

## Chavis lays out plans for million man march

The *New Federalist* weekly newspaper on Aug. 21 carried a lengthy interview with Ben Chavis, national director of the Million Man March scheduled for Oct. 16, 1995 in Washington. The interview gives a rare, and uncensored view of what the march is about—as well as the fullest story yet of the real reason behind Chavis's ouster as executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, exactly one year ago. Chavis, a civil rights fighter for some 30 years, was elected as the NAACP's executive director in 1993 and on Aug. 20, 1994, he was kicked out from that position—although in his 16 months in office he had increased the membership by 185,000—after a national campaign by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to break the back of a nascent alliance between the NAACP and the Nation of Islam under Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Chavis told interviewer Dennis Speed, "It was when I reached out to Minister Farrakhan, that the intense pressure on the [NAACP] board of directors increased." False allegations of sexual misconduct and financial mismanagement "were just used as a political ploy, to try to justify my dismissal." Chavis emphasized that he still supports the NAACP, and also that his outreach to Minister Farrakhan "was the right thing to do. I'm very proud of the fact that out of the dissolution of my relationship with the NAACP, I have been able to regain a sense of national purpose, in terms of mobilizing and organizing for the Million Man March." Moreover, he said, out of the idea for the march, another organization, the National African-American Leadership Summit, was formed to continue the work started by mobilizing a million black men to come to Washington, D.C. on Oct. 16. Already, the NAALS has 100 member organizations, including the Nation of Islam.

### National day of atonement

About the march itself, he continued, "We've called this 'for a national day of atonement.' The whole concept of atonement really comes from the African-Hebraic tradition, which means 'to be at-onement,' at-one with God, and at-one with another, at-one with oneself, and at-one with one's brother. . . . And so, this atonement means that there are three categories of demands.

"The first demand, is the demand on self, what we have to do for self, in terms of ending the self-destruction of the black community, ending the disrespect. We want black men to be restored to taking responsibility for the uplift of our families, and the care of our families, and the care of

our communities.

"The second category of demands, will be demands on government, pressing the right-wing forces in the government. . . .

"And third, will be the category of demands on Corporate America."

Chavis mentioned two other facets to the organizing for the Million Man March:

- An effort to register 8 million black voters as Independents. "We believe that the two-party system has failed the black community, and, quite frankly, the black vote has been bought and sold. . . . The race is at stake, and so, the impact of the Million Man March is going to be very formidable, in a political sense, on the eve of the last presidential race of this century."

- A day of absence on Monday, Oct. 16: "We want the black workforce not to work that day. For those who can't go to Washington, everybody can stay home from work, stay home from school, can stay out of the bars, can stay out of the crackhouses. I would hope that no black person will be seen in any mall, no shopping malls that day. And I'm telling you, that will send a message, a concrete message. Just the absence of us spending on that day. If we spend \$428 billion a year, that means we spend more than a billion dollars a day!"

"If we were in South Africa," he said, "it would be called a general strike, and we know how effective the general strikes were in South Africa, to help bring down apartheid."

Chavis, a signer of the petition calling on President Clinton to exonerate Lyndon LaRouche, was asked to comment on the LaRouche case. "I think the fact that Mr. LaRouche, even under all this pressure, has refused to bend, is a testimony to his strength and the strength of the organization that he's working with," he said. "I think that there has been character assassination. Most brothers and sisters in the black community have only heard something negative about Mr. LaRouche, and they've heard those negative things from the established media."

No stranger to controversy, Chavis himself was wrongfully convicted of firebombing a white-owned grocery store in Wilmington, North Carolina in 1971, as part of what became known as the "Wilmington 10." Collectively, the defendants were sentenced to 282 years in prison, with Chavis drawing the longest sentence—34 years. He served four and a half years before he was paroled, and, in 1980, the conviction was overturned.

The fight for civil justice, especially for African-Americans, runs deep in his family: His great-great grandfather, John Chavis, was the first African-American to be ordained as a Presbyterian minister in the late 18th century. Shortly after the Nat Turner slave insurrection, when many states outlawed teaching blacks to read or write, John Chavis, a scholar who taught Greek and Latin to whites, set up an underground school for both slaves and runaway slaves; he was beaten to death by vigilantes, three years after the uprising.