CAM: Brave new work!

The nature and power of research being done in our universities today and its accompanying government support and influence demand that we take a new look at the hallowed concept of academic freedom. Recent discussions of the Cambridge Project, prompted by SACC's opposition to that attempt by MIT computer experts and political scientists to develop new methodology for handling behavioral science problems, has brought this issue into focus on our campus. The case made by Allen Grobland in Thursday's discussions in 26-100 that academic freedom, like freedom of speech, is not an absolute right but is, instead, subject to limitations for the good of society, is well taken. The issue we must face is this: Where and how shall we draw the line?

SACC has performed a real service for the community by bringing this issue into the open. It is an unfortunate commentary on the degree to which the Institute has dealt with this issue in the past that it has taken full-blown opposition to this and to other projects to bring this matter to the community's attention.

We hope that the commission which will examine the MIT education will deal with this issue of academic freedom and its accompanying problems with the government. Out of this will come, hopefully, some real breakthrough in examining the social consequences of proposed, ongoing and past research. We cannot take a vigilante approach to this problem on a permanent basis.

Unfortunately, we have no solution to this in the short run, however, we must with individual projects on an ad hoc basis. What, then, shall happen to the Cambridge Project?

We find specious the arguments advanced by the proponents of the project that it is "safe" because no data on specific individuals will be used, because the results will be openly published, and because the methods to be developed will not be nearly so effective as opponents fear. Other agencies could easily plug specific data into the methods which might be developed. In addition, the government and a few large companies are truly equipped to make use of our project's findings. Finally, there is the danger that the results of the project may be given undue credence by the uninformed, or that policymakers who understand the methodology to be developed may consciously attempt to influence data to justify proposals which are contrary to their own wishes.

On the other hand, there are many real advances which might come out of the project in diversification of our society and international problems. In addition to the badly-publicized aspects of the project which could easily be used to further current government policy in Vietnam, the draft and in the future the facility will attempt more laudable endeavors. Among these are: arm-coating, urbanization in many countries, domestic problems in the areas of health, manpower, and training; problems associated with the development of underdeveloped nations, and attitudes of peasants about the potential for development.

One is tempted to wonder whether computerized data on the Vietcong's will to fight might not have been used in Vietnam.

It is also true that the continuing growth and diversification of our society will require all agencies, public and private, to rely more and more on computerization of data. The alternative will be, we fear, a breakdown in information flow, which will result in a society less responsive to human needs than we now witness.

Thus, we find it anything but trivial to compare the relative merits and drawbacks for society if this project is carried to fruition. Indeed, it may be possible to tell without actually completing the work.

The dilemma faced by scholars today is well expressed in a letter from Professor Hayward Alker to the Cambridge Project. He writes: "I detest by working through the Cambridge Project, the relative merits and drawbacks for society if this project is carried to fruition. Indeed, it may be possible to tell without actually completing the work."

The concerns expressed in a letter from Professor Hayward Alker, the author of the Cambridge Project, to the Tech by the author, Alker outlines a situation in which (cans) find adequate data and modeling facilities for myself and especially my students outside of Defense-supported projects, (b) help but not significantly facilitate Defense Department policies such as the Vietnam War, (c) fully participate in the Cambridge Project without further strengthening the already overwhelming dominance of DoD in foreign area research.

Under the current circumstances, we feel that one appropriate response is the recent efforts by various agencies to influence the government the bringing NSF funding for research up to DoD levels. Another alternative would be for the Institute and particularly those in the Cambridge Project to develop and institute new safeguards against the misuse of science. The need for such safeguards will become especially acute in the area of biology and genetic manipulation becomes more and more possible.

As far as the funding of the Cambridge Project is concerned, however, we feel that when large groups of faculty members, fully cognizant of the risks to society which are involved, feel that such project will produce a net benefit of substantial magnitude, it is the Institute's responsibility to prevent them carrying out their objectives.

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RRTC

Earlier this year (The Tech, April 15) we expressed the opinion that RRTC should continue to be offered on campus strictly as an extra-curricular activity. Our concern was that RRTC receive special privileges from the Institute regarding academic appointments or credit for military training.

We continue to hold this view. In examining the motions brought before the faculty, we find the motion offered by the Committee on Educational Policy most troublesome. If passed, this motion would remove the RRTC from a category of student organizations which are not expected to receive special privileges from the Institute regarding academic appointments or credit for military training.

In order to insure the success of the feedback function of Agenda Days, all group leaders should forward written reports of the sessions to Miss Seelinger, Rm. 7-133.