



WAR RESISTERS LEAGUE

AFFILIATED WITH THE WAR RESISTERS INTERNATIONAL

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Dear Friend,

One of the most urgent problems in the peace movement today is how to "relate" the issue of peace to the other great social issues of our day -- Civil Rights, unemployment, automation. I know of no organization, in or out of the peace movement, which has more consistently and effectively done this job of relating than the War Resisters League.

Because it is a pacifist organization, the League has at times been termed dogmatic or inflexible in its consistently radical position. Yet what other American peace organization was creative enough to be involved in African politics more than a decade ago? What non-pacifist group was flexible enough to identify itself with the Civil Rights movement long before most peace groups were even aware there was an impending crisis in this area?

This involvement continues at a time when most groups are confused over whether or not to be involved at all. Ralph DiGia, our Administrative Secretary, has just returned to our office after a long six weeks in Albany, Georgia. We say "long" because Ralph spent four of those weeks in jail with other members of the Quebec to Guantanamo Peace Walk Team. With those members, Ralph also fasted while in jail. But the job he had been sent down to do -- to help ease the passage through Georgia of this group of pacifist walkers intent on carrying a message of reconciliation to both Americans and to Cubans -- was done, and done not only with the active support of the Albany Civil Rights Movement, but in such a way that the right to public demonstration had been affirmed for the local movement, making possible public action on Civil Rights after the Peace Team had left.

Our Field Secretary, David McReynolds, only recently returned from a speaking tour of the South where, despite being arrested twice and being harassed by the Nazis in Washington D.C., he was able to speak to hundreds upon hundreds of students, relating the issue of peace to the problems of Civil Rights, unemployment, and automation.

In view of the problems posed by black nationalism, and the general danger of violence breaking out in the Civil Rights movement, the League has given me a temporary release for full time work in the Civil Rights movement, seeking to apply the logic of nonviolence to this most urgent area.



Ralph DiGia, after
his release from
Albany jail.

I could go on at some length, but I have made my point: not only the League's heart, but its staff and its budget have been put in the right place on this matter of relating peace to other social issues. But this, of course, is not the only matter of concern to the peace movement. Equally important with relating peace to other issues is the pressing question of where the front line of the peace movement itself should be, what are the key issues on which we must press forward.

Too many in the peace movement have, suprisingly enough, felt a kind of demoralization following the signing the Test Ban Treaty. Here, at exactly that moment when the peace movement has won some slight victory, its own forces have been disoriented!

Now is the time to press forward in our attack on organized violence, on the arms race in general and on such urgent matters as Vietnam in particular. Now is the time to demand the arms budget be cut so that massive funds can be channeled into a real war on poverty. Now is the time to push on with the task of liberating all peoples, everywhere, from the stifling totalitarian atmosphere which an armed society produces.

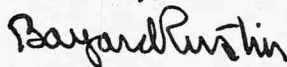
Here, in this area of knowing where to move next, the League continues to play a key role. In 1957 the League worked on the first public demonstration for Easter. The following year other peace groups joined the pacifists in taking the peace issue "into the streets". In 1958 League members were on the crew of the Golden Rule as protest against nuclear testing. In 1960 and 1961 the League's staff organized the first massive resistance to the compulsory Civil Defense alerts. Those alerts are no longer held -- it was a victory which meant that dozens of persons, including two League staff members, had to spend several weeks in jail, but it was a victory and it meant Civil Defense became a "respectable issue" on which more moderate groups could work.

And now, at a time when the liberal organizations and peace groups have almost completely adjusted themselves to the conscription laws, the League is preparing to help launch a sustained and major attack on the draft act -- not merely to get better legal treatment for conscientious objectors, but to get the entire draft act repealed, to end for all time the hold which the military now have on the youth of this nation.

If you are not already a member of an organized peace group, may I suggest you read carefully the enclosed brochure on "What Is The WRL" and consider joining now. If, however, you do not feel able to sign the membership pledge, I hope you will want to make a contribution to the work of the War Resisters League.

Organizations that work on the frontier of social thought do not have mass support. They do not have tax exemption. They do not have large memberships. But such organizations are essential if our society is to survive, if the words "peace," "freedom," "justice" are to be given real content. I hope you will join that select group of those who, while not members of the League, are aware of the great value of its work and are eager to be counted among its supporters.

Sincerely,



Bayard Rustin
Executive Secretary