

REPORT ON
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

by BAYARD RUSTIN
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AN EXPLANATORY NOTE

ON February 20 the League's Executive Committee learned that a request had been received for Bayard Rustin to go to Montgomery, Alabama, to consult with certain leaders of the bus boycott. A one-day protest demonstration had unexpectedly developed into a major experiment with non-violent resistance and was entering its eleventh week.

Because tension was mounting, and because there is grave danger of violent racial conflict, the Executive Committee felt the League should do all in its power to help strengthen those forces in the Negro community which are exploring non-violence.

Furthermore, the kind of potentially violent conflict we are faced with in the South today is one of the important factors which creates the atmosphere in which international war takes place. The Committee voted unanimously to send Bayard, since he has had considerable experience with non-violent resistance in both the North and South.

A report issued on March 9, by Dr. Homer Jack, who visited Montgomery, indicates the value of Bayard's work. Dr. Jack says: "He seemed especially effective in counseling with the leaders of the protest during the crucial two weeks after the mass arrests for the boycott. His contribution to interpreting the Gandhian approach to the leadership cannot be overestimated."

We are pleased to share the following portions of Bayard's report with members and friends of the League.

ROY FINCH
Chairman, War Resisters League

March 21st, 1956

I. Tension in the South today has been caused by many factors:

a. *A Rapid Industrial Revolution* has disrupted the old social and economic patterns in the South. Intense social confusion has been created. Poor White and poor Negro people, over 50% of whom have become urbanized in the last few years, are faced with making radically new adjustments. In such a time as this, if this were the only factor, a certain amount of tension would be inevitable.

b. *The Supreme Court Decision of May, 1954* is viewed by many white Southerners as federal intervention designed to destroy their way of life. There is a determined effort to frustrate this and any other court decision indicating increased justice for Negroes. In fact, every effort for justice is considered to be related to this major Supreme Court decision.

c. *The New Negro Attitude*: All over the South the Negro has reached the position where he no longer is prepared to accept injustice and indignity. He is determined to have justice now. He has a new sense of dignity and destiny. He is united as never before.

d. *The Emergence of The White Citizens Councils* and the use of propaganda, threats, arson, mass arrests, bombing and murder to obstruct the progress of Negroes at every point—in schools, in transportation and in voting. Economic boycotts against Negroes are increasingly being used.

e. *The Decline of White Liberalism*: In Alabama the white liberals, the white church leadership and the so-called middle-of-the-road race relations groups have literally been immobilized by fear of violence and fear of ostracism. They do not speak out. They do not act. The fields of comment and action have been left to white extremists, on the one hand, and to Negroes who demand justice now, on the other. For example, in Montgomery no white minister except one who has a Negro congregation has spoken out. At the University in Tuscaloosa, the American Association of University Professors has not met nor made a statement on the Autherine Lucy case. In Birmingham the Interracial Council announced that they were neither for nor against integration. The recent remarks by novelist William Faulkner indicate that this decline of white liberalism is not limited to Alabama.

II. The Montgomery Boycott:

a. The leadership in general is exploring the principles and tactics of non-violence. All the leaders are clear that they will have no part in starting violence. There is, however, considerable confusion on the question as to whether violence is justified in retaliation to violence directed against the Negro community. At present there is no careful, non-violent preparation for any such extreme situation.

b. The Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the Montgomery Improvement Association, which is organizing the non-violent protest, is developing a decidedly Gandhi-like view and recognizes there is a tremendous educational job to be done within

the Negro community. He is eagerly learning all that he can about non-violence and evidence indicates that he is emerging as a regional symbol of non-violent resistance in the deep South.

c. Until recently the Montgomery Improvement Association had no constructive program. Now, however, such an educational and work program is underway. Huge prayer meetings and symbols, including slogans, discussions and songs, are designed to keep the movement going. The car pool, substitute transportation for the Negro community, is efficiently operated and utilizes constructively the energies of many scores of the secondary leadership.

d. The leadership, comprising about one hundred Negro men and women, from all classes, is courageous. Many have been arrested and are prepared to go to jail. Their trials began March 19.

e. The Negro community of approximately 45,000 people is almost to the man behind the protest, refuses to use the buses, contributes over \$2,000 weekly to help with the car pool and will not return to the buses until their minimal demands are met. The movement is strong because it is religious as well as political. It has been built upon the most stable institution of the southern Negro community—the Church. There is no evidence of Communist infiltration.

f. The protest is a rank and file movement. No particular person or persons began it. It arose from a very general response to the arrest of a respectable Negro woman who refused to move to the rear of a bus. The community resented her treatment; the community began to act. Later the ministers began to give guidance to a movement which they had created.

III. The Importance of the Montgomery Protest:

a. Through the non-violent action in Montgomery, Negroes, North and South, have come to see that many of the stereotypes they have held about themselves are not necessarily true. The protest has given them a sense of pride and dignity and they now believe,

1. that they can "stick together"
 2. that their leaders do not necessarily "sell out"
 3. that violence, such as the bombing of the leaders' homes, does not necessarily "any longer intimidate"
 4. that their church and ministers "are now militant"
- ... 25 of those arrested are ministers
5. that they have found a new direct-action method that is bound "to spread over the deep South"

b. Montgomery has convinced many southern Negroes that certain elements in the white southern community do not intend to see them make any progress. The Negroes see evidence of this in the fact that their prerequisites for returning to the buses are merely conditions prevailing in other southern cities already. The protest leaders seek

1. courteous treatment on the buses
2. first-come-first-served seating *within the segregation*

pattern while the courts determine the legality of intra-state segregation

3. some Negro drivers on buses serving predominantly Negro areas.

Why, the Negroes ask, are white people unwilling to grant these simple requests? The answer, they believe, is that a line has now been drawn against any final abolition of segregation. This has led the Negro in Montgomery to redouble his effort since his treatment on the buses is a long-standing grievance and has caused Negroes in other areas of the South to believe all is lost unless they vigorously struggle for justice now.

IV. Our Peculiar Role:

Those of us who are interested to see progress toward a peaceful interracial society in the South, and who are convinced that to a considerable degree such a society depends on a non-violent response by the Negro community, have something to do in addition to supporting the Montgomery Improvement Association. More specifically, we must use our resources to strengthen the forces of non-violent resistance in the Montgomery situation. This means, among other things, helping to prepare literature, helping to plan workshops on non-violence in theory and practice, helping to construct functional work programs and raising funds to carry on other programs related to non-violent education.

V. Two Important Considerations:

a. We in the North should bear in mind that the most important thing we can do to help the Montgomery situation is to *press now for total integration in the North*. Montgomery is important if it stimulates us to greater action where we are.

b. Montgomery is also significant because it reveals to a world sick with violence that non-violent resistance has relevance today in the United States against forces that are prepared to use extreme measures to crush it. This is a very real educational factor for all people to utilize who are working for world peace.

NOTE!

There are two things you can do now to help strengthen the non-violent aspects of this important protest action:

1. Communicate your moral support to the Montgomery Improvement Association by writing its president, the Reverend M. L. King, Jr., 309 South Jackson Street, Montgomery, Alabama. Moral support is important.

2. Send contributions to the WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE earmarked for use in relation to Montgomery. The WRL is now doing many things in reference to Montgomery for which funds are urgently needed.