrolled financial flows that destabilise the economies of an increasing number of countries all over the world. We will not accept this as a 'norm' in 2017, that is why through the MLK Global campaign we are renewing our call for Dr King's vision embodied in the 'Economic Bill of Rights'.

MLK Global proposes the internationalising of the 1968 Poor People's campaign with the first of 5 global mobilisations over the coming decade 2018-2028 linking USA social justice movements with other social justice movements around the world. This is the time for a global call out of governments, institutions, big corporations and business. 2018 - the 50-year anniversary of the life and work left by Dr King presents us with an opportunity to join hands, voices and actions together in our shared quest for peace and justice.

2. THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN 1967/68

At the time of his murder, Dr. King was working on *The Poor People's Campaign* – a mass movement with its [Poor People's March on Washington](#) planned for summer 1968. It was a more radical successor to the March on Washington on August 1963 and called for an occupation – Resurrection City – a tented community of thousands that would stay until they got their demands implemented.



He was latterly developing political strategies that forged links between race and class, within the framework of a profound challenge to the wider economic system. He said 'we must rapidly begin the shift from a thing oriented society to a people oriented society'. And he argued that 'something is wrong with capitalism'.

'For years I labored with the idea of reforming the existing institutions of society through a little change here and little change there...but now I feel quite differently. You have got to have a reconstruction of the whole society, a revolution of values... We are not interested in being integrated into this value structure. Power must be relocated, a radical redistribution of power must take place.'

Dr. King was assassinated on 4th April 1968 and the April 16 edition of USA [Look magazine](#) carried a posthumous article from King titled ["Showdown for Nonviolence"](#)—his last statement on the Poor People's Campaign. The article warns of imminent social collapse and suggests that the Campaign presents government with what may be its last opportunity to achieve peaceful change—through an Economic Bill of Rights. Just three weeks after Dr King's death, the Committee of 100 – set up to lobby on behalf of the campaign- called for just this. On 12th May 1968 Ralph Abernathy, King's chosen successor to head the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, went forward with the Poor People's Campaign. **Coretta Scott King brought 5,000 demonstrators to Washington, DC, seeking an Economic Bill of Rights.** "Resurrection City," a shantytown, was constructed on the Mall to house many of the visitors who met with congressman and senators to plead their case. 20,000 army soldiers were activated and prepared for a military occupation of the capital should the Poor People's Campaign pose a threat.

From *Martin Luther King, A Life* by Marshall Frady.

3. INTERNATIONALISING THE POOR PEOPLE'S CAMPAIGN FOR TODAY

We need a new Citizens Global March on Power in the spirit of the Poor People's Campaign – the time is right to internationalise it.

We are moving backwards. King's world of 1968 is not so far removed from today. In fact the statistics show that in many ways the present day is worse for many people – whether in the developed world or the global south. The [USA stats](#) are particularly shocking link.

The prime culprit is the 'neoliberal project', a USA/UK led project that has been globalised over 40 years. Its goals - to privatise, deregulate, undermine labour and roll back the state for citizens - have been implemented. Meantime, it ensured that the power of government worked for big business and this too, has triumphed. At the same time, the global south has been under the neoliberal yoke for 40 years and has paid a terrible price for it.

Martin Luther King is in the hearts of very many of the world's people. The power, truth and universality of his words and his actions speak across time, nationality and creed. Were he alive today, he too would be condemning the 'neoliberal project' which has served to benefit the privileged few while failed the majority. He too would be in accord with those who say capitalism is broken.



'Why are there forty million poor people in America? And when you begin to ask that question, you are raising questions about the economic system, about a broader distribution of wealth.' When you ask that question, you begin to question the capitalistic economy. And I'm simply saying that more and more, we've got to begin to ask questions about the whole society..." Speech to Southern Christian Leadership Conference Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967.

Under a renewed Poor People's Campaign racial justice movements, labour movements, progressive faith groups of all denominations, peace movements, women's and human rights groups; the landless movements, Idle No More and other first peoples movements; environmental movements and the global co-operative movement from all over the world **would be coming together in a 21st century call for economic justice and in the spirit of Dr King's original 1968 call.**

4. FROM 1968 TO 2018 - AN ECONOMIC BILL OF RIGHTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

1968 - The original five demands stand the test of time.

Guaranteed income and jobs, access to land and finance and participation in the political system were called for. The most interesting fact to emerge is that **Dr.King's first call** for a guaranteed

minimum income is a concept now gaining great traction around the world and called by various titles ie Universal Basic Income. It also has a strong [theological foundation](#).

Dr.King was way ahead of his time.

The solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income. ... We are likely to find that the problems of housing and education, instead of preceding the elimination of poverty, will themselves be affected if poverty is first abolished. A host of positive psychological changes inevitably will result from widespread economic security. The dignity of the individual will flourish when the decisions concerning his life are in his hands, when he has the assurance that his income is stable and certain, and when he knows that he has the means to seek self-improvement.

There is nothing except short-sightedness to prevent us from guaranteeing an annual minimum – and liveable – income for every American family. The time has come for us to civilize ourselves by the total, direct and immediate abolition of poverty.

Martin Luther King Jr., Where Do We Go From Here: Chaos or Community? (1968)

We suggest that Dr.King's **second call** would also be addressed by the UBI concept. Universal Basic Income is also integral to the policy platform of the Movement for Black Lives in the USA – it sees UBI as key to the present day concerns and discussion about reparation for African Americans.

The 5-plank Economic Bill of Rights was at the heart of the Poor People's Campaign and was developed by King and the Committee of 100 – representatives of the movement in all its diversity. Dr.King did not live to see the March or the lobbying undertaken by the Committee.

Fifty years on we propose extending the original five to include five more – reflecting Dr. King's timeless concerns such as perpetual war and military spending; manifestations of racism linked to the global failed 'War On Drugs' and gross levels incarceration of African Americans; also the power of corporations, climate change and the demand to reverse the 'aid' narrative adhered to by northern (rich) governments and institutions at the expense of the global south.

Below are the original five calls and how we envisage them today plus the five new calls to take account of issues we need to address for this 21st century.

THE ECONOMIC BILL OF RIGHTS – then and now

Dr.King called for an Economic Bill of Rights in a letter to Congress in February 1968 - one which would provide jobs, housing, education and health care. This was to be the foundation for the Economic Bill of Rights lobbied for, after his death by the Committee of 100.

IN 1968, THE COMMITTEE OF 100 DEMANDED AN ECONOMIC BILL OF RIGHTS WITH FIVE PLANKS to deliver ECONOMIC JUSTICE

1968 “A meaningful job at a living wage”

2018 we have levels of unemployment; rising gap between top and bottom salary; triumph of the 1% and shareholder value, massive military spending. **WE WANT** Citizen’s Income; public investment in infrastructure, public services and jobs; more of the green jobs economy; more of the co-op economy.

1968 “A secure and adequate income” for all those unable to find or do a job

2018 we have inadequate taxation to support social welfare/safety net. **WE WANT** a properly funded social security system and / or meaningful alternatives to work for those who cannot work.

1968 “Access to land” for economic uses

2018 WE WANT land reform to challenge the domination of globalised agribusiness; increased respect for and investment in small and medium sized farmers around the world.

1968 “Access to capital” for poor people and minorities to promote their own businesses

2018 the banking catastrophe meant banks were bailed yet very little was re-directed back into the economy. **WE WANT** stringent regulation of banking; due process to be implemented for those culpable in the crash; more mutuals and co-op financing.

1968 “Ability for ordinary people to “play a truly significant role” in the government”

2018 WE CALL UPON THE ‘EVERYDAY CITIZEN’, young and old alike, opt in – stand for office – in order to secure support (taxes and legislation) for health, education, housing, reform and regulation of banks, corps etc.

WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE FIVE MORE CALLS ADDED TO THE ORIGINAL FIVE DEMANDS

2018 WE ADD: CLIMATE CHANGE & ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY– increased investment in mitigation; green economy and renewable; due process for climate crimes

2018 WE ADD: REVERSE THE POWER OF TNCs (Transnational Corporations): See the People’s Treaty on challenging corporate power within a legal framework

2018 WE ADD: REVERSE AID ‘NARRATIVE’; insist northern governments and institutions recognise and act upon the fact that the *north owes the south* in economic terms and aid is a tool of foreign policy

2018 WE ADD: END ‘THE WAR ON DRUGS’ – redirect government funds into pro poor policies; end racial discrimination in justice system; capture revenue in same way as alcohol and tobacco.

2018 WE ADD: WAR SPENDING/INTL RELATIONS: We want massive reductions in military spending, just as Dr King advocated. Militarisation was a primary concern for him. Real security threats to be addressed: climate change, poverty, food sovereignty. *See TPNS Five Percent Campaign.*

Today, an Economic Bill of Rights and the realization of a Beloved Community is at the essence of Dr. King's prophetic, Urgency of Now.

Globalization has fuelled a level of inequality the world has never before seen. The poor has become poorer and the rich have grown richer. The “radical redistribution of power” is a moral imperative if we are to ever truly fulfil the Dr. King’s vision.

