

NAACP's Chavis a victim of ADL dirty tricks

by Mel Klenetsky

The firing of National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Executive Director Benjamin F. Chavis on Aug. 20 by the NAACP board of directors, exemplifies a political targeting process against African-Americans by the media, corporate foundations, and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL). Chavis and his supporters described the efforts to oust him as a "lynching" and a "crucifixion" by forces "outside the African-American community."

The media line, appearing in editorials in the *Washington Post* and *New York Times*, and in commentaries by nationally syndicated columnist Carl Rowan, was that Chavis was fired for "mishandling of funds." Board members, spoken to afterward, maintained that Chavis was fired because of an accumulation of problems that included his use of NAACP funds to settle a former employee's sex discrimination claim and a \$2.7 million deficit in the NAACP budget.

However, those more knowledgeable say that the real reason for Chavis's firing had to do with his efforts to reach out to broader strata of African-Americans to try to solve the serious problems facing their communities. This included his convening of a National African-American Leadership Summit last June, which included Nation of Islam leader Minister Louis Farrakhan. Chavis was fired the day before the second summit was to take place.

"I feel a little liberated right now. I don't have a straitjacket on," Chavis said on Aug. 21. "I'm not here to point any fingers or to lay any blame, but we are not going to let what happened yesterday hold us back. Never again will we allow forces outside the African-American community dictate to us when we meet, who we meet with, and what we meet about."

The ADL had waged a huge campaign to prevent the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) from opening a dialogue with Minister Farrakhan. The ADL had taken a full-page ad in the *New York Times* reprinting the offensive remarks of

Khalid Muhammad, a Nation of Islam (NOI) spokesman, given to a small audience at a New Jersey college campus. Farrakhan removed Khalid Muhammad as spokesman, thereby distancing himself from the latter's remarks.

Farrakhan's performance last year at a benefit concert of a work by Jewish-born Classical composer Felix Mendelssohn, was exemplary of the efforts Farrakhan was making to open up a serious dialogue with whites and blacks outside the Nation of Islam. The ADL, despite Farrakhan's removal of Khalid Muhammad, went on a major campaign to get the CBC to denounce and distance itself from Farrakhan. This was the context in which Chavis called the first National African-American Leadership Summit.

Rep. Kweisi Mfume (D-Md.), chairman of the CBC, attended, as did Rev. Jesse Jackson, Rep. Donald M. Payne (D-N.J.), Ossie Davis, Malcolm X's widow Betty Shabazz, and many other leaders of the black community. Numerous sources who attended the summit said there was unanimous support for Farrakhan's presence, because of his efforts within the black community to combat drugs and the successes in a prisoner rehabilitation program, which had gained the attention and respect of many within the black community. This was reflected in a *Time/CNN* poll conducted last February which found that 70% of black American adults think Farrakhan is "someone who says things the country should hear."

Much to the dismay of the ADL, the black community and the CBC stood up to its pressure. The pressure increased when June 10 *Wall Street Journal* threatened the NAACP with the cessation of the corporate funding on which the national civil rights group heavily depends, in an obvious attempt to force a split in the organization's ranks. The paper cited Michael Myers, former assistant director to the NAACP and now with the New York Civil Rights Coalition, who said he would not give the organization "another dime," and announced the formation of a National Committee to Save

the NAACP that would challenge Chavis and board chairman Rev. William Gibson at the annual convention in July. Chavis and Gibson beat back all challenges at the July NAACP meeting, which explains why the Chavis firing raised many an eyebrow.

Board must 'live by its decision'

"We are outraged. Dr. Chavis was the best that came to us in the last 12 years," said Darnell Armstrong, a New York NAACP youth representative and former youth board member. "We're going to clean house. All those individuals that made that decision will have to live by that decision." Chavis's efforts to bring more young people into the NAACP made youth amongst his strongest supporters.

