

Sugar-coated poison in school corridors

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No single incident sparked the inferno of hate that incinerated the goodwill and tolerance at one Metro-area high school.

A group of Heritage Front supporters came to the school one day last year. They just started chatting with a few students, about politics, current events, trying to influence their thinking.

They told the students that "those people" - immigrants - stole jobs from Canadians. And now they were out to steal the white man's God, too. If not, how come there were prayers of different faiths being held in the schools, they asked.

Eventually, about 80 students adopted the philosophies of the hate-mongers. Some started wearing swastikas. Some started claiming certain corridors for "their kind" only.

Then there were extortions and assaults on some minority members. A Muslim student, offering up his obligatory daily prayer to God, was attacked.

But what is worst of all is it took only three weeks for the hate to get a foothold in the school, says Detective Dino Doria of the Metro Police hate crimes unit. Eventually arrests were made, students got counselling and the school is getting back to normal. But similar events are happening at schools all across the Metro area right now, Doria says.

He relayed the story to parents and educators at a seminar last week, warning that the number of hate mongers in Metro is growing and that young people are their target recruits.

"Hate mongers are no dummies," he said. They know how to sway young people with "sweet, sugar-coated poison."

As the number of hate crimes goes up - figures for the first half of 1994 show a 51 per cent hike in the number of hate-crime victims - the chance that your child may be targeted for recruitment is increasing, he said.

Most hate crimes are perpetrated by youths and young men between the ages of 12 and 25, he said. Most are not formal members of hate groups and they come from a variety of backgrounds, he said.

Doria says hate propaganda is now easily accessible on the Internet. And, he says, there is a growing body of rock music CDs - put out by groups like RaHoWa and Skrewdriver - that exclusively target teens with bigoted and hate messages.

High school recruiters typically start off small and usually choose two students, he says. The targeted students usually seem somewhat awkward and don't fit in easily in any one school group.

Eventually, the target learns he or she can be cool and accepted - if they buy the white power message.

Besides the Heritage Front, other groups like the Church of the Creator, Aryan Nations and the Ku Klux Klan are working in Metro to recruit younger members. Currently an estimated 40 national hate groups operating across Canada run racist

hatelines, put out racist literature and run paramilitary training camps for young recruits.

"Their proposals are carefully worded, sweet sugar-coated poison," Doria says.

Most hate mongers are more sophisticated than in the past, he says. The groups tell young recruits they only want to "protect" the rights of whites. They hire lawyers to review their propaganda and take personality courses to be better able to win over more members.

Jessica Young, who became active against racial intolerance after her own school, Humberside Collegiate, became the site of racist white power acts, says it is important for students to reach out to each other.

She says the kids who feel separate, left alone, who don't get a sense of belonging from their peers will be the ones who are vulnerable to joining a hate group.

Young says workshops in her school on valuing diversity and how silence is complicity have been very helpful. But mostly students must feel they are not alone and can turn to someone for help.

"We were so shocked - how could this happen in our school," she says.

Dr. Karen Mock, of the League for Human Rights of B'nai Brith Canada, says the hate monger's goal is to dehumanize his target.

Once that is done, people start believing it is okay to mistreat a group. That is why it is so important to report and oppose hate mongers as soon as their activities are uncovered, she says.

A pamphlet prepared by the human rights league says parents should watch for any significant change in their child's behavior and be aware of the books or music he or she is interested in.

If a parent finds racist doodling or graffiti or if a child starts wearing clothes that are a trademark for racist power groups they should talk to their child. Several agencies including the Ontario Human Rights Commission, local race relations committees and the race relations ministries can be contacted for help.

Caption: Photo: Karen MOCK: Human rights advocate says hate monger's goal is to dehumanize target.

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