Cal. State decree leaves questions

The consent decree which ended the two-year dispute over governmental access to records at Berkeley may have served one purpose at least: it judicially showdowned and avoided another debate over the nature of confidential records in general.

The moment reached between the University of California and the Department of Labor allows the government to take copies of confidential documents, such as peer-evaluations, to conduct inspections into the university's hiring practices. The decree, analogous to a contract, guarantees that the government will protect the confidentiality of the documents in its possession, and will return the copies when the investigation is complete. It also states that only documents requested by the top level government administrators will be supplied.

This is a tenuous legal situation. While the decree probably circumvents the immediate danger of a Freedom of Information Act request making peer evaluations public, it is unclear what would happen if there were a court challenge to obtain access to the documents. It is widely believed that the screening of requests through the higher echelons of the Department of Labor is a circumstance which may be soon forgotten.

It is not surprising that Berkeley did not hold out for a more sure protection of academic liberties since it received hardly any support from other major institutions in almost a year and a half. Berkeley had little choice but to settle quickly and minimize its losses.

The debate raised by the Berkeley controversy has tended to play itself out in another question of privilege: access to confidential material in general. What is consistently neglected in the debate is any serious questioning of Berkeley's right to monopolize such material. It is quite possible, we might assume, that information which is so volatile in the hands of the government or public can be left in the hands of academic institutions without the use of the documents. We hope these issues will be discussed rationally and resolved soon so that future access to these records does not remain in question much longer.

Editorial

Name games

By voting in this week's straw poll, MIT students have a unique opportunity to have a lasting mark on the Boston-Cambridge area. The results of this poll will provide a pool of names, one of which will ideally become the new name for what is now known as the Harvard Bridge.

The decision that students make will not be an easy one. It is hard to imagine the best name for a bridge when confronted with such options as the Beaver Bridge, the Institute Bridge, the William Barton Rogers Bridge, the Cambridge Bridge, or the Richard Corder MacLaurin Bridge, to name but a few. The possibilities are even more staggering, however, when one recognizes that all of these names could have been the word "technology" hypothecated onto the end.

MacLaurin, president of MIT from 1909 to 1920, engineered MIT's move over the river from Boston to Cambridge. Ironically, when such a move was first discussed, the opening of the new campuses crossed the river on a barge, MacLaurin crossed over on the bridge, fearing the barge would sink.

Rather than bringing Belmont walk across the Charles, the bridge could now become a symbol to remind everyone of MIT's position as a vital link, much as the bridge links the two cities. It could also serve as a source of inspiration to discouraged students: while crossing might be bumpy, just like one's MIT career, one will get there in the end.

These votes cannot be underestimated. Remember: vote early, vote often, vote Richard Cockburn, MacLaurin-Technology Bridge.

Between IRAQ and a Hard Place...

The need for a forum

To the editor: I found Stephanie Pollack's column, "The Egyptian precedent" (The Tech, Oct. 3, 1980) an interesting and informative discussion covering the current efforts underway to form a discussion group of students, faculty and administrators.

As a member of the panel charged with evaluating the need to establish this type of organization, and to determine the appropriate structure, I found this column to be most helpful. I would like to clarify and emphasize several of the points presented in the column.

The secret society called Osiris dissolved nearly a decade ago. There is no link between that old group and the new one being evaluated today, other than the fact that some of the members on the new panel were members of Osiris many years back.

The very complexions of the two groups are entirely different. Osiris was largely a honorary society with student members selected entirely from the senior class. The group encompassed certain rites and initiation procedures. And the list of student members was a carefully guarded secret revealed only after the students had already graduated. The current panel is certainly not a honorary society in any sense. Student members are present from the sophomore, junior, and senior classes, as well as from the graduate school. Also the list of members is not a secret to be guarded. The current panel isn't even a formal organization. It is most of a fact-finding and evaluating discussion group whose successive meetings have been scheduled only at the end of the previous meeting. No formal agenda or schedule exists.

Osiris did fill a need which is currently unfilled—that is to provide an open forum for discussion between students, faculty, and administrators in an atmosphere of trust. Thoughts and ideas need to be presented and discussed without concern that such thoughts and ideas will suddenly become official Institute policy the next day, as was the case in the recent East Cambridge unknown house student exchange uproar. An open forum will allow for student and faculty input into administrative decisions before such decisions are made. And such a forum will provide new avenues of communication between students, faculty, and administrators.

The desire to form a regular forum for discussion between students, faculty, and administrators is not a result of the so-called "bumpy start" that Paul Gray's administration has "suffered." That desire has existed for quite some time, and is manifest at several different levels. Dean Holden, for example, meets with various student leaders for discussions on a regular basis. Dean McClvy is very interested in forming student discussion groups to meet with other members of the Dean's office as well. And there is substantial interest in broadening the scope of student representation on many of the Institute committees.

Finally, the question of representation: one member of this panel said something to the effect that he would provide for full representation for the MIT student body, we'd need about 9000 members. The hope is, however, that a group of about 18 to 20 students can be collected from both the undergraduates and graduate schools whose feelings and opinions can be heard.