

Negroes

(1970 folder)

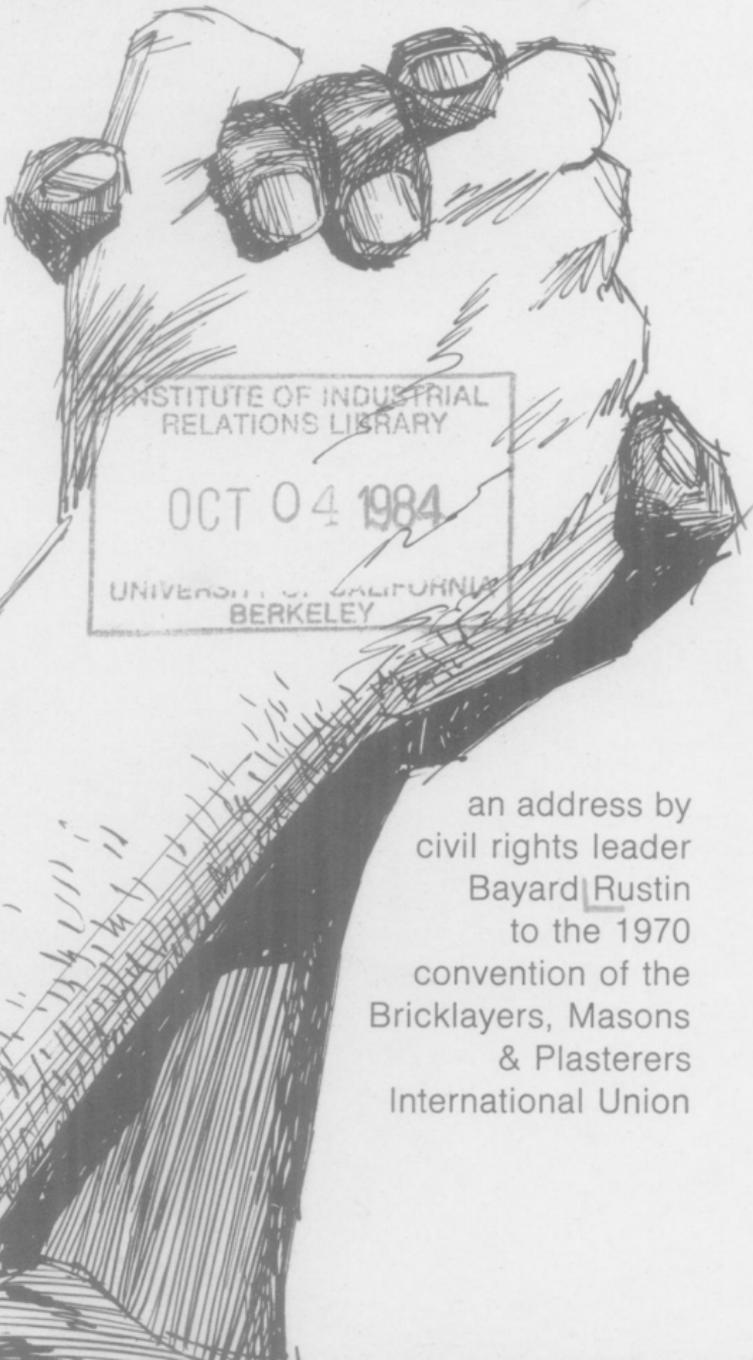
# BLACK

# RAGE

# WHITEN

# FEAR.

the full employment answer.



an address by  
civil rights leader  
Bayard Rustin  
to the 1970  
convention of the  
Bricklayers, Masons  
& Plasterers  
International Union

*On August 31, 1970, at its biennial convention in Washington, D.C., the Bricklayers, Masons & Plasterers International Union bestowed its first Thomas Jefferson Award for Architecture, with an accompanying \$5,000 prize, on Ulrich Franzen, FAIA. Mr. Franzen decided to donate the \$5,000 prize to aid minority youths in building trade apprentice training programs. The Executive Board of the BM&PIU suggested that the executive secretary of the A. Philip Randolph Institute, Civil Rights Leader Bayard Rustin, be invited to attend the convention and accept the donation for use in the Institute's "Outreach" program. Following Mr. Franzen's address to the convention, Mr. Rustin accepted the donation and then spoke to the convention delegates and guests. This booklet contains the text of Mr. Rustin's address.*

**Mr.** Chairman, brothers and sisters,  
Mr. Franzen:

I want to thank you very much for making this contribution to the A. Philip Randolph Institute. I think you have shown great wisdom, if I may say so, because, whether we like it or not, the building trades represent to many people in the black community, rightly or wrongly, a problem for the labor movement.

