

Speech By Bayard Rustin  
Fourth Annual SNCC Conference  
Washington, D.C.  
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Singing: "Freedom Now."

Introduction: I would like to ask that if anyone has found the pocketbook belonging to Ms. \_\_\_\_\_ from Greenwood, Mississippi would they please turn it over to either Ed Brown, Bill Mahoney, Mike Thelwell or myself. Would Mr. Gottenheimer meet Mr. Zabeney in the basement.

This morning's program and the topic for the first discussion this morning I think really began with the first discussion of this conference. And it was evident at that point that we in the civil rights movement had come to a point where we had to do some new thinking, and some reevaluation in terms of where are we going and what we should be doing next. The topic to be discussed this morning in a sense is designed to throw out some questions and give us some insights into the civil rights movement.

The topic is, "New Perspectives of the Civil Rights Movement," and will be given by Mr. Bayard Rustin who is the executive secretary of the War Resister's League. But more importantly, like I would guess to most of us like Ms. Ella Baker, has been a mentor to most of us who are of the younger generation and who at many times when we are looking for new ways and are looking for new perspectives have to go to those who have experience and who have done some thinking on this. Without any other comment I would now like to introduce Mr. Bayard Rustin.

Bayard Rustin: I am very happy for the opportunity to come here this morning to talk with you. And we have very precious little time, I am going to dash right in. First of all before we can know where we are going I think that it is very important that we know where we are coming from. The civil rights movement is now in extreme crisis. We are in crisis north and south. And while I would be the first person to applaud SNCC, CORE, and the other groups for the extraordinary sacrifice; for the number of people, many of them here, who have been in prison; many of you beaten. We must not permit the sacrifice nor the enthusiasm to obscure the truth.

After hundreds of people have been, faced dogs, cattle prods, and the like there is not one major area in the South where these sacrificies have been made where one can say that there has been a genuine

breakthrough. We expected that by now Birmingham would look very different than it does. But we are in a situation there and in many other places where after all of this trouble and after even intervention on the part of the federal government you have the situation pretty much as it was concretely before.

Now this is equally true in the North. There are more Negro children in the North in segregated schools this year than last. There is more segregated housing in the United States this year than last. And in fact the pattern of ghettoization of Negroes being cramped into a particular area which was the pattern of the North and not the pattern of the South ten or fifteen years ago is now being fastened on almost every industrial city in the South.

We are giving all of our attention to the integration of schools and this in part good. But the fact of the matter is there are to be segregated schools for some long period in many, many areas of this country no matter how hard we try to get rid of it. And therefore we are equally in crisis because in our effort to integrate nobody, but nobody is giving any attention to the abysmal education of the millions of Negroes who are trapped in integrated schools, and who by any stretch of the imagination can in great masses get out of it.

So that everywhere we look there are more Negroes unemployed now than there were last year. And there will be more unemployed next year than this year. The fact of the matter is we have been as it were slowed down, at every point we are in grave difficulty. Why? This is true for many reasons but one of the great and important reasons is that we do not as black people and a handful of white people represent with all of our enthusiasm the political and economic strength to contend with the forces who are against us, who possess a tremendous deal of political and economic strength.

Secondly, we are in this problem because the movement has been broadened to include the fight for freedom on levels, particularly jobs, where you touch great forces, and where the problem becomes economic. If in Montgomery you want to get into a bus there is room in that bus for you. And therefore a limited degree of social dislocation can get you a seat in that bus. Or if you want to be able to eat as you travel there are seats in those restaurants. And if you are thorough going and are prepared to go to prison and make a mountain of dislocation about it, you can be accommodated. But when you touch the problem of jobs you face a totally different job because you

can not be accomodated to that which does not exist.

When you raise the problem of school integration you can not be integrated --in fact my friends-- into the American school system which is not big enough to give the white children in the most, in the best schools a decent education until teachers are paid more money, until billions are utilized for building schools, until the ghettos of the North are torn down and rebuilt from the bottom, we can not get integrated schools. Now you do not get these fundamental things by being enthusiastic merely, nor to be prepared to be struck on the buttocks by a cattle prod, nor being able to throw five hundred people in a given situation in jail.