Baltimore NAACP President Rodney Orange denounced the board's decision, accusing it of having decided to fire Chavis before the Aug. 20 meeting which was held in his city. "Many of them [board members] came here today knowing what they were going to do. They came with the specific purpose of getting rid of Dr. Chavis. We were hoping for a hearing, but some came and weren't even concerned with what he had to say," he told reporters after the meeting.

Clarence Mitchell III, a former Maryland state senator who now heads the Center for the Study of the Harassment of African Americans, saw the Chavis firing as a disaster and part of the old guard refusing to make way for a new generation of leaders. "A meeting of the board of directors of the NAACP is a geriatric conference," Mitchell said. "The board's action is a wake-up call to black America. There's no way African-Americans are going to let 64 old people remove an outspoken, vigorous leader who was pulling together diverse elements of the black community."

Financial blackmail

Board members said they had no choice but to remove Chavis to protect the NAACP financially; and indeed, they were being financially blackmailed. The *Washington Times* reported that some board members, who requested anonymity, said that some charitable organizations, including the Ford Foundation, had been approached by other board members asking that they withhold contributions, bringing pressure on the board to remove Chavis. The Ford Foundation held back a donation of \$250,000, part of a \$500,000 grant, citing managerial concerns. The *New York Times* reported that several corporations, including Mobil Oil, Philip Morris, and General Motors, expressed reservations about continuing to lead fundraising drives for the NAACP.

Whites outside the NAACP reportedly offered to buy out Chavis's contract in an effort to distance the NAACP from Farrakhan. About \$7 million out of the NAACP's \$18 million budget comes from corporate contributions. Ironically, most of the NAACP's \$2.7 million budget deficit had been handed down to Chavis by his predecessor, Benjamin Hooks. There was a \$1.2 million deficit left by Hooks and a \$600,000 settlement that was incurred under Hooks's tenure, but fell

due after Chavis took over.

Chavis had increased membership by about 185,000, to 675,000. The week before Chavis was fired, Carl Rowan spread a rumor that membership had dropped, not risen, from the time Chavis took over. This was designed to counter Chavis's claim that the NAACP had grown under his tenure. With the Ford Foundation withholding \$250,000 and the media clamoring for Chavis's ouster, the NAACP board capitulated.

The fight is certainly not over, however. Allies of Chavis such as NAACP board member Larry Carter and Mitchell, whose family has long been in the leadership of the NAACP, have vowed to mobilize the NAACP's "branch system," which would involve a referendum of NAACP members that could throw out the board's decision. In the meantime, Gibson remains a target of the same crowd that removed Chavis. Board member Joseph Madison led the charge against Chavis, according to reports.

The names must be named

Prior to his firing, Chavis indicated that there was an orchestrated campaign by forces outside the African-American community working with a small number within the NAACP to oust him. Chavis threatened to name the names of those working against him, but, to date, has not done so. On Black Entertainment Television's "Lead Story" program broadcast from the first National African-American Summit, Chavis said, "I have considerable evidence that there were groups, organized groups, in New York City and Washington, D.C., some connected with right-wing Jewish groups, that worked in coalition together to put pressure on the NAACP."

The sinister role of the ADL cannot be underestimated. The ADL has a long history in this regard. In the 1960s, the ADL spied on Dr. Martin Luther King and shared its data with FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. One leading ADL official, Henry Schwarzschild, quit his full-time job with the ADL when he found out about the ADL-FBI collusion against Dr. King.

Ever since, ADL-FBI collusion has deepened, with African-American political activists remaining at the top of the list of joint targets. In 1991, an ADL conference in Montreal featured speakers such as Arizona Prof. Leonard Dinnerstein, who argued that "black intellectuals" and the black community are one of the greatest repositories of anti-Semitism.

Last year, San Francisco police unearthed a massive ADL spy operation against hundreds of political and ethnic groups, including the NAACP, the Rainbow Coalition, and the NOI. ADL "fact finder" Roy Bullock was caught selling confidential FBI files on the NOI to the South African intelligence services. And when African National Congress leader Chris Hani came to California, Bullock and the ADL spied on his activities and sold reports to the South Africans. Hani was later assassinated.