5. COMPONENTS & TIMETABLE

THREE INTERLINKED COMPONENTS

‘We all face the same problems, in different contexts. We need to be harmonious in the global telling of the story’

Itumeleng D Mothoagae, University of South Africa

- THE GLOBAL MARCH. Launch 4th April 2018: Fifty years after the murder of Dr King. The Citizens Global March on Power with Economic Bill of Rights’ manifesto. Thereafter, marches to be held 2020, 2022, 2024, 2026, 2028
- THE ECONOMIC BILL OF RIGHTS. The Movement for Black Lives policy demands includes the Universal Basic Income. Like them, we believe it should play a central role in reframing the relationship of the citizen to government – for the USA and we argue every single government around the world. It was also the first demand of Dr King’s five demands in 1968.
- WHERE WE ALL COME FROM. the power of symbolic locations. All humanity is born of one female, East Africa, 200,000 years ago. This ‘bigger picture’ would flow through the creative elements of MLK Global.

Fifty years on, can citizens of the world pick up where he began ‘finish what Dr. King started?’

6. PARTNERSHIPS & HOW YOU/ YOU ORGANISATION/NETWORK COULD TAKE PART

Between now and the key moments of 2017 and 2018 here are some ideas to share with your colleagues and networks

- Awareness raising: Spread the word about why the time is now for King’s Economic Bill of Rights of 1968

- about the vision to **internationalise and re-envision The Poor People's Campaign** of 1968 as the 'citizens global march on power' and to take place in many countries around the world between 2018 and 2028
- about **King's Economic Bill of Rights and its relevance to today** with its calls for guaranteed income, state support for those who cannot work, access to capital, access to land and a role in government.
- about the **universality of an updated Economic Bill of Rights for all citizens** and the international solidarity that it expresses in the face of globalised corporate interests
- explore how 4 April 2018 intersect with your own work and how can 4 April 2018 add value to your work
- inspire, motivate and mobilise through faith-based/community events and activity

7. ABOUT US

MLK Global is led by Dionne Gravesande and Deborah Burton (UK) and Yolande Cadore (USA)

DIONNE GRAVESANDE and DEBORAH BURTON worked together over a 6 year period at the UK development and campaigning agency Christian Aid.

Together, they worked on projects that took our core campaigns (Trade Justice, Climate Justice and Tax Justice) to churches (including Black Majority Churches) as well as the wider public. These projects included high profile work such as the Channel 4 TV documentary [The Great African Scandal](#); acclaimed cinema doc [Black Gold](#) and high profile campaigning work on the IMF and World Bank with Danny Glover and Abderrhamane Sissako's film [BAMAKO](#). Deborah left Christian Aid in 2009 to found Tipping Point North South and Dionne became one of TPNS's 9 management committee members.

YOLANDE CADORE has spent the last fifteen years working with grassroots organizations in New York City and nationally. She has worked with the Working Families Party; with ACORN; New York State Tenants and Neighbors; she was Director of Community Organizing WE ACT for Environmental Justice for six years. She served as the National Field Director at The Praxis Project and between 2010 and 2015 she was the Director of Strategic Partnerships at the Drug Policy Alliance. She has also consulted for several organizations including the Open Society Foundations and Moveon.org. She is currently a graduate student at the School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA), Columbia University.

ABOUT TIPPING POINT NORTH SOUTH

[Tipping Point North South](#) is a London based 'for the benefit of society' co-operative and is non-profit. We support a small number of cinema documentary films; we have our own standalone single issue campaigns and we co-produces events on critical issues of our day (project list below.)

Cinema Documentary Films

1. **Open Bethlehem**: Director Leila Sansour Palestine /UK (released)
TPFF Co-Producer <http://www.tippingpointfilmfund.com/site/projects/open-bethlehem/>
2. **We Are Many**: Dir Amir Amirani (released)
TPFF Exec Producer <http://www.tippingpointfilmfund.com/site/projects/we-are-many/>

Campaigns

1. **Make Apartheid History** <http://makeapartheidhistory.org/>
2. **The Five Percent Campaign** on runaway military spending <https://tippingpointnouthsouth.org/5percent/short-intro/>
3. **From Pink to Prevention** Challenging vested interests ie governments, industry and breast cancer charities about pink-washing and the sidelining of environmental and occupational links to breast cancer worldwide <https://tippingpointnouthsouth.org/campaigns/from-pink-to-prevention/>
4. **The War on Drugs** and the push for reform <https://tippingpointnouthsouth.org/campaigns/rethink-the-war-on-drugs/>

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