

Statement by
Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, President
Southern Christian Leadership Conference
Wednesday, April 16, 1969
Chicago, Illinois

Ladies and gentlemen of the press:

Today we are concluding the semi-annual meeting of the Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In our twelve-year history, this has been our first Board meeting in the North, but I anticipate more because SCLC for some time has been a national organization.

Our 54-member Board is bi-racial and interdenominational. The members are distinguished men and women from all walks of life and from throughout the nation. The Board of Directors is the highest policy-making body of SCLC.

I am especially pleased that the Board has unanimously approved the plan I presented as the Second Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign. We launched this Second Chapter on April 4, one year after the assassination of our Founding President, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

We know that the First Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign achieved some major victories. Most important, it made poverty visible and served notice that we will never allow America and the world to forget or ignore poor people. We also had such concrete accomplishments as the release of \$220 million for food for hungry people, the 1968 Housing Act containing a blueprint for a 20th Century Homestead Act for black and other poor people, and reduced prices for food stamps.

But we are telling America that we cannot stop at that, for this society has many more unfulfilled obligations to the poor.

First, we are making the following demands on the Federal Government in 1969:

Specifically, we adopted the following program and policy for the Second Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign:

1. Feed the hungry by providing free food stamps to all families earning less than \$3,000 a year.
2. Enact uniform national welfare standards so that welfare rights are nationwide and all people receiving welfare have a decent income.
3. Provide productive jobs and training for all people in need of work, so that they may provide for their families.
4. Repeal the welfare freeze that threatens poor mothers and children if it goes into effect July 1, 1969.
5. Make all Government payments to the poor increase in proportion to rises in the cost of living.

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6. Enforce fully and vigorously the federal Equal Employment Opportunity law, by withdrawing federal contracts from companies which practice racial discrimination. This law has never been enforced by those who cry for "law and order."

7. Also enforce, in the North and South, the federal law on school desegregation by withholding public funds from school districts which fail to desegregate. Again, this law has never been adequately enforced by the same officials who call for "law and order" and who say they want to "bring us together" but are keeping our children apart.

8. End the war in Vietnam.

These demands are explicit and simple enough for anyone to understand. They are reasonable and attainable. They are made, and will be dramatized, in a nonviolent way.

Secondly, in this 1969 Second Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign, we intend to dramatize the issues of poverty in local actions throughout the nation. Our staff and Board members will organize to do this in carefully selected locations where local conditions clearly demonstrate the need for specific action on our demands.

Thirdly, we will place a spotlight on the Poor People's Campaign in the Nation's Capital, Washington, D. C., beginning on Mother's Day, Sunday, May 11th, with a march sponsored by SCLC and other organizations. On the same day, I will address the nation from a prominent church in Washington in the morning, and simultaneous Mother's Day marches will take place in communities where SCLC is working.

During the following week, a Committee of 100 poor people and their representatives will visit the Congress, Cabinet members, and the White House to present our demands. We are in the process now of scheduling meetings beginning Monday, May 12th, with such key political figures as members of the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for the Poor People's Campaign, initiated last year by a bipartisan group of Congressmen and Senators, and headed by Senator Edward Brooke of Massachusetts; leaders of the House and Senate; and the secretaries of several departments, including Agriculture, Health, Education and Welfare, Labor, and Defense. We expect to end the week with a visit to President Nixon at the White House, to apprise him of the specifics of our demands.

Fourth, after the week in Washington, the Committee of 100 representatives of the poor will return to their communities to dramatize the issues we have raised through nonviolent demonstrations. In contrast, therefore, to the 1968 Poor People's Campaign focus primarily in Washington, the Second Chapter in 1969 will see our Campaign breaking out across the national map. It may be North Carolina on the issue of school desegregation. It may be Alabama on the issues of poverty and welfare. It may be California on the demands of our Mexican-American brothers, or the Northwest reservations on the demands

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of American Indians. It may be Chicago, where Rev. Jesse Jackson is leading our SCLC Operation Breadbasket battle for economic rights in the private and public sectors of this economy.

Although we have no plans for another Resurrection City in Washington, the poor and their representatives from these aroused communities will assemble at the seat of government in Washington when this becomes timely and necessary. For example, when there are key votes to be taken on bills relevant to our specific demands, we shall quickly assemble the poor from across the nation in Washington to press these issues in the halls of Congress, in the congressional galleries, and in the streets with massive demonstrations. When critical decisions are being made by the Administration and its Cabinet-level Departments relating to these issues, the poor of the nation will likewise descend upon the Nation's Capital to press nonviolently their just and long-denied rights to the demands of this Campaign.

Fifth, I have designated the Rev. Walter E. Fauntroy as National Coordinator of the Second Chapter of the Poor People's Campaign. Rev. Fauntroy has long been Director of SCLC's Washington Bureau, and he is uniquely and superbly equipped for this new assignment. He was coordinator of the historic March on Washington in 1963, he is the architect of a nonviolent land-reform program in Washington which promises to revitalize our ghettos across the nation, and he is the former Vice-Chairman of the City Council of Washington, D. C.

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