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21 Faculty Place
Wilmington, Ohio 45177
October 24, 1987

Ruth Benn, Editor
THE NONVIOLENT ACTIVIST
339 Lafayette Street
New York, New York 10012

Dear Ruth,

Thanks for the forwarded card (strange request?) and other material. I've enclosed a letter about Bayard. There is so much I could write about him. I should at least jot down in rough my memories--how he organized the whole prison population (including the JW's) to commit CD against racial segregation in the dining room and how the prison officials put him in solitary the night before the CD claiming he had been caught in a homosexual act. I startled the guards by running into the punishment area of the prison and asking Bayard if it were true. When he said "no" I assumed (and still believe) he was telling the truth and the officials used his homosexuality to break up the action. A few of us went on strike and never did work again in that prison. Eventually Bayard joined us. There someone sent him a mandolin which he wanted to learn to play. His constant practicing sent us up the wall. Finally we made a rule that he could only practice an hour or two a day. I also recall that the prison made some awful slop they called apple pan dowdy - which no one but Bayard would eat and eat it he did - we all passed our trays down to his cell when it was included.

Bayard also had his arrogant side. He once told me that some people needed degrees (me, for instance) while others like him did not. A favorite phrase was "go to the dictionary, I've been there." Then there were a few times when the magic of his nonviolence failed. One time a racist southern politician from Kentucky got so angry he broke a mpp handle over Bayard's head. Bayard did not lose his cool but commented that his skull was too tough to break - or something like that. What a guy! It was a sad day when he decided to leave the peace movement for consensus politics but he still had a lot of the nonviolence in him. A year or so ago he was arrested supporting the striking workers at Yale.

Now for your questions concerning possible articles. I would be interested in Americans not learning or not knowing their history but I'm not sure what you had in mind--concerning war?, concerning radical and reform movements? or did you mean the Peace Movement and its past? All of these interest me. For example I'm intrigued with the constant moaning about our being a white middle-class movement. Would you believe that even the abolitionists had the same problem? Of course some of the antislavery groups actually excluded blacks but when blacks did become involved they often worked on their own rather than in collaboration with the white organizations. Not always though - it's complicated like so much in history and life.

Keep up the Good Work and keep in touch. Best Wishes,

21 Faculty Place
Wilmington, OH 45177
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To the Activist:

Many of us who felt out of touch with Bayard Rustin and his political views after he left the peace movement, nevertheless feel a deep personal loss at his death. We must never forget the tremendous contributions he made to the nonviolent movement for peace and justice. His imaginative actions and keen mind were an inspiration to those of us who resisted World War II.

I'll always remember what Bayard did when I left Lewisburg prison after serving my entire three-year sentence for refusing to register. Having served all my time, I demanded the right to go where I chose, but prison officials insisted that I return to the place I had been living before imprisonment. The issue led to my being literally carried out of the segregation section of the prison against my will. Bayard placed himself on the floor, forcing the guards to walk over him as they carried me out of the cell block. That is the kind of loyal support one never forgets.

On another occasion, before Bayard went to prison, he found himself on a train with some German prisoners of war. An American soldier went up to one of the prisoners and slapped his face. Shortly after, Bayard stood in the door of the car carrying the Germans and sang a German song, Schubert I believe. Such action was typical in those days of Bayard's intuitive sense of the spirit of nonviolence.

Sincerely,



Larry Gara