And I come to what I think therefore is the profound need of the movement. And that is a perspective which is political, historical, and economic. Study, study, read, thinking to see that if you are truly talking about integrated schools and jobs-- but if these things can not be brought about without profound social change, then we must think in terms of not merely mass action, but a political program, the entisement of allies which will make it possible for us to see that in addition to talking about opposition to segregation and discrimination, we are talking more fundamentally about opposition to many of the assumptions held in the society and the institutions which are constructed on those assumptions (applause).

That is to say that we have to have a political program, an economic program. For politics and economics are essentially the same thing. They reflect one another. And they must be seen together. Now we get the Harris poll. Despite the fact that we are in this condition-- and the Harris poll essentially says that white people north and south are getting tired of our struggle. They feel that we are moving too fast. None of them quite say that they are not in favor of it really, but that it is tiresome, it is wearisome. They wish we would get lost.

Now we have no intention of getting lost. But neither do we have any intention of not being clever about what that problem is. And here again although I know some of you will disagree with me, I would like to explain what I think the Harris poll is in fact. You get Montgomery and then there is a lull. People say, "Oh, thank God we are so tired of this kind of conflict." But they don't lull very long because then you get the sit-in movement. Then there is a lull. But not for very long, because then you have the Freedom Rides. Now all during these early struggles the masses

of white people were responding to a principle of social change.

And that principle is that those in the oppressing class never really believed that the oppressed mean it. They can not believe it. But they don't mind believing that you would like on this occasion to sit on the bus, or on that occasion to sit in a restaurant. But when Birmingham comes and some of those things that you people have been doing in Mississippi in which you say to the nation, "Look we want a package deal." What is a package deal. A package deal says we want total freedom, we want it now in every area in life, we call on everybody to put himself into it with direct action. Not urging that person to urge somebody else, but to do it himself.

You run right smack into the fact that the American people through the Harris poll, the Harris poll indicates that they are now negative but tomorrow can come out more positively precisely because they are finally, finally, the white American is making its peace with the fact that we mean it. He knows that it is now for real, and when it is for real, his first reaction is to be frightened and to back off and to say go slow. You help him precisely because you do the opposite. Because unless you do the opposite, he can never come through the psychological circle which is required of him.

But my friends it is precisely in such periods that one has to be clever, genuinely clever. And I shall in a moment propose a pilgrimage for the SNCC Conference. And when I propose it remember that I shall be addressing myself in part to the Harris poll. But I want to propose the pilgrimage a little later. Now this situation of the Harris poll and the situation in the North and the South as I have described it suggests to me a totally new role now for the white student, the white radical, and the white liberal, who truly wants to be significant in the civil rights movement. I do not here by suggest that there are not certain white people with great talents who may not leave home to do a particular job, but the great majority of white students and others who are interested in this cause to my mind should be working on the following projects.

First of all, they should stay home and convince by working as hard as any black SNCC worker works in Mississippi to get the current Civil Rights Bill passed, and to get white people wherever they are to support it. Because with all of its limitations the principle must be established that the rights which we hold, are held under national law. Secondly, I am

convinced that in the South one of the reasons that we have not had a breakthrough in a place like Birmingham and the others, is that we do not have the economic and political strength to get it. Therefore you ask the question what else is needed?

Now let us take Danville, Virginia. Danville, Virginia is an ideal town for every civil rights movement in the country to get into now. Why? Because the city of Danville exists on a particular industry, Dan River Mills. Now to get a breakthrough in one of these cities requires not only sacrifice and cattleprodders and dogs being resisited there, but great economic pressure from all over the country on that power structure. And if we are clever enough to do that in one place, the next city that is open to this kind of pressure will already behave differently. And therefore I think that the white youngsters should work in their communities, set up groups in their communities, work in the schools and clubs of their communities to back up by economic boycott the cities in the South where there is an effort to make a breakthrough . And this is something that white middle class people can do because we have to depend on the trade unionists and the white middle class to carry out the boycott. Negroes will never do it themselves.

Thirdly, I think it is very encouraging that the white youngsters understand that with automation there is no way for the civil rights groups to get work for Negroes. And therefore what is needed is a broad political program that will insure work for everybody. Does this mean again, getting as much help from as many places as it possible to get it from? Now you have more white people unemployed than Negroes. While percentage wise our unemployment is much higher, when you count heads there are many, many more white people unemployed. And they lie in their poverty without a peep. I would like to see some white people not put on jeans and go to Mississippi which is for them a very simple job with all the glamour of being deeply associated with the Negro's \_\_\_\_\_.

