

Pedophiles in the schools

New York's Channel 4 News showed some footage last March of a pedophile group having a quiet chat in the busy atrium of the Citicorp building in midtown Manhattan. The pedophiles were all members of NAMBLA, the 1,000-member North American Man/Boy Love Association, which wants the law to allow adults to have sex with children.

Unaware he was being taped, one member of the group, a public school teacher, urged another, a public school librarian, to keep his membership secret until he has tenure. A third NAMBLA member interviewed by Channel 4 turned out to be a former public school psychologist who had worked with emotionally and physically handicapped children at a Queens elementary school.

John Miller, the WNBC-TV correspondent who broke the story, said last week: "We thought these guys were people who lurk around outside schools. What we found was, they lurk around inside the schools."

Lurking may not be the right word. There's no evidence yet of NAMBLA members' preying on children in city schools, though at least two local members have been convicted of sex offenses. But Miller has a point. Child molesters don't just hang around playgrounds. They apply for jobs at schools, camps, the Boy Scouts, Big Brothers, YMCAs. "Boy lovers" love to work where the boys are.

So far, the effort to haul the pedophiles out of the youth system isn't going all that well, as the current NAMBLA story in New York shows. For six months, there was virtually no newspaper coverage.

The press also ignored the spreading story of parental protests about Peter Melzer, 53, the teacher on the WNBC-TV tape who advised the librarian to lie low. Melzer teaches physics and science at one of the city's elite schools, the Bronx High School of Science. He is on the NAMBLA steering committee and the editorial board of the *NAMBLA Bulletin*, which has offered advice on how to entice a child into sex ("Leave a pornographic magazine someplace where he's sure to find it").

The City Board of Education has known since 1984 that Melzer was a pedophile. "It seemed to me that nobody wanted to take responsibility for making a decision," said Edward Stancik, a special investigator for the school system. Two weeks ago, Stancik released a long report recommending Melzer be fired. The former school psychologist and the librarian are both under investigation now, too.

So far, gay and civil liberties groups have been fairly quiet about the Melzer case, headed toward state disciplinary hearings. Melzer is accused of no crime, and

NAMBLA says he is being persecuted for speech and political beliefs. But even in the absence of a crime, says Stancik's report, "his misconduct in aiding the *Bulletin* in publishing the advisories for pedophiles . . . makes him unfit to teach children." Yes, that's exactly the point. Leaving a known pedophile in the classroom would be quite a statement about the values of public education.

Melzer, by the way, is a regular delegate to an annual international conference of pedophiles and pederasts. Call it a sexual version of the Predators' Ball. To the folks at NAMBLA, it's important to make sex with children look legitimate. David Finkelhor, a sex researcher at the

University of New Hampshire, calls NAMBLA "the intellectual elite of child molesting." Most people who prey on children don't bother much about theory, but NAMBLA types feel driven to rationalize such acts. So they have cobbled together a credo out of the gassier rhetoric of victim groups and the children's rights movement.

We are told that man-boy lovers are yet another oppressed group, that NAMBLA is seeking "the empowerment of youth" and sexual self-determination for children, who are being exploited by parents who treat them as property.

This is a corruption of language as well as morals, but it is taken very seriously in some quarters. Since the 70's, at least, one strain of thought in journals of sex research has upheld some of the principles of

what might be called child molesters' lib: All children are sexual beings from birth, some children do not suffer from adult-child sex, it's sometimes better to have sex from adults than no love at all, and every sexual taboo must be analyzed pro and con, including incest and adult-child sex.

Pedophiles have made some headway in politics as well as in the world of sexology. NAMBLA is a member of the International Lesbian and Gay Association, which has called on members "to treat all sexual minorities with respect," including pedophiles. Though a great many lesbians and gays detest NAMBLA, the group has been allowed to march in gay parades in New York and San Francisco under its own banner.

Is there a creeping tolerance? I notice that John DeCecco of San Francisco State University, editor of the *Journal of Homosexuality*, is also on the board of *Paidika*, a Dutch pedophile journal. When I asked him why, he said, "They needed a psychologist." No. They "need" respectability, and DeCecco is providing some. The culture is now so soft minded that many will listen to any self-styled victim group, perhaps even pedophiles. That's why it's crucial to keep them out of the schools. ■

