

RUSTIN, BAYARD **(1912-1987)**

American black civil rights leader.

Born in West Chester, Pennsylvania, the illegitimate son of an immigrant from the West Indies, Rustin was reared by a grandfather who worked as a caterer. In the 1930s he joined the Young Communist League, which he regarded as the youth group of the only party then truly dedicated to civil rights. In 1941 he became

race relations director of the Fellowship of Reconciliation, a nondenominational group seeking solutions to world problems through nonviolence. He spent 28 months in prison for refusing military service in World War II. From 1953 to 1955 Rustin was director of the War Resisters League, a pacifist organization, and from 1955 to 1960 he worked with Martin Luther King, Jr. Having organized several earlier mass protests, he achieved his greatest success in the 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. A believer in progress through the labor movement, he served for many years as president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute.

Because of his "gradualist" labor emphasis, as well as his advocacy of black-Jewish harmony and support for Israel, Rustin was labeled conservative by some black radicals. In 1953 he was arrested and briefly imprisoned on a morals charge in Pasadena, California. His homosexuality, which was known to his associates but not to the general public, is believed to have been used by enemies to deny him the position of leadership to which he was rightfully entitled.