I challenge them to something less glamorous and more real. To go into these ghettoes of the North, into West Virginia, into Kentucky, and identify yourselves, live on twenty dollars a week like SNCC workers do, get to know those people, and get the white unemployed to join us in the struggle (applause). Because my friends when the day comes that the white unemployed of this nation adopt the spirit of the civil rights movement and adopt its tactic of dislocation and mass action we are on our way to

revolution in this country on the most fundamental ... (applause).

Fourth, I think we need to stop this foolishness of damning trade unions and acting as if Lenin and the building trades represents a whole trade union movement. It does not (applause). And furthermore I do not care how devilish the trade union movement is. One has to look on it in the way that one looks on the devilment of one's wife or cousin (laughter). It is a part of our family, we can not get along with out it, this conference was in part paid for by it. But that is only the beginning.

It is important for us to understand that what a pity-- I wish Jack Conway last night had not given the first third of his speech about Kennedy. Not that I disagreed with it. But because having heard that you failed to listen to the two thirds. It was one of the most remarkable speeches calling for a new development of political parties in this country, calling for the total support of the civil rights movement. By money, no. By applauding, no. But by the trade union movement facing the fundamental factors which must be faced if we are to have freedom. And we failed to understand and really to discuss that tremendous speech that he made. My proposal, therefore, is that a number of you, black and white, need to seek out responsible places in the trade union movement or to challenge the trade union movement wherever you are by organizing workers into tiny little unions of ten people, whatever you can get. But to get men organized to demand their rights and to support the trade union movement's effort to revitalize itself.

I just want to say a few words here my friends. The two most important factors that made this revolt possible, that made SNCC possible, that made SCLC possible, that made for profit with the NAACP, were first of all the New Deal which gave Negroes a new basis economically. The Wagner Act which made it possible for people to organize. And regardless of the difficulties they have made for us, the reason people were able to start revolting-- you can never revolt when you are completely down-- was that the trade union movement had organized Negroes to give us enough economic power to start revolting. Let us not forget that. That a contribution was made. They are not doing enough. It is up to us to get them to do more.

Now, I want next to go into some political analysis. I think there has been too much foolish talk at this conference about President Kennedy's death and about Mr. Johnson. I don't intend to go into, you know, into a lot of foolishness. I would like to talk

about the political implications of the president's death. I think that the chief political result of the president's death is that the right in this country will utilize his death to discredit the Left, to discredit people who are progressive, who want social change. I think this is the meaning of Mr. Eastland now being given the right to have an investigation of it. Mr. Eastland's investigation of Oswald is going to be an anti-communist, anti-Negro, anti everything he can drag in including the kitchen sink to discredit anyone who wants to see change made in this country.

The trial of Mr. Ruby will be used to take things as far to the left, to the right, as they can take it. The best that can come out of this for us is this. That people will say it was an extremist that did it and therefore we are against all extremes whether on the democratic left or the totalitarian right. Let us do away with extremists. Now it is in this connection my friends that I think to gain we have to be clever. I would like therefore to see you people before you leave Washington, consider what many of you will not want to hear, but if you will listen to me I think you will see that it is important.

A pilgrimage to Arlington to the man who although may not have done all we wanted, was the one man who was president in the past 180 years who ever spoke out unequivocally saying that Negroes morally have the right to freedom, that this is a moral question. Now Kennedy will not hear you, any more than he can smell those flowers. But you will be putting yourselves in a strong position regarding the Harris poll and the public in general which somehow according to the Washington Post and Life magazine has come up with the idea that SNCC is extremist. You be clever enough to cut that out by what you do. Not that that is your work, but that you must create an atmosphere in which you truly can work.

I would like to say a few things about Mr. Johnson. Mr. Johnson knows as well as I know that he has no mandate from the American people. He knows even more where President Kennedy had the Negro vote pretty much in his pocket, the labor vote pretty much in his pocket, and the progressive liberal vote in his pocket. Mr. Johnson knows that if he wants to become president in '64 he has got to prove it. That is the reason he spoke of civil rights three times in his first address. Good words, beautifully spoken. That is the reason he called Mr. Wilkins the other day to the White House. That is the reason he tried to get a hold of John Lewis three days, and Jim Forman, and Whitney Young three days after he was made president.

