

# Chavis outlines post-March plans

by Nancy Spannaus

In two lengthy interviews given to Schiller Institute leader Dennis Speed in November and December 1995, the Rev. Benjamin Chavis outlined the perspective of the National Afro-American Leadership Summit (NAALS) in the wake of the Million Man March. The interviews, the first of which was published in the Jan. 15 issue of the weekly newspaper *New Federalist*, focus on Chavis's thinking about how the Million Man March can spark the formation of an independent political movement in the United States, and what that movement must represent.

As was reported after the post-March meeting of the NAALS, the group plans to expand its scope, and sponsor a Million Families March in October 1996. The Rev. James Bevel, who formulated the concept of *atonement* for the Oct. 16, 1995 Million Man March, has been appointed the general coordinator of this year's march, whose precise date has not yet been determined. But, according to Reverend Chavis, there is no question but that the scope of the March's concerns will expand to involve international concerns and organization, as well as reaching into the pores of communities throughout the United States.

## What the October march proved

Reverend Chavis asserted that there were three major lessons from the Million Man March. First, the fact that the March was so successful, despite the efforts made to discredit its initiator, the Honorable Louis Farrakhan, showed that African-American men can be mobilized. Second, the March's success reflected the importance of local organization, and third, it demonstrated the ability of the nascent movement to finance itself.

At the present time, he said, there are 400 local organizing committees which have held themselves together for follow-up action. LaRouche movement organizers have confirmed that these committees are indeed active around the United States.

Asked about the organizing perspective, Reverend Chavis indicated that NAALS would be building itself up as an independent force, in the context of the ferment around the 1996 Presidential and Congressional elections. A national black political convention would be held at some point. One of the targets of that movement was likely to be the Republicans pushing the Contract with America.

In Chavis's words, "The so-called Contract with America

has not delivered. The so-called Contract with America was very bellicose, issued false promises that it could not deliver on, and so, to some extent, Newt Gingrich and the far right wing of the Republican Party are reaping what they've sown, and I think it will continue to happen into the 1996 elections. This is due particularly to what happened on the budget from the shutdown of the government.

"Now, whose interests are these people really speaking for? Certainly not the interests of the majority of the people, black or white. I think they may have overexposed themselves.

"So, one of the things we will be discussing at our national black political convention, is the question of independent politics, is the question of a possible independent candidate."

## Alliances

Reverend Chavis, along with many other civil rights leaders and Dr. Abdul Alim Muhammad, the minister of health of the Nation of Islam, joined with a group of state legislators, former congressmen, and labor leaders in a call to defend the U.S. Constitution by resisting Gingrich's blackmail, which appeared as an ad in the *Washington Post* on Dec. 12. That ad, like the NAALS itself, called for a major voter registration drive before the 1996 elections.

As to the political situation, Reverend Chavis said the following:

"Now we begin 1996 with a grappling, a yearning, an outcry for the improvement of the quality of life over against the bankrupt policies of the Gingrich era. Therefore, what I would recommend is that we organize at the grass-roots level throughout the country, build new, stronger networks of both political and prominent, as well as economic and prominent activity, toward a larger, more long-range social transformation of American society.

"While there are some that gloat that the United States is the only remaining superpower, what does that mean? What good is a superpower, if that superpower can't feed its own people? What good is that superpower, if that superpower can't house its own people? What good is a superpower, if that superpower cannot deliver basic education to its youth? What good is a superpower, if the superpower can't deliver health care to its people? What we need is a movement for social change, for great social change in the United States. I think black Americans need to lead that movement toward social change.

"I think what we're now witnessing is an indication of a stirring among people who believe that our nation must now tread a different course than the one presently embarked on, led by Newt Gingrich and the Republicans. That is why, to me, even though [Sen. Robert] Dole may be leading in some polls, he really offers no new insight. There needs to be a third political force, a third political power, an independent political force, an independent political power, that emerges out of this situation."