Poor educational system at fault for student unrest

By Harvey Baker

During this last week, MIT's administration has tried valiantly, almost desperately, to engage itself in dialogue with its students and faculty, hoping to bring all of the school's academic and other activities into a large perspective from which to map out a policy for the school to follow during the next generation.

While these efforts have been highly commendable and hopefully fruitful for those who participated in them, it must be recognized that they are only stopgap measures. Most students didn't really participate in the Agenda Days, and those who did saw little of great significance emerge from them.

Perhaps the problem is best tackled by examining the kind of question that was debated. "Why," the topic of discussion asked, "is the Institute of Technology, and not a University?" Asking this kind of question, while an important one for MIT, ignores the fact of student unrest, ill feeling, and disappointment specifically in MIT or its pursuit of the kind of defense work, its war-related research and special labs, compared to other schools.

MIT's unrest has been pacific. The problem is much more basic, is becoming universal, and lies deeper in the educational establishment than is perhaps recognized even by the "dissidents" themselves. Let's face the facts: For over the last hundred years, sadly, the education they are receiving in the universities is to them intolerable.

Classroom education

Ask yourself this question. Are you learning, actually learning, more inside the classroom or in your life outside of it? Most college students, if answering honestly, would have to respond by saying that academically, their school is tops, but in any other aspect of education, it is a sorry second best. The school's approach to learning, its whole methodology, has become outdated, and was intended for a generation of students who were compliant and unquestioning, and went to school "to learn a trade." Such is not the case today. Mark Twain said, "Don't let your schoolboy inter- feres with your education." Even one hundred years ago, Twain pointed out that education because democratic hermit, a bookworm, or a "tool" was not going to yield the kind of experienced, well-rounded man the students were trying to turn out. More and more students are realizing this today, and while students and their attitudes have changed much over the last hundred years, sadly, their education has not.

Only the level of academics has changed, not in degree, but in style, and is no longer responsive to today's student. If our various educational administrations would look around, they would see why students picket, protest, and demonstrate. Look at what they are after for an education.

For the first 21 years of their life, they are supposed to sit quietly, placidly, take their spooned "education" without a whimper, and neither drink, smoke, or have sex, all of which are "adult" vices. They are supposed to sit calmly in their ivory towers, oblivious to the sufferings of their men, and uncaring about the tragic problems of their government because a "tool" is too young to vote, and hence need neither respond to it, nor feel responsible for it.

What is education, MIT? Is it what your students get: regurgitation rather than creativity? Are not students taught only to respond, reply, and do weekly problem sets, rather than to think for themselves, express and give vent to their feelings, put down their own ideas? Isn't there something terribly wrong, when for 21 years of their lives, people are taught simply to respond, and react to what others, their "mentors," say, and do, and are asked to do no more?

But, one hears a reply, how can you be creative in Physics? For the first time in your life, you can learn, save by doing that weekly problem set? Perhaps, though, if you think about it, contained in this question is a response to it. Perhaps just because of this reaction-only education our physicists receive, scientists of today are so dull, uninitiated, and largely uncreative.

In substantial numbers, even after they graduate from the educational system they will be placed in a job which will stress even more of those same qualities, and which will serve only to further automate the individual's thoughts.

Hence, if one really wishes to understand unrest, etc., as the administration probably does, to eliminate it, and to create education to its former level, one's focus will really have to be on the educational system itself. This is why the campuses are revolting. This is the reason for the picketing and the strikes. Students are looking for action, something to bite their teeth into. The educational system itself is tops, but in any other aspect, it is a sorry second best. The school's approach to learning, its whole methodology, has become outdated, and was intended for a generation of students who were compliant and unquestioning, and went to school "to learn a trade." Such is not the case today.

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MIT PLAYERS

A TASTE OF HONEY

opens Thursday, May 15
continues May 16-17, 25-26
Kenge Little Theater
8:30, except May 25, 7:00
11:00, May 25, 26
$2.00 all others
Reservations X4710

Outside pressures drive universities to ask police aid

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to the lack of student aid in quelling disturbances.

Now, though, Saloma feels that they are being pushed too far. They often result in an Administration that feels compelled to use outside help following the failure of internal attempts to control disorder. Saloma thinks that Nixon is "presiding" over the government, not leading it. The next four years of the Nixon administration will probably be the "Last Hurrah" of the old politics, he feels. He predicted that Nixon will have trouble getting an infusion of talented students and academics into his administration. "Nixon just won't be able to mesh with the universities and the students."