Many of us are convinced there are groups in the trade union movement that are more discriminatory than the building trades. There are groups which are more difficult in many respects. However, the average person believes that there is something very wrong in the building trades. And the A. Philip Randolph Institute is dedicated, first of all, to telling the truth about the building trades (Applause) and, secondly, to doing with the building trades what we try to do with everybody else—help them get over their problem as we would want them to help us to get over ours, which they do.

## “Outreach” Programs

The building trades have been extremely helpful in our “Outreach” programs.\* We are

\*“Outreach” programs work in cooperation with the labor unions and apprenticeship committees. They seek out and inform young minority group members of opportunities in these trades, and provide them with trade placement analysis, orientation courses, work motivation, assistance in preparing for apprentice entrance tests, and counsel and guidance during the training period. Such programs were pioneered by the A. Philip Randolph Institute beginning in 1963. The Institute also helps train counselors for “Outreach” programs throughout the country. The success of these programs is one of the principal reasons why the number of non-whites in building trades apprentice training has grown from less than three per cent in 1960 to almost nine per cent in 1969.

now in 21 cities across the United States. We spend over two million dollars a year upgrading black young men and Puerto Rican young men into the building trades. Some will be delighted to know that one of the chief reasons we are able to make this progress, when other people merely stand and scream, is because we look upon the building trades as our brothers cooperating to deal with a common problem. (Applause)

Our Society has a very serious problem because too many people are substituting one thing for another. If you are hungry, it does no good to pick up a phony issue. You can debate crime in the streets until you are blue in the face, but it will not get you a job. If you are living in poverty, you can debate student disorder until you are green in the face, but it will not build a house or provide you with decent food to eat.

## Labels and Analysis

We are in trouble because of irrationality, unreason, and extremism in the minds of the average citizen of the United States. The average person is actually making several substitutions.

Instead of analyzing problems, for example, he substitutes labels for analysis. In the black community, if I get up to talk and explain what is happening in the labor movement, somebody will not say to me, "Now, Mr. Rustin, tell us about this problem, about this and about that. What are the facts?" If they don't like what I am saying, they will simply call me an Uncle Tom. That is supposed to stop all debate.

The substitution of labels also applies to what the average person thinks Mr. Agnew is really doing. People will just say he is a great guy or they say he is a bastard (Laughter), none of which explains poor Mr. Agnew (Laughter) who happens to be a political person who is attempting to win the South for Mr. Nixon. Therefore, Mr. Agnew

is neither a bastard nor a genius. He is a hard-working individual trying to get the South into the Republican Party. (Laughter)

He is also saying those things which he thinks confused working class people want to hear in order to win their allegiance for Nixon. Thus, while Nixon forces the working classes of this country to suffer so that he can eliminate inflation, Mr. Agnew diverts their attention from unemployment and other economic problems to black people, to rioting in the streets, and to students.

## Strengthening Unions

I do not mean to say that rioting in the streets and student misbehavior and whatever else you have are not problems which must be dealt with. They are very serious problems, but we must not permit Mr. Agnew's slogans to divert us from the simple fact that so long as there is poverty and racism, and so long as there is no response to the democratic process for young people, then they will all misbehave.

We all come to the conclusion, therefore, that it is by extending democracy, it is by redistributing the wealth, something the trade union movement has been dedicated to from its beginning, it is by strengthening trade unionism, that we stop rioting in the streets and student misbehavior. We do not stop them by diverting our attention to Agnewism. (Applause)

## Life Style and Politics

Now, the second problem we face, and we all engage in it to a certain extent, is the substitution of life style for politics. Do your own thing, we say. To hell with doing your thing. Get on the picket line or into the voting booth. Those are the only two places where you can do your thing to improve society.

How I feel in doing my thing doesn't affect the society in the least. Everybody, you know, wants to think that you solve some social problems with style. The great debate as to whether dress lengths will be mini or maxi or somewhere in between may be interesting, but that is not going to build a house or educate a youngster.

