

BIOGRAPHICAL
DICTIONARY
OF THE
AMERICAN
LEFT

EDITED BY
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Mrs. Rose and her husband went to Europe, settling permanently in England in 1870. She died in Brighton in 1892.

SOURCES: *Notable American Women* (1980); Yuri Suhl, *Ernestine Rose and the Battle for Human Rights* (1959).

LILLIAN KIRTZMAN JOHNPOLL

ROSS, CARL (b. 1913). Carl Ross was the leader of Communist Party youth work in the early 1940s and one of the younger national leaders of the Communist Party in the late 1940s and 1950s. He was born on July 22, 1913, in Hancock, Michigan. His father, Edwin Rasi, was an immigrant from Finland, his mother was born of Finnish immigrant parents. Ross grew up in the Finnish (and Finnish Communist) community located within the neighboring cities of Duluth, Minnesota, and Superior, Wisconsin. He graduated from Central High in Superior in 1931.

In 1930–1934 Ross was secretary of the Midwest district of the Labor Sports Union, a largely Finnish and politically radical organization, and he edited the weekly English section of the daily Finnish language and Communist newspaper *Tyomies*. In 1934–1937 he served as secretary of the Young Communist League of Minnesota, participated in the Minneapolis Youth Council and Minnesota and Midwest Youth Congresses, and represented Hotel and Restaurant Workers Local 665 on the Hennepin County (Minneapolis) Farmer-Labor Party Central Committee.

From 1937 to 1943 Ross served in various capacities in the national leadership of the Young Communist League and as editor of *Clarity*. He also served on the National Board of the American Youth Congress. In 1944–1945 Ross was national secretary of the American Youth for Democracy and helped to edit *Spotlight*.

In 1946 he became secretary of the Communist Party of the Minnesota-Dakotas district and supervised extensive Communist activity within Minnesota CIO (Congress of Industrial Organizations) unions and the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party. During the next decade he served on the Communist Party's National Committee and in a variety of important national Party positions. He was also convicted and imprisoned for harboring a Smith Act fugitive in the early 1950s. Ross left the Communist Party in 1957 when it fell into disarray in the wake of Khrushchev's confirmation of the crimes of Stalin's regime and the Russian suppression of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution.

In the 1960s Ross ceased active participation in politics and developed a successful electroplating business in Minneapolis. In the 1970s he retired from business and became an independent scholar in Finnish-American, radical, and labor history. In 1984 he became the executive secretary of the United Fund for Finnish-American Archives.

SOURCE: Oral History Interview, Minnesota Historical Society, St. Paul, Minnesota (1977).

JOHN E. HAYNES

RUBIN, JERRY (b. 1938). Jerry Rubin was one of the most visible and outspoken members of the counterculture during the 1960s. He was a representative of that part of the New Left that abandoned, indeed ridiculed, traditional political activity in favor of cultural politics. Rubin was born on July 14, 1938, into a middle-class Jewish family in Cincinnati. He attended Oberlin College for a short period but eventually graduated from the University of Cincinnati in 1961. After extensive travel abroad, he enrolled in the graduate school of the University of California at Berkeley in 1964.

Rubin was an early leader in the free-speech movement that emerged on the Berkeley campus in the fall of 1964. He was a founder of the Vietnam Day Committee, which held one of the largest of the early teach-ins in the spring of 1965. By 1967, however, Rubin had turned away from traditional political protest to cultural radicalism. In 1967 he was one of the founders of the Youth International Party, the Yippies. Rubin and his fellow Yippies protested against American society through acts of absurdity. Their often colorful garb and behavior, such as wearing outlandish costumes to House Un-American Activities Committee hearings, generated a vast amount of media attention.

Rubin was a participant in the May 1967 disruption of the New York Stock Exchange and a leading figure in the march on the Pentagon that October. At the Chicago Democratic convention in 1968, Rubin and the Yippies staged what they referred to as a festival of life—part of which included the nomination of Mr. Pigasus, a pig, for President. Rubin was charged with conspiracy to incite riot and was one of the defendants in the Chicago Eight trial of 1969. He and four of his co-defendants were convicted of the individual act, not conspiracy, of inciting to riot. He also received a two-and-a-half year sentence for contempt for his actions during the trial. As in the case of the other convicted defendants, his conviction was overturned on appeal. In the 1980s Rubin was working as a stockbroker on Wall Street.

SOURCES: Jerry Rubin, *Do It* (1970) and *Growing Up at Thirty-Seven* (1976).

TOM WILLIAMS

RUSTIN, BAYARD (b.1910). Bayard Rustin has been a lifelong activist on behalf of nonviolence and racial justice, served as principal organizer of the 1963 March on Washington, and as executive director and later president of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, and has worked during the last quarter-century to maintain close ties between organized labor and black political activists.

Rustin was born on March 17, 1910, in West Chester, Pennsylvania, one of twelve children. He was raised largely by his grandparents and was particularly influenced by his grandmother, a member of the Society of Friends and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Rustin graduated from West Chester High School, attended Wilberforce University for one year and Cheney State Teachers College for two, and then traveled around the nation doing odd jobs until the mid-1930s, when he moved to New York.

