

World News

Ad hoc group formed to protest ban on NAMBLA

by Sheila Walsh

A number of Gay activists recently endorsed an ad hoc group that will stage a separate march from the Stonewall 25 international march in protest over what they see as attempts to censor the North American Man/Boy Love Association (NAMBLA) from the Gay event.

The ad hoc group, called Spirit of Stonewall (SOS), will protest a Stonewall 25 decision that effectively barred NAMBLA and other groups like it from its June 26 march which will commemorate the 25th anniversary of the Stonewall Riots. SOS maintains that Stonewall 25 is "censoring some groups and forms of expression."

According to a press release, over 150 activists, scholars, artists, and writers endorsed SOS. Among those listed include poet Allen Ginsberg, Lesbian activists Gayle Rubin and Pat Califia, authors Camille Paglia and Sarah Schulman, Mattachine founder Harry Hay, author Felice Picano, and former Boston Councilor David Scondras.

The SOS press release stated: "NAMBLA deserves strong support in its right of free speech and association, and its members deserve protection from bashing. SOS does not take a position on the age of consent....The issue is not intergenerational sex — although that is one the movement needs to consider honestly. Every organization at Stonewall 25 need not endorse every other organization's positions. The issues are censorship and inclusiveness."

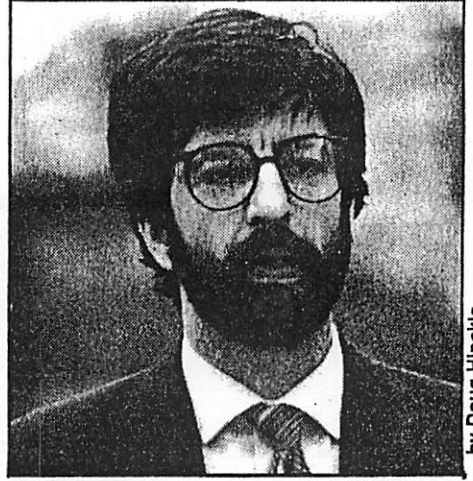
At its Jan. 15-17 U.S. steering committee meeting, Stonewall 25 voted to bar groups "advocating" the "sexual exploitation of children" and the "repeal of age of consent laws" which prohibit sex between adults and minors. The vote effectively barred NAMBLA from the Stonewall 25 march because NAMBLA has called for the removal of all age of consent laws. NAMBLA says it opposes sexual exploitation of children and disputes claims that all sex between adults and children is exploitative.

"I'm a strong First Amendment person," said SOS supporter Scondras. "I'm skeptical of the benefit of not allowing people to have a point of view."

Scondras said he does not think the people in the Gay community who have condemned NAMBLA have buttressed their position with facts. He added that he does not believe NAMBLA is a pedophile group because research he has seen indicates that a child's sex does not matter to pedophiles.

"NAMBLA seems to be Gay men who prefer intergenerational sex," Scondras said. "I know five NAMBLA members and they are clearly Gay. If you had the North American Adult/Child Sex Organization, that would be pedophilic." He added that he would never support an organization that would abuse or exploit children. He said he was unaware that NAMBLA has advocated dropping all age of consent laws and that he is not in favor of doing so.

Paglia said she endorsed SOS because she "supports most marginalized forms of sexuality and sexual expression." The Gay community is trying to sweep the



by Doug Hineke

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issue of pedophilia under the rug, she said. "It's been at the center of Gay male sex for thousands of years," she said.

Paglia said she believes all sex must be consensual, but the legal age of consent is "artificially high" in the Western world and should be lowered to around age 14.

Sarah Schulman said she does not agree with everything stated on the SOS press release but agreed to endorse the group because she does not think a group should be excluded from Stonewall 25.

SOS, according to a press release, is considering an alternate march route which would start at the Stonewall Inn, the site of the Stonewall Riots, and join the main Stonewall 25 march at the United Nations.

Pat Norman, a co-chair of Stonewall 25, said the march organizers have made no decision on what would happen if SOS, marching with NAMBLA, tried to join the march. "My focus is to deal with the important issues that are facing 99.9 percent of the Lesbian, Gay, bi, and transgendered community throughout world," she said. "It can be a controversial issue if we chose it to be. But that could take away from the march."

NAMBLA denounced

The National Gay and Lesbian Task Force (NGLTF) recently joined the cadre of Gay organizations that have spoken out against NAMBLA. In a statement issued May 26, NGLTF stated a position adopted at its May 20-22 board meeting.

"NGLTF condemns all abuse of minors, both sexual and other kinds, perpetrated by adults. Accordingly, NGLTF condemns the organizational goals of NAMBLA and any other such organization," the position read. "NGLTF specifically notes that numerous studies have shown that the vast majority of child molestation is committed by heterosexual men, usually with members of their own family."

NGLTF specifically objects to NAMBLA's position that age of consent laws should be abolished, according to spokesperson David Smith. NAMBLA is "in essence, advocating sex between a pre-pubescent teen and an adult," Smith said. "If they think that can somehow be consensual, then that's where our organizational goals differ."▼