Editorial

The great misunderstanding

We are sympathetic to those persons who have been hurt by the publication of what some perceive to be an offensive picture and caption in the Freshman Picture Book. However, the charges brought against David Soule before the Committee on Discipline are hardly grounds for expulsion from the Institute or any other substantive disciplinary action.

The incident, which began as a well-intended joke, has been escalated into a major controversy which threatens to spread far beyond campus. The eras of the difficulty lies in the inability of either side to understand the motives and emotions of the other. Whether in fact Soule or anyone else is "insensitive" in this context is a problem of our society as a whole, not of MIT or any of the parties involved.

President Wise and Chancellor Gray surely did nothing to calm the situation by their inflammatory and overscientific statement in Tech Talk on Wednesday. By interpreting the action of the Technology Community Association, publishers of the Picturebook, as a "raze also entered unacceptable in this community," they are suggesting a misjudgment of an undoubtedly apolitical act. And by bringing the question of "prior editorial review" into this issue, they are evoking concerns about freedom of speech and only at MIT but throughout society. Only a re-built firebreak is needed to ease the situation. These should begin immediately.

Another way to look at the record of David Soule and TCA is that the publication of what some dismisses the demand for the expulsion of Soule. Our policy is not to publicize the reasons for our decisions, and we have nothing to say about the exclusion.

More to the point, it is that the current debate is about the publication of a picture of Techniue's mascot, Grogo. Such a statement in no way has implied that Soule or TCA had committed any offense or that the publication of the picture was in any sense a political act.

While the COD is certainly not the appropriate forum in which to resolve this situation, it raises issues which are real and which will not disappear. The most productive steps towards arriving at a reasonable conclusion, between those who are aggrieved and those who were unaware of the implications of the act, is to run such a title. Certainly, no one from the MIT administration, guaranteed equality of pay to non-Americans working in the Zone, and agreed to construct a bridge over the canal to link the two parts of Panama by the Hay-Billard Treaty. But in 1904, the United States increased the revenues in the canal area.

In 1913, Congress decided on Panama, at the time a part of Columbia, as the site of the canal, and in the Hay-Berrian Convention of that year with Columbia the two sides agreed that the United States would spend $10 million and an annual fee of $250,000, the United States would receive a 99-year lease over a zone six miles wide. The Colombian Senate rejected the convention on August 12, 1903, but President Theodore Roosevelt, on Nov. 3, 1903, backed by forces linked to the newly formed Panamanian Co., and acting with the American President's at least tacit approval, Panamanians revolted and declared themselves free from Columbia. Thus, the United States formally recognized the new nation, and a week later received as minister from that country a de facto ambassador of the Canal Company.

Acting with great dispatch, the United States and Panama concluded on Nov. 18, the Hay-Bunyard-Vanrae Treaty, which guaranteed to the United States use and control of "a zone of influence" of a ten-mile-wide zone "in perpetuity." The United States agreed in return to the neutrality of the canal (which still had not been built) and the independence of Panama, and agreed to pay to the new nation the same amount of money as it had offered Columbia earlier in the year, beginning nine years after ratification. The Senate approved the treaty on June 14, 1904.

In a 1955 treaty with Panama, the United States increased the monies of Panama, gave that nation $28 million worth of property, primarily held by the Canal Zone administration, guaranteed property of violence and an increasing atmosphere of tension: the 1964 deaths of 21 Panamanians and 4 American soldiers led President Johnson to begin negotiations to change the Canal's unique political status. Thirty years later Jimmy Carter concluded what has been the work of four Presidents.

The new canal treaties, approved by the Senate — which is by no means likely — would give the U.S. military permission to control the canal back to Panama by noon, Panama time, Dec. 31, 1999, and would guarantee the neutrality of the canal. The strategic importance of the waterway has been reduced anyway by the fact that it can no longer accommodate large oil tankers or aircraft carriers, despite Ronald Reagan's claims that the re-access is "a risk for our national security and for hemispheric defense." The canal represents an important stage from the policies of U.S. imperialism of an era long past to President Carter's new era of "neutral policy." Opponents of the treaty claim that "use of violence and an increasing atmosphere of tension: the 1964 deaths of 21 Panamanians and 4 American soldiers led President Johnson to begin negotiations to change the Canal's unique political status. Thirty years later Jimmy Carter concluded what has been the work of four Presidents.

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