

Bayard Rustin - Biographical Sketch

Bayard Rustin was born on March 17, 1910, in West Chester, Pa. After graduating from West Chester High School, where he was on the championship football and track teams, he traveled extensively, doing odd jobs to earn money for college. In 1931 he entered Wilberforce University and later attended Cheyney State Teachers College, Pa., and the City College of New York, where he earned his tuition by singing with Josh White and Leadbelly.

From 1941 to 1953, Mr. Rustin served as Race Relations Secretary of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. During that period he was also a youth organizer for A. Philip Randolph's March on Washington (1941), and became the first field secretary of the newly formed Congress of Racial Equality (1941). In 1942, he went to California to help protect the property of Japanese-Americans who had been placed in work camps. The following year, Mr. Rustin was imprisoned in Lewisburg Penitentiary as a conscientious objector.

Upon his release in 1945, Mr. Rustin became chairman of the Free India Committee and was frequently arrested for sitting-in at the British Embassy. Three years later, at the invitation of the Congress Party, he made his first of several trips to India, working there for six months.

In 1947, Mr. Rustin participated in the first Freedom Ride - The Journey of Reconciliation designed to test enforcement of the 1946 Irene Morgan case outlawing discrimination in interstate travel. Arrested in North Carolina, he served 30 days on a chain gang. His report of this experience appeared in the New York Post and prompted an investigation which led to the abolition of the chain gang in North Carolina.

In 1951, Mr. Rustin went to West Africa where he worked with Azikewe and Nkrumah. With George Hauser he had organized the Committee to Support South African Resistance, which in 1953 became the American Committee on Africa. Also, during this time, he became Director of Mr. Randolph's Committee Against Discrimination in the Armed Forces which secured President Truman's executive order eliminating segregation in the armed forces.

In 1953, Mr. Rustin became executive secretary of the War Resister's League, a pacifist organization. Two years later he went to Montgomery, Ala., at the invitation of Dr. Martin Luther King to assist in the organization of the bus boycott. The following year, he drew up, at Dr. King's request, the first plans for the founding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. For seven years Mr. Rustin served as special assistant to Dr. King.

Mr. Rustin went to England in 1957 where he helped mobilize the first of the massive Aldermaston peace marches, and in the same year coordinated the 35,000 strong Prayer Pilgrimage to Washington for civil rights. The Youth Marches for Integrated Schools, which he directed, followed in 1958 and 1959.

When, in 1960, Dr. King was indicted on false charges of perjury in connection with his income tax returns, Mr. Rustin was appointed director of his defense committee which succeeded in winning Dr. King's case. The same election year saw him organize Marches on the Democratic and Republic Party conventions, and participate in the Sahara Protest against nuclear testing by the French government. He returned to Africa again in 1962 for the All African People's Conference in Addis Ababa.

Mr. Rustin was Deputy Director of the March on Washington of August 28, 1963. He directed the New York School boycott of February ~~23~~ 1964 -- the largest civil rights demonstration up to that time.

Mr. Rustin has been arrested some 22 times in the struggle for civil rights.

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