

# Rainbow Restructures

By Gerald Lenoir

**T**he National Rainbow Coalition (NRC) board of directors approved a significant set of changes in the Coalition's by-laws March 3. The net effect of the alterations is to concentrate more decision-making authority in the Rainbow's president, the chair of the board and the executive committee, and the national board.

The decision to restructure was described by its supporters as necessary to take full advantage of the political possibilities opened up by Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential bid.

The board action capped a two-and-a-half month process in which a 15-member restructuring subcommittee appointed by NRC President Jesse Jackson developed the recommendations eventually passed by the board as a whole. (See *Frontline*, Jan. 30.) Though the changes made were not without controversy, they passed by a substantial majority in a voice vote at the meeting.

## POWER TO APPOINT

The most controversial changes were provisions to allow the existing board to elect new board members and to give the president the power to appoint state Rainbow officers. Under the by-laws passed at the NRC Convention in Raleigh, North Carolina in October 1987, board members were

required to stand for election at a biennial convention in which delegates from state Rainbow chapters were empowered to vote. State officers of chartered Rainbow chapters were to be selected only by vote of the state membership. While the new by-laws don't preclude the election of state officers, they do give the president the power to appoint the state chair, to remove other state officers, and to appoint their replacements.

Rainbow spokesperson Frank Watkins told *Frontline* that the new by-laws were "fundamentally designed to make the organization more inclusive and representative of a very broad-based membership." He warned against small groups of people who could prevent the Rainbow from expanding.

But Larry Hamm, chair of the New Jersey State Rainbow and an NRC board member, described the new board selection procedure as creating a "self-perpetuating board." Hamm and the New Jersey delegation led the struggle at the Raleigh convention to formulate by-laws which would give more initiative and decision-making authority to state and local Rainbows and the grassroots membership.

Hamm and other board members who had opposed the changes adopted agreed that the NRC needed to be restructured in some way to take into account the new opportunities brought about by Jackson's success in obtaining seven million votes in the 1988 primaries. "I agree with the need for expansion and

inclusion," Hamm told *Frontline*. He disagreed, however, with the specific proposals recommended by a majority of the restructuring committee. He and others with a similar viewpoint favored a compromise position on the question of the selection of state chairs which would allow the president to appoint chairs in states where the Rainbow was not organized and in states where fledgling Rainbow organizations had not yet become chartered chapters. They also favored the election of at least a portion of the board at a delegated convention.

After the board discussion and decision, however, Hamm stated, "The by-law changes were ratified by a majority of the board. That struggle is behind us. We must build the Rainbow within the parameters set by the board meeting." A number of board members told *Frontline* they did not expect that the new rules would interfere with the development of the Rainbow at the state and local levels.

Other action taken at the meeting included approval of a report of the National Policy Committee to develop a proposal for National Rainbow Coalition action around a range of issues. Among these are strengthening the right of workers to organize, support for the Jesse Gray Housing Bill now before Congress, the fight for national public health legislation, and voter registration reforms. The Policy Committee is also developing a statement of the NRC's program and vision. State chapters will be invited to send representatives to the next meeting of the Policy Committee to help fashion that program. In addition, the board passed a resolution urging Coalition members to support the strike against Eastern airlines. □