

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. CON. RES. 161

Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Dr. King's Launching of the Poor People's Campaign and Organization of the Poor People's Army.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MAY 24, 2007

Ms. LEE (for herself, Mr. STARK, Mr. MEEK of Florida, Mr. ELLISON, Mr. LEWIS of Georgia, Ms. EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON of Texas, Mr. GRIJALVA, Mr. PAYNE, Ms. CORRINE BROWN of Florida, Mr. CONYERS, Mr. BUTTERFIELD, Mr. HONDA, Ms. KILPATRICK, Mr. SERRANO, Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas, Mr. MCDERMOTT, Mr. NADLER, Mr. RANGEL, Mr. COHEN, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. KUCINICH, Mr. BACA, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, Mr. TOWNS, Ms. WOOLSEY, Mr. HASTINGS of Florida, and Mr. WATT) submitted the following concurrent resolution; which was referred to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

CONCURRENT RESOLUTION

Commemorating the 40th Anniversary of Dr. King's Launching of the Poor People's Campaign and Organization of the Poor People's Army.

Whereas Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. raised the possibility of a poor people's alliance as early as 1964;

Whereas Dr. King advocated such an alliance in his book entitled *Where Do We Go From Here? Chaos or Community* published in January, 1967, and often spoke of the need to confront the class and racial basis of economic discrimination;

Whereas America was at war and very polarized during the summer of 1967 and racked by social and economic injustice and civil strife;

Whereas Dr. King sought to overcome widespread national despair during 1967 and called for “transmuting the deep rage of the ghetto into a constructive and creative force”;

Whereas in the middle of August, 1967, Dr. King first revealed his new organizing vision to his aides in the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) for a nonviolent campaign of mass civil disobedience in the national capital itself to dramatize the need for jobs and economic advancement for the poor;

Whereas Dr. King planned to bring thousands of unemployed Americans to Washington, DC, to camp out in front of government buildings for an extended period like the Bonus Marchers of 1932 in order “to cripple the operations of an oppressive society” until it listened at last to the cries of its poor;

Whereas in mid-November, 1967, at an SCLC retreat, Dr. King informed his closest advisors that “we are going to take this movement and we are going to reach out to the poor people in all directions in this country. We’re going into the Southwest after the Indians, into the West after the Chicanos, into Appalachia after the poor whites, and into the ghettos after Negroes and Puerto Ricans. And we’re going to bring them together and enlarge this campaign into something bigger than just a civil-rights movement for Negroes”;

Whereas he traveled nationwide throughout the fall of 1967 to raise funds for the poor people's campaign, which he called his "last and greatest dream";

Whereas Dr. King held a national news conference at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta on December 4th, 1967 to unveil this new campaign, remind the press that the government "does not move to correct the problems involving race until it is confronted directly and dramatically", detail the SCLC's plan to recruit 3,000 poor people from five rural areas and ten major cities, train them for three months in the techniques of nonviolence, and then bring them to Washington, DC to disrupt government operations until America responded to the needs of her poor;

Whereas J. Edgar Hoover and other top-ranking FBI officials actively sought to sabotage the poor people's campaign, using 44 field officers to stir up public indignation against it and for the first time specifically targeted Dr. King in the FBI's COINTELPRO activities against "black nationalist hate groups";

Whereas the announcement of the poor people's campaign markedly increased assassination threats against Dr. King and precipitated the issuance of what has now been documented as specific contracts upon his life;

Whereas SCLC leaders officially approved the poor people's campaign in January, 1968;

Whereas in January, 1968, Bernard Lafayette was named to direct the poor people's campaign and forty veteran SCLC field workers were dispatched to selected rural areas in the South and to Baltimore, Philadelphia, Newark, New York, Boston, Cleveland, Detroit, and other

riot-plagued cities to start recruiting volunteers to establish a poor people's "tent" city in Washington, DC;

Whereas several thousand poor people in the first phase of the campaign were supposed to march into Washington, DC as a poor people's army in late April, 1968, and encamp in a plainly visible shantytown;

Whereas the poor people's campaign was designed to mobilize the nation to mount a full-scale, nonviolent assault on poverty through at least three months of unrelenting pressure on Congress for action during the summer of 1968 and spotlighting for the entire nation the paradox of "poverty amid plenty" and the miserable realities of America's poor;

Whereas Dr. King described the purpose of the poor people's campaign to be "to dramatize the gulf between promise and fulfillment, to call attention to the gap between the dream and the realities, to make the invisible visible";

Whereas Dr. King was murdered on April 4, 1968, while in Memphis marching in support of striking sanitation workers, thus depriving the poor people's campaign its principal organizer and felling the drum major of the poor people's army before it could march to our Nation's Capital;

Whereas 40 years later, 1 in 8 Americans now lives in poverty;

Whereas poverty in America now is far higher than in many other developed nations, as evidenced by the fact that the United States ranks 24th among 25 countries when measuring the share of the population below 50 percent of median income; and

Whereas inequality has reached record highs in America, wherein one percent of Americans in 2005 had the largest share of the nation's income (19 percent) since 1929 and, at the same time, 20 percent of Americans have only 3.4 percent of the Nation's income: Now, therefore, be it

1 *Resolved by the House of Representatives (the Senate*
2 *concurring), That—*

3 (1) the President and Congress should reaffirm
4 the Federal commitment to eradicate poverty in
5 America as a leading national priority; and

6 (2) the President and Congress should establish
7 immediately a national goal of cutting poverty in
8 half in the next 10 years and adopt a national strat-
9 egy to reach that goal.

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