News Analysis

Protest: a return to radical politics?

By Thomas J. Spisak

Mass political action has been dead at MIT for the last three years. Since the McGovern fiasco in 1972, no issue has been strong enough to stir the sentiments of the student body. Radicalism has gathered dust while the Institute has stumbled through the routines of classes and quizzes, jobs and problem sets.

Mass politics returned to MIT last Friday. The issue of training nuclear engineers for Iran moved two hundred people to stage a sit-in in the Department of Nuclear Engineering Headquarters in Building 24. Few of the demonstrators characterized themselves as political radicals, and for most of them it was the first time they had joined in such action.

There were various reasons why people opposed the agreement with Iran. Some, including most of the organizers of the protest, were mostly concerned with the political ramifications involved. As one of the organizers said, "Iran to us, it is still a small part of a very large system," adding "What we're trying to do is chip away pieces of a system." Another student admitted that he was "scared of the idea war demonstrations of the early seventies. There seemed to be more idealism that was apparent at the time than there was any mass political action on this campus. One student said that he was demonstrating because he was "firmly against training nuclear engineers for a nation whose politics go contrary to everything we have been taught to believe about this country."

Voronel links release to work of MIT group

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account the opinions of these scientists. If MIT scientists are persistent in their demands for constant connection without interference, I'm sure Soviet authorities will have only one choice—to release Azbel."

The wife Nina added that "I am sure about this country." She said, "You are thrown out of societies if your friends are brave to remain your friends.

The committee that was originally formed to secure the Voronels' emigration is now working on getting Professors Mark Axelrod, Alexander Lerner, and Benjamin Levich out of the Soviet Union (see The Tech, February 14, 1975.)

Although Azbel has "strong chances" according to Voronel, that the Shah can get nuclear weaponry, "I think that any country in the Middle East having nuclear weaponry would be very much a destabilizing influence in the area. Students also felt that the Persian Gulf easily could cause a confrontation in the Middle East. The majority of the protesters seemed primarily concerned with the way in which the Institute had handled the deal and the subsequent protest. One student said he was at the sit-in because he wanted "some response, but so far no one is saying anything." He said later that he felt the demonstration was worthwhile because "the Committee (CATNES) had tried several different ways of asking questions without getting any answer.

Many of the students felt that they were tied to by MIT. One student, when asked if the deal has changed his perceptions of MIT, said he doubted that he would "ever have much respect for this administration again.

The protesters seemed more distressed with MIT than angry about the deal. The lack of stridency was surprising to one who took part in the anti-war demonstrations of the early seventies. There seemed to be more idealism that was apparent at the time than there was any mass political action on this campus. One student said that he was demonstrating because he was "firmly against training nuclear engineers for a nation whose politics go contrary to everything we have been taught to believe about this country."