A Return to Activism

By Glenn Brownstein

In widespread campus activism dead or dormant? Is the student vote no longer an important force to be considered? Are colleges now simply professional training schools where students work for the so-called "job-ticket" and care little about any outsider role the institution might play in shaping (good or bad) the world around them?

About two weeks ago, the New York Times ran a story about the apparent lack of student political campaigners in the New York area, and that this trend mirrored a drop from the turbulent '60s-style activism toward a more materialistic, middle-class-valued student population, less concerned with social protest than with the need for a graduate school, a well-paying job with a future, and basic material concerns (the stereotypical home in the suburbs, two cars, etc.).

The article stated that the MIT student body is not as active politically as the student population at the University of New York/City University of New York schools. There is currently a student protest at State University at Stony Brook over the Taiwanese Government's alleged acts of aggression toward China. Being a student at the Taiwan and Iran campuses, I realize that such protests are not as widespread at MIT, but there are certainly enough groups to make the student body a political entity. I see no reason why these groups should not be united to the national level as they are on the Taiwan side. MIT can not only remember the campus riots and anti-war demonstrations that went on during the height of that period, but also took part in the protests, whether it was for or against a group can do that picketing.

I believe that we should really be aware of the situation and try to get involved. It's my honest belief that matters here could escalate to the point where it might be inevitable if we continue the status quo.

It's remarkable what a group can do that is?...people raise enough of a stink about an issue, the administration is is, and to begin making an effort to preserve it. If people here are about sculptures, overcrowding, and academic program cutbacks, to try to do something, even if it means going to the Institute. I don't think people here are as upset about these unpopular administration decisions as I was. I think the time has come for each of us (students, faculty, and administration) to get involved. I'm referring not to smaller campus-activist groups or even the less modest number, though still a few. I believe in the power of the people, and the pressure can be made on trends concerning Taiwan and Iran, but the student body as a whole.

In a school like MIT, where tree time is at a premium, it's perhaps most unfair to require students to use committees to voice their opinions. It seems obvious that if most MIT students don't have an opinion about the Iranian or Taiwanese programs, or about Institute policy whether they affect them or not. The Institute administration can consult them, I'm not referring to smaller committees to the national level, especially when many committees handle a so-called "hot issue" every four or five years at most. This isn't apathy, but merely protecting our $6,000-plus investment each year.

I don't believe the New York Times story assessed the trend correctly in New York. There is currently a student protest at State University of New York/City University of New York schools and I'm aware of several other anti-administration decisions that will force some schools to change, academic programs to be restructured, many students to transfer, there was a successful protest at Columbia against increases of freshman class size from 750 to 900 - they'll only be 750 admitted next year.

I'm not at MIT. I sincerely hope not. I feel that most of our problems could have been solved if we had called a meeting about 100 students, not 100 committees. Not all of us have time for committees, but would like to have a chance to influence the issues. I don't think people here are as upset about these unpopular decisions as I was. I'm aware of the pressure that the student population isn't worth considering. If all these decisions supposedly have the student's interest in mind (you'd have to argue loud and long to convince me of that), why aren't students actively asking what their interest is?

I think the time has come for each of us (students, faculty, administration, employees) to figure out exactly what our role here is, and to begin making an effort to preserve it. If people here are upset about a decision made that affects them, then every individual should be encouraged to mobilize a response and make it known. If enough people rouse enough of a stink about an issue, the administration is going to have to hear them. It's remarkable what a group can do that is?...people raise enough of a stink about an issue, the administration is is, and to begin making an effort to preserve it. If people here are about sculptures, overcrowding, and academic program cutbacks, to try to do something, even if it means going to the Institute.

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