Now what is the meaning of this for us. Next he is a southerner. But if there is anybody who thinks that simply because a man is a southerner that he necessarily is damned as far as we are concerned, remember Hugo Black, whom you will not remember. I will tell you. When Mr. Hugo Black was appointed to the Supreme Court almost every Negro organization in this country opposed him. He turned out happily to be perhaps the most progressive man in the Supreme Court. So let us not have a prejudice on that. I am thoroughly convinced that it will be easier for Johnson to control the South than Kennedy, and not really because Johnson gives them everything that they want. But because Johnson represents a number of things they want.

He is the first man to be president from the South in over a hundred years. But he can also maneuver by giving the South some of the economic things that it wants. And to tell them take their post offices, new roads, and other things and use them as they will, put them where they will. But that he has no choice but to go along vigorously. Now perhaps he won't. But we should take the view that we will help him. As good Americans we will help him. As good SNCC people we will help him. Just as we helped Kennedy. But to help Mr. Johnson means to create the atmosphere in which he is pushed so hard that we push him harder than they can. You do not help him by sitting on your fannies, but by getting into the streets in greater numbers, creating more dislocation, and being more clever about tactics (applause). That is to say that instead of doing what we have done before which is to say to talk about the necessity for mass action, we add something to that-- mass action plus a political program. The first step of which is a civil rights bill by Christmas.

Now at this point I would like to say a few words about Mr. Louie Lomax, not because I want to attack Mr. Lomax but because I want you to see something. Mr. Louie Lomax is a man who said the other day he should call off demonstrations in honor of President Kennedy for six months or something of the like. Mr. Lomax is also the man when President Kennedy was running for office wrote a couple of articles in Harper's magazine in which he essentially said that, you know, that Mr. Kennedy is in the forefront of the fight, that he is doing more than certain Negro leaders for the fight, and some of us should stop griping, that the man is overburdened and all of this.

Now the only reason that I want to mention Mr. Louie Lomax is that I have heard so much talk about white



liberals among SNCC people in the last three days. I just brought in Mr. Lomax to remind you that Negro liberals still exist and have to be dealt with (applause).

Now there has been a great deal of talk about automation and I do not want to go through an analysis of automation again, you have had that up to here. What I want to point out my friends is that the business of training is for the birds. Now you think I mean by this that I don't want Negroes trained? No. That I don't want white youth trained? No. But the fact is nobody knows what they are to be trained for. What are you going to train these people for? Are you aware that every freshman who enters high school this year to become a typist or a bookkeeper or a stenographer, three years from now in his junior year in high school according to the best figures he will be unemployable because there is just not going to be any need for bookkeepers, and typists, and stenographers. I know a man who works for Bell Telephone. He told me that they have gotten rid in the last three months of 8,000 bookkeepers. He said that we now have three machines that do it, and they said they don't make half as many mistakes, they don't get tired, they aren't temperamental, they do represent personnel problems. And he said this with great enthusiasm (applause).

Now what are you going to train a 45 year old Negro with four families (laughter) who lives in Mississippi, with four children pardon me (more laughter). One does not need to tell it all always (laughter). With four children, what are you going to train him for? I ask this question very seriously. What do you train him for? Well, let's say that we train him to be any five or six things if he could learn to be. Only to find that at the end of the training period oh now we must train him for something else because the machines have already taken that over.

I am not trying to be facetious my friends, I am trying to point out something which I think is profound. That until there is a planned economy, until automation is controlled by government so that you know what you are going to automate and when and how far you are going to go, there is no possibility of training anybody (applause). And this points out why we need a political program. Because to train these people in a vacuum, but not to be working for a new definition of what work is, not to understand that some people must be paid under a new definition of work even if they do not work the way we define work

today. They are humans and they must be provided for.

You talk about this problem. Do you know I had come to my office in New York City the other day a young man, 18, looking for me to help him get some work where he would not have to report that he was working. So this sounds strange I dig into it. It turns out that he comes from a family of seven in New York. His mother is on relief-- this is not Mississippi, New York-- his mother is on relief, she gets close to \$500 a month to support those eight people. But if he goes downtown to get a \$50 a week job they cut his mother off relief and the family has to live off of \$200. Are Negro boys going to go out and rob their families of \$300 of relief money for the lousy jobs that they can get?

You have no idea in Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Pittsburg the number of black men who purposely move out on their families because they can not support them on \$35, \$40, \$50 a week working as orderlies in hospitals. And it is because they leave home, because they desert their families that the \$500, \$400 which they must have to live on can come in from relief. And they sneak in every other night or so to kiss the children or go to bed with their wife and slip out before dawn.