Impressed by the anti-racist activities of American Communists, Rustin joined the Young Communist League (YCL) in 1936 and two years later began taking courses at the City College of New York, where he also functioned as an organizer for the YCL. Often singing in nightclubs in order to support himself, Rustin continued his YCL activism, concentrating on building black opposition to racism in the U.S. military. In June 1941, revulsed and disillusioned when Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union immediately led the American Communist Party to abandon its prior hostility toward U.S. interventionism and military racism, Rustin left the YCL and became a youth organizer for A. Philip Randolph's (q.v.) March on Washington movement.

When Randolph, to Rustin's dismay, canceled the scheduled July 1 mass pilgrimage following Franklin Roosevelt's signing of an executive order banning federally sponsored racial discrimination, Rustin joined the staff of the Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR), a pacifist group whose core principles fit well with his own. In twelve years with the FOR, Rustin's experiences and activism ranged widely. Beaten by Tennessee policemen in 1942 for refusing to move to the rear of a segregated bus, Rustin the following year refused to submit to any kind of military service on account of his pacifist principles and served two and a half years in federal prison as a result. In April 1947 Rustin was one of the leading participants in the FOR's Journey of Reconciliation, a "freedom ride" precursor designed to test Southern compliance with a Supreme Court decision mandating desegregated seating in interstate transportation. Arrested in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for refusing to leave the "white" section of a bus, Rustin served twenty-two days on a prison camp chain gang after his conviction was upheld on appeal. In 1948 he played a major role in A. Philip Randolph's League for Nonviolent Civil Disobedience Against Military Segregation, set up to pressure President Harry Truman to enforce and expand Roosevelt's earlier anti-discrimination order. Rustin also made a lengthy visit to India to deepen his understanding of Gandhian nonviolence and helped create the Committee to Support South African Resistance, which later became the American Committee on Africa.

In 1953 Rustin left the FOR to become executive secretary of the War Resisters League, and he renewed his close working relationship with Randolph. When the indigenous black boycott of Montgomery, Alabama's segregated city buses seemed to herald a new era of civil rights activism, Randolph and other supportive New Yorkers sent Rustin south to counsel the boycott's leading spokesman, the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr., in early 1956. Along with FOR staffer the Reverend Glenn Smiley, Rustin proved invaluable to King by supplementing his natural commitment to a Christian doctrine of love with broader intellectual expositions of the philosophy and practice of nonviolence as drawn from the writings of Gandhi, Thoreau, and others.

When the Montgomery protest ended with successful legal desegregation of the city's buses, Rustin and two New York colleagues, Stanley D. Levison and Ella J. Baker, took leading roles in helping King build on the Montgomery

achievement by creating the regionwide Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). Although the SCLC was slow to emerge as an influential civil rights force, Rustin remained a close and influential adviser to King until the summer of 1960, when New York Representative Adam Clayton Powell, under political pressure to derail civil rights protests planned for the Democratic and Republican national conventions by Randolph, King, and Rustin, threatened to highlight publicly not only Rustin's draft conviction and past YCL membership but also his homosexuality, including a completely false allegation of an intimate relationship between Rustin and King. While King mulled what to do, Rustin took the initiative and resigned as King's aide so that the convention protests could proceed unhindered.

Three years later, when Randolph decided the time had come for another March on Washington, this one to focus on black joblessness, Rustin again was at his side. Although both civil rights opponents, such as South Carolina Senator Strom Thurmond, and some proponents, such as the NAACP's Roy Wilkins, suggested that some aspects of Rustin's past personal record might embarrass the march effort, Randolph, King, and others stood firmly behind Rustin's appointment as chief march organizer. With a hastily assembled staff and modest budget, Rustin used his superb administrative skills to pull off a smooth-functioning demonstration that drew almost a quarter-million people to the Lincoln Memorial on August 28, 1963. Although Rustin himself hoped to prolong the March on Washington coalition as an umbrella organization for broadening the civil rights movement's agenda from anti-discrimination legislation to more far-reaching social welfare and economic policy reforms, the effort proved unsuccessful. Nevertheless, in several extremely influential and oft-cited articles, Rustin expounded his case that the movement had to broaden its goals and that doing so would require a progression "from protest to politics"—to electoral coalitions where black activists would join with labor, church, and liberal forces to pursue a wide-ranging progressive economic agenda. Though such a perspective struck some as too radical in 1963, by 1966 and the advent of "black power," many movement activists were condemning Rustin's emphasis on biracial electoral efforts as too meek and out-of-date.

Outspokenly critical of "black power," of King's Poor People's Campaign, and of local black activism in the 1968 Ocean Hill-Brownsville, New York, school controversy, Rustin's lifelong record of radical activism looked severely tarnished to many black commentators by the end of the 1960s. Securely ensconced as head of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, founded in 1964 and funded in substantial part by the AFL-CIO, Rustin increasingly was criticized as being more responsive to organized labor's interests than to those of the black underclass. Rustin opposed and publicly condemned the 1983 March on Washington. He became national chairman of Social Democrats USA in 1972.

SOURCES: Bayard Rustin, *Down the Line: The Collected Writings of Bayard Rustin* (1971) and *Strategies for Freedom* (1976); Milton Viorst, *Fire in the Streets: America in the 1960s* (1979).

DAVID J. GARROW