

## From Bayard Rustin

8 March 1956  
New York, N.Y.

*Rustin, executive secretary of the New York–based War Resisters League and former Fellowship of Reconciliation activist, had arrived in Montgomery on 21 February to offer his help as an expert on nonviolent direct action.<sup>1</sup> Rustin departed a week later, fearing that controversy over his presence would hurt the movement, but King, E. D. Nixon, and other MIA leaders continued to value his advice. One Alabama journalist alleged that Rustin had misrepresented himself as a correspondent for two European newspapers, Le Figaro and the Manchester Guardian. Rustin clarifies the matter in this letter written the day after he met with King in Birmingham and discussed the appropriate role for outsiders in the movement. According to Rustin's notes from the meeting, King was "very happy to receive outside help." They agreed, however, that any ideas or programs developed by northerners would be directed through King or Nixon, to avoid the appearance of interference by "northern agitators."<sup>2</sup> Rustin asks King to review a draft of an article on the bus boycott, which would be published under King's name. "Our Struggle" appeared in the April issue of Liberation, a new pacifist journal published in New York.<sup>3</sup>*

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1. Bayard Rustin (1912–1987), born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, studied at Wilberforce University, Cheyney State Teachers College, and City College of New York. In 1941, after a stint as an organizer with the Young Communist League, Rustin joined the FOR staff, first as a field secretary and then as race relations director. A devout Quaker, Rustin was sentenced to twenty-eight months in prison in 1942 as a conscientious objector to World War II. He directed the Free India Campaign and led sit-ins at the British Embassy in Washington in 1945. A founder of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), Rustin coordinated the organization's first Freedom Ride (then known as the Journey of Reconciliation) in 1947. In 1953 he resigned from FOR and joined the staff of the War Resisters League as its executive secretary, serving there until 1964. Rustin remained an important advisor to King after the bus boycott and organized the March on Washington in 1963.

2. Rustin, "How Outsiders Can Strengthen the Montgomery Nonviolent Protest," 7 March 1956. His suggestions included encouraging northern pacifists to visit Montgomery for a few days; providing "ghostwriters" for King, who was too busy to write himself; developing sympathetic protests in other parts of the country; and establishing a revolving bail fund for arrested protesters.

3. King, "Our Struggle," April 1956, pp. 236–241 in this volume.

8 Mar      Reverend Martin Luther King  
1956      309 Jackson  
            Montgomery, Alabama

Dear Reverend King:

I called your wife today and told her that I had gotten the matter cleared up with the Manchester Guardian. Actually, they had never offered any reward for my identification. In regard to Le Figaro, we are in process of getting that cleared up. For the record, at no time did I say that I was a correspondent for either of these papers. I did say that I was writing articles which were to be submitted to them and this is now in the process of being done.

Enclosed you will find an article which I should like you to revise and to give permission for being printed under your name in the April issue of Liberation. Also enclosed is a copy of Liberation so that you may know the nature of the magazine. This magazine is being widely distributed to the kind of moral leadership who are intensely interested in non-violence and many important leaders of the church. For this reason I emphasized the moral aspects of the problem. I hope you can see your way clear to give us permission to publish it, to revise it where you wish, and to get it back to me as soon as possible. I am working on a couple of other things for you for wider distribution.

Let me hear from you as soon as possible.

Sincerely yours,

[*signed*]

Bayard Rustin

BR/ms

Encl: cc of article and Liberation