This must be planned. And we have to have a political program, know where we are going, fight for it, and not to think that it can merely be fought for in the streets, but that ultimately Congress must act, the decision must be made, and for this we need a political arm (applause). I therefore propose that the time has come when SNCC should have a lobbyist in Washington (applause). By which I mean two or three bright people. And I would propose here an interracial team who can by their presence there, indicate to this government that the young radicals are not just people in overalls doing a magnificent job there, but that they know that what they are doing there must be ultimately be related to what happens in the Capitol and the White House. Without this we are lost.

Now I want to say a word here my friends about this compensatory business and preferential business. Anybody who reads the Harris poll and anybody who knows anything about winning allies, automatically knows that the terms compensation and preferential do not get us anywhere. Mr. Randolph and I spent two years building up in New York City a unity committee including every type of Puerto Rican organization. And brother if you know Negro organizations you don't know Puerto Rican organizations yet. There is one for every five Puerto Ricans in New York (laughter). They are

like Negro churches. They just abound in glory (laughter).

Now Mr. Randolph and I spent a couple of years building up this committee in New York and it is finished overnight because a group comes out in New York City on a sit down project calling for 25% of the jobs for Negroes. And the Puerto Ricans said to hell with this. Who do they think they are? We need jobs too. Now the Puerto Ricans were a little confused, some of them won't join the work, some of them don't consider --as black as I am-- don't consider themselves Negroes, or they think they are white, they don't want to be associated with us, double jeopardy, and all of that.

I don't care about that. They are unemployed, they are our brothers, and what I would like us to say which I think will appeal to millions of Americans is that we want a Marshall plan, yes. But we want it for those in a particular economic category, whether they are black, white, puerto rican, mexican-american, japanese-american, whatever they are. We want preferential treatment for them because they are poor and not because they are black. And I think the psychology of this we must get in our minds. And I want you to know that I for one am very much against talking about preferential and compensatory unless it is to compensate all in a given economic bracket. And my friends you don't lose anything because it is not as if we are all up there, we are all down there in that bracket. And you have the psychology of people knowing that we have compassion for those who are mistreated, who are the dispossessed, and for the poor. And not merely for ourselves.

I would like to close friends by saying a few things about strategy. Tactics and strategy. The tactic one uses has to be for a given moment. There is nothing sacred about a tactic. If sitting down is commensurate with getting something, you sit down. If marching is commensurate with getting something, you march. If the time comes that march is not effective, don't march. If the time comes to sit down and it is not going to be effective, don't sit down. The movement must resist like the plague any rehearsed responses. We have to be agile and open.

And that means that in this period where you have the Harris poll, where you have the confusion in Washington, and where my friends you are going into the 1964 elections, let me analyze for a moment something that it is very important to see. One of the biggest problems we are going to face in '64 is not Eastland, but the manner in which Negroes who are

overly committed to one political party as against another, will attempt to slow down the movement until after the election and there man is in. Resist it. You will remember in 1960 when Dr. King and Mr. Randolph were having marches on the political conventions, that Adam Powell made the brutal attack on me. And do you know what his attack was? That Mr. Randolph and Dr. King were under the influence of a man who had an ideology other than that which is American. What the hell does that mean (laughter)?

It means that I was a communist. He thought-- he telephoned Dr. King in Brazil and thought that Dr. King was going to call off the march on the Democratic convention. Neither Mr. King nor Mr. Randolph stopped. But in '64 this is going to be a hot contest. And my advise to you is to watch out first of all for the Negroes who will try to slow down and undermine the effort on the basis that it is doing it for good reasons, because if you can only get this particular man in whom they like than everything will be all right. Resist it.

What we also need to resist my friends-- to know-- is that in this period which I think is going to be an effort to discredit everything that is progressive there is every reason for us to heighten the nonviolent nature of the struggle. I am not saying this because I happen to be a pacifist, because I have never recommended to the Negro people pacifism. Because I know that they are not going to buy it. I would recommend strategic nonviolence, and I doubly recommend it now because in this period we are going to need to speak more gently precisely because we have to act more militantly.

We are going to have to be more considerate precisely because our job is to build an even higher mountain of social dislocation and mass action. We are going to have to be more gentle and more gentle in our tone and our attitude, precisely because in this tough period we are going to have to fight harder and harder and harder. I recommend these few ideas to you in the hope that they will helpful in our freedom (applause).