

Rustin says leader of black cult is 'dictator'

By JOAN BORSTEN
Jerusalem Post Reporter

Describing Black Hebrew leader Ben-Ami Carter as a "dictator," veteran U.S. civil rights leader Bayard Rustin told *The Jerusalem Post* that he would defend Israel's right to deport the members of the cult.

Rustin came to Israel at the head of a six-member delegation of civil rights and black leaders to investigate "human rights in Israel" as they pertain to the Black Hebrews.

The delegation spent 11 days meeting with members of the sect in Dimona and Arad, defectors from the sect, Israeli officials, and U.S. Ambassador Samuel Lewis. They presented their findings yesterday at a press conference.

The group urged Israel to quickly reach a decision defining the status of the sect, and also called on the government to issue work permits to sect members and to continue efforts to upgrade their housing.

Although Rustin accepts the delegation's report, he felt he had a "moral obligation" to speak personally about the 1,200 Black Hebrews living in Dimona, Arad, and Mitzpe Ramon.

"If a group of Nigerians had entered the U.S. illegally, refused to obey our immigration laws and practised polygamy, I don't believe a single civil rights leader would question America's right to deport them," said Rustin. "I feel the same way about the Black Hebrews and Israel. I will not let the question of colour obscure my belief in democracy and abhorrence of dictators. I will not engage in a double standard. If the Black Hebrews do not abide by Israeli laws and intend to replace the present order of things, they are a threat to the state."

Rustin said that he cannot tell the Israeli government how to handle its 12-year-old dilemma.

"Israel must determine whether Ben-Ami Carter still believes what he originally said — that he and his group will inherit the earth and that the Jews are impostors in Israel. If that is still the case, the Black Hebrews are indigestible. If on the other hand — as his current public statements indicate — he has changed his tune, the group is digestible."

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Rustin personally believes that Carter is still bound by his original principles — which were expounded to the delegation once again this week by the head of the Arad Black Hebrew community, Charles Blackwell.

"I wonder," asked Rustin, "if in this kind of controlled situation (in the sect) Blackwell could possibly say what he did without Carter's permission?"

Rustin admitted that he has not been able to substantiate charges frequently levelled against Carter and his lieutenants by former Black Hebrews, who claim that their passports and bank accounts were impounded by Carter, that it was difficult to leave the group, and that families were separated as a method of discipline.

"But I wouldn't be surprised if it were true," said Rustin.

"Carter is a dictator and dictators don't have the same moral standards as democratic leaders. Hitler and Stalin were capable of doing almost anything."

"We cannot forget that we see only what Carter wants us to see," he said. "I did not see children with malnutrition in Dimona. But I believe members of the Baptist community (who say that most of the Black Hebrew children they have sheltered in past years arrived suffering from malnutrition). The Health Ministry should go in and check every child. It is not right that this group can deny any government the right to investigate what is going on."

What Rustin, like every other member of the fact-finding mission, did emphasize was his belief that the government could end the current untenable situation by diffusing Carter's control over his band of followers.

Instead of relocating the entire cult on an isolated moshav, as was recommended by the Glass Commission report, Rustin would give all Black Hebrews currently in Israel — including those who have left the group and are living on their own — the legal right to live anywhere in the country as long as they obeyed national laws.

In response to the frequently-voiced fear that deporting the cult would increase anti-Semitism among U.S. blacks, Rustin felt that blacks and Jews would overcome the anticipated tension as they had other problems.

Other members of the mission were Alexander Allen, vice-president of the National Urban League; Charles Bloomstein, of the A. Philip Randolph Educational Fund; Dr. Archie Buffkins, of the task force on International Higher Education in Israel; Lewis Carter, of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People; and Mrs. Arthur Logan, of the National Council of Negro Women.