The third problem we face is the substitution of emotional satisfaction for program. I will start with the black community first just to show you I am not prejudiced. (Laughter)

All kinds of black youngsters, when I go around the country today, say, "Well, you know, we like Huey Newton and Rap Brown because they make us feel good." What does that mean? It means that when they hear someone calling white people blue-eyed devils, they feel good.

Now, I don't care whether you call white people blue-eyed devils or not. Most that I know are not. Some are. But that's besides the point. The point is that giving white people hell may give some poor soul emotional satisfaction, but it doesn't get him a job or build a house, and these are the things I am interested in.

Many young Negroes today want to run around talking about how they wear their hair, and whether they eat soul food, and whether they have black studies. All of this may be very interesting, but the fact of the matter is that if you want a house that is decent to live in it is not really related to how high you grow your wig. (Laughter) It is not really related to whether you eat soul food and chitlins and pigs feet. But it is related to the social program of the trade union movement.

I don't care if the Irish want to go on eating corned beef and cabbage. That's their business. But don't let any Irishman think that that's the way social progress is going

to be made for the poor Irish. It won't work.  
(Laughter)

The young people today misbehave and then their parents, being profoundly ashamed of them but not knowing what to do about it, proclaim that their children's behavior—The drugs and the disorders—is “revolutionary.” These are sick parents. They don't know what else to do. So they substitute illusion, which gives them internal satisfaction, for the fact that their children are in deep trouble.

## Emotion and Program

Now, in this period where people are substituting labels for analysis, life style for politics, and emotion for program, two terrible things have to happen that we had better be aware of.

Number one, black people become enraged, and white people become fearful. Blacks are enraged because the society has become more affluent, but for the most part they remain poor. Millions of them live in indecent houses, have no jobs, and send their children to inferior segregated schools. So they are enraged against white people.

But the white people who look so well off are not as well off as people in the ghettos think they are. The blue-collar worker today is in grave difficulty. Oh, sure, if you live in a ghetto and look over there and see he has got two cars, that looks great. But what you and I know is that neither of them is paid for. (Laughter)

The blue-collar worker is the only man who really has to work hard to send his kids to school. If you are very poor, you get a scholarship, and if you are rich, you go to the bank to get the money. If you are a blue-collar man, you have to save to educate your kids. Inflation hits you the hardest. The blue-collar worker has a radio for himself and one for his kids. But they are also not paid for.

He is, therefore, economically insecure, and he is increasingly fearful when he is told that the blacks are going to take his house, the blacks will take his job, the blacks are being educated at his expense. He feels that the more they misbehave, the more crime there is, the better they are treated, while he, an upstanding citizen, must behave himself and also sacrifice for their welfare.

Now, my friends, anything which attempts to deal with black rage at the expense of white fear will not work, and anything which attempts to deal with white fear at the expense of black rage will not work. We will not be able to have any peace in our society unless whatever is done reduces black rage and white fear at the same time. (Applause)

Now, when we look around for a solution, we discover that the architects do not have the answer—pardon me, Mr. Franzen (Laughter)—that the Women's Liberation does not have the answer, we discover that no university has the answer, and we discover that no civil rights group has the answer.

## Full Employment Is the Answer

The fact is that if you are going to deal simultaneously with black rage and white fear, the only group in the nation which has the answer is the organized trade union movement because it says: "There must be full employment for all who want to work." If there was full employment, blacks would not be in a rage because they do not have jobs, and whites would not be fearful that they will lose theirs. (Applause)

If there were homes being built for all the whites and all the blacks who need them, blacks need not be enraged because they do not have them and whites need not fear that the values of their properties are going to drop as blacks come in and buy them up cheaply. This is actually not the case, but they think it is.

The labor movement is the only group in this country of any size calling for the free education of all children. Who would not have wanted to give Einstein a free education?

And how many Einsteins are in these Italian, Irish, Jewish and black and Puerto Rican ghettos, and how many of your poor children or grandchildren may not get an education because they will not have the money? Who knows but that one of them would make an even greater contribution than Einstein?

### Coalition for a Solution

Now, my friends, in the face of this need, there is only one way to bring a solution about and that is by forming a coalition of forces including the trade union movement, the minority groups, and the liberals.

Everything important that has happened since the time of Franklin Delano Roosevelt happened when the minority groups, the trade union movement and the liberals stood together. And every time we have had a failure is when that coalition has been broken.

