

Get involved in

MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY

NorthEast

'Abolition Committees' in every City and Town!

March, 2006

Dear Supporter of Make Poverty History,

A message From Archbishop Desmond Tutu to North East Campaigners,
January 2006:

"Dear Friends.

How wonderfully you have supported us in our struggle against apartheid. You did make Apartheid History! Thank you, thank you, thank you. Thank you for wanting to make poverty history. Well done. Go on to the Jubilee, on to Trade Justice and on to make Poverty History!"

[Archbishop Tutu received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 and the Freedom of the City of Durham on 10th March 1987.]

The question we have to ask ourselves is, "*Are we really serious about Making Poverty History*?" In 1787, twelve men met in a printer's workshop in London and effectively launched the campaign against slavery. They had to be **very serious**, since according to Adam Hochschild:

"If you had then stood on a London street corner and insisted that slavery was morally wrong and should be stopped, [your] listeners would have laughed you off as a crackpot... Ending slavery was wildly impractical: the British Empire's economy would collapse."

Hochschild goes on: "*Within a few short years, there was an abolition committee in every major city and town... More than three hundred thousand Britons were refusing to eat slave-grown sugar... Parliament was flooded with abolition petitions... Public opinion had undergone a sea change.*"

Our campaign is also one against slavery - the slavery of global poverty - and this campaign too started in Britain in the form of the Jubilee Debt Campaign, the Trade Justice Movement and, last year, Make Poverty History. Although progress has been painfully slow, our endeavours have not been without fruit. "The world has awoken" as a result of your efforts, said Kofi Annan. "A flame of hope has been kindled in the poorest countries of the world.... On behalf of the United Nations, I extend my deep gratitude to you all for your indefatigable efforts." The great man continued with doubtless unintentional, but delicious irony: *"Millions of people are indebted to you."* ☺ **One thing's for sure: never before in human history has there been such a widespread and insistent clamour on behalf of the world's poor.**

"Within a few short years there was an abolition committee in every major city and town," says Hochschild. Similarly, we believe that **'abolition of poverty committees'** in every city and town is what **we need, and we have called for the formation of such groups (however small and whatever they call themselves)** in every parliamentary constituency in the land. How wonderful if the North East could be the first to reach this goal! Because of the existing network of Correspondents who supported the regional debt campaign, and the interest stirred by both last year's national MPH campaign and our recent regional gathering in Durham Cathedral, we stand a very good chance of doing so.

Once again, I bring to your attention the words of Richard Curtis, Director of Comic Relief, spoken at the start of 2005, but which I have adapted to our present situation: *"We ask all supporters of Make Poverty History to persevere in this great work, because otherwise the promises we received last year will become dust... nothing further will be achieved, and 30 years from now, our children and grandchildren will say to us, 'You let thirty thousand children die unnecessarily each day on your watch. Shame on you!'"*

Finally, another reminder of that earlier titanic struggle for justice: G. M. Trevelyan described the abolition of slavery as *"One of the turning events in the history of the world"* and, what we're witnessing with the campaign against global poverty just could be the start of another such *'turning event'* in history. If so, how wonderful if our children and grandchildren are able to say to us, "You stood up for the world's children; you played your part. We're proud of you!

Please read the briefing document below **and then let me know, by email or post, if you would like to be involved in representing us in your locality as a 'Correspondent'.**

With every good wish,

David

David Golding

‘Abolition Committees’ in every City and Town!

Being a ‘Correspondent’ for Make Poverty History NE

According to Adam Hochschild, *“If you had stood on a London street corner [in 1787] and insisted that slavery was morally wrong and should be stopped, your listeners would have laughed you off as a crackpot.”* He continued by pointing out that, *“Within a few short years, there was an abolition committee in every major city and town... Public opinion had undergone a sea change.”*

Our campaign is also one against slavery – the slavery of global poverty - and we would like to see ‘**abolition of poverty committees**’ being formed in every parliamentary constituency in the region.

What would such ‘Abolition Committees’ consist of?

Ideally, each committee would consist of at least 3-4 people, who could, if they wished, be ‘*Correspondents*’ - i.e., contact people, representatives – of MPH-NE. Each group would be entirely self-governing, but we hope they will collaborate with us.

Does the committee idea rule out a person acting as a Correspondent on his/her own?

Not at all! We anticipate that many ‘committees’ will be made up of individuals who, for one reason or another, don’t have anyone with whom they can work. If we have more than one Correspondent within any given constituency, we would put them in contact with each other, but whether or how they collaborate would be entirely up to them.

What sort of group/individual would qualify?

Any group having as one of its aims to promote the position of Make Poverty History, as expressed in its manifesto.

What would be their role?

They would do what they could, whether little or much, to raise awareness of global poverty and the need for action to relieve it. In addition, they would:

- Write to their MP 2-3 times each year; **and/or**,
- Go to see to their MP at his/her surgery, or at Westminster, 1-2 times each year; **and/or**,
- Arrange for their MP to attend a meeting of sympathetic people, at which there could be an exchange of views.

What support will be offered to groups?

We will offer briefing papers, suggestions for campaign actions, draft letters, etc, and provide speakers where possible, if requested. But no one **has** to take any notice of our stuff!

What should such groups call themselves?

Anything they choose! They may be local branches of a trade union, represent an inter-church group, be affiliated to WDM, etc. However, if they wish to use the MPH name, they should regard themselves as being part of “Make Poverty History NE” – e.g., “Make Poverty History NE (Sunderland)” - because of copyright. [I can explain in more detail if you insist!]

What about external relationships, with national organisations?

We would encourage each Correspondent to become a committed supporter of one of the aid agencies or national campaigning groups (but, no, we won’t be checking up on you!).

David W. Golding (PhD, DSc)

Spokesperson, Make Poverty History NE

Board member, Jubilee Debt Campaign UK

Voluntary Campaigns promoter for Tearfund