Now, George Meany is a very bright man and when Judge Carswell was being considered for the Supreme Court, the newspapermen came to George Meany and said: "We would like to know what you think of Carswell's record in labor?"

And Meany said, "The poor man has been so inactive we can't even find a record in labor." (Laughter) Then George Meany hit the jackpot. He said, "But I can tell you one thing, my experience is that any man who is anti-black is also anti-labor and that is the reason we are opposed to him." (Applause)

Now, my friends, an alliance between blacks and trade unions is not like a marriage. A marriage is based on affection, or at least it should be. (Laughter)

## Mutual Interest

A political alliance is not based on affection and anybody who thinks otherwise is in for a rude awakening. It is based on mutual interest. I need you, you need me, and if we don't stick close to each other that other fellow who hates us both is going to get us. (Laughter and Applause)

In every state in this union where they have attempted to create a right-to-work law, the trade union movement alone was incapable of blocking that law. It had to turn to the civil rights movement and the two of them together blocked the legislation. (Applause)

At the same time, were it not for the AFL-CIO Civil Rights Department, were it not for the AFL-CIO lobbyists in Washington, there would not have been, under Johnson or Kennedy, a single civil rights act passed. We were not strong enough to do it alone. We had but one little guy, Clarence Mitchell, up on the Hill. The trade union movement had 50 lobbyists backing him up. Now, that is what I call an alliance based on mutual need. We need one another.

## Economics: The Bedrock

Now, Mr. Nixon is trying to break that alliance by attempting to bring into the Republican Party Southerners and blue-collar workers, But you know, I don't think that working class men, black or white, are going to fall for Nixon, precisely because you and I know that there is something more important than whether blacks and whites like each other, and that is economics. That is the bedrock of our alliance.

The Kerner Commission Report gives the impression that the real problem is racism, but this is not true. If the real problem is racism, don't build houses or create jobs, go to psychiatrists. (Laughter)

If the real problem is racism, what I ought to do, if I am white, is go to the priest and

say, "Mea culpa," until I am pure. This has very little to do with jobs.

Baby don't trust anybody who tells you that the basis for social change is something you don't pay for. You don't have to pay a thing to get rid of your racism. You just have to be nice.

I would prefer that people hold onto a little bit of their racism but be prepared to spend money for houses, schools, jobs and the other things we need. Only after we have these things do I want to purify them. (Laughter)

It is not only Nixon who is trying to break up this alliance. We have all kinds of young people in the black communities screaming, "We need to separate. We need to go back to Africa. We need to get rid of this and that."

Even CORE, which used to have good sense when I was a member of it, (Laughter) now talks like this. They want separate school districts for blacks and they even went down South to meet with all of the Southern Governors, including Lester Maddox, to try to set up segregated schools. CORE has become more dangerous than Maddox because Maddox doesn't fool anybody. But CORE misleads people.

Then we have many blacks who say, "The trade union movement is our greatest enemy." We have two million blacks in the trade union movement. If you compare their salaries to those of blacks not in the trade union movement, you can see what a vast difference it is.

And there are liberals who say that labor has grown conservative, when the fact of the matter is, they don't know one thing about the American trade union movement.

You also have whites who are screaming about crime in the streets. They say that Negroes have gotten out of hand and want too much.

## Standing Together

We must root out that kind of talk and be prepared to stand together. For better or for worse, black people and white working people need each other and must stay together.

This ought not be too hard for us to do. It ought to be very easy for you to see the real desires and ambitions of Negroes and not to let some vocal but misguided fools in the black community mislead you.

I do not let white fools mislead me. I know we need the trade union movement, no matter how much these fools try to show me that the leaders of the trade union movement are my enemies.

Furthermore, my friends, do you realize that for over a hundred years the black community has had to put up with the Ku Klux Klan and the white citizens council? Now, if we have done that for a hundred years, don't you think you can stand Stokely Carmichael and Rap Brown for fifteen minutes? (Laughter and Applause)

The key to our problem is the 1970 elections. In November we may well set the tone for what this nation is to be for decades. One great question before America today is whether the liberal coalition will unite to elect forward-looking men to Congress, men who will override Nixon's inevitable vetoes. Only by retaining some political control over this nation so that eventually we can send a liberal back to the White House—only in this way can we find a solution to the problems of poverty, discrimination, violence, and war. If we do not eliminate these problems, there will not be peace in our time.

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*Bayard Rustin*