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"Profile, take one...

A few weeks ago, I was asked to provide a publication with a "profile" of MIT. It turned out to be a tough question to answer. A few days later, I decided I'd be interested to see how other members of the MIT community would "profile" MIT, in fact, I'd like to publish some alternative views during January if there's sufficient response.

MIT is a unique institution in many ways. It has the world's best professors for science and engineering. It is famous. It has the best facilities available. It has something for liberal arts and social science programs.

Yet, in many ways, the true paradox about MIT is that it shows just those qualities which make it unique.

There are actually three component institutions which comprise MIT. The educational mission is probably the chief concern of students and a prime concern of faculty. The research institution is the chief concern of faculty and a prime concern of students.

Yet, strangely, the political institution is largely ignored by students, often with some effort, and very little interest by faculty. It is often surprisingly aware of the social consequences of their research. Yet students rarely are or care to be.

In some ways, students are an interesting breed here. They are intensely competitive, but not among themselves. They compete against difficult problems to be solved, or against things they do not know. They are not backstabbers (freshmen pass-fail helps set the stage for this attitude.)

Yet, in terms of what interests them, students sometimes see things which raise few eyebrows at other colleges while they tend to see the same kind of thing at MIT and not as usually. Students protest for a year to plan to make commons (institution food) required of some students -- a practice commonplace at many schools. Yet few question a decision by a housing firm, with ties to MIT faculty, to move to MIT.

Similarly, students fought tooth and nail (rightly so) a plan to move the drop date earlier in the term, as it is at many schools. Yet few raise an eyebrow at the volume of defense-related research affiliated with MIT.

The drop date case illustrated an interesting feature of the MIT administration. It was a decision which would have been largely柜台. Students were left on their own and regulations were minimized. Yet in recent years, this policy has become expensive. Institute food services were losing money. Grad inflation was reducing the "value" of an MIT degree. So, with tuition going through the roof, the administration moved slowly to end the practice.

It has not met with staff resistance -- the MIT student is nothing if not independent. But it has moved in an administration which is unclear. One thing is less unclear. The MIT administration will doubtless continue its obsessive aversion to the public spotlight. While the President-- Doubtful.

Perhaps MIT fears controversy because its myriad research contracts are healthier in the dark. Even in the field of public information and education in which MIT has been unusually quiet. Nevertheless, there seems impetus from within the MIT community to force the college more into the limelight it could own but for asking.

The political institution has been unusually quiet. Education in science and technology it has been unusually quiet. Even on campus the administration moves efficiently and quietly. It has met with only time will tell, but signs point with ever-sharper resolution toward a bloody show down in El Salvador after January 30. The stage has already been set for direct US military intervention by the Carter Administration. Even without direct military action, Congress has set for direct US military intervention in El Salvador after January 30.

What exactly President-elect Reagan's Latin American policy will be only time will tell, but signs point with ever-sharper resolution toward a bloody show down in El Salvador after January 30. The stage has already been set for direct US military intervention by the Carter Administration. Even without direct military action, Congress has set for direct US military intervention in El Salvador after January 30.

The analogy with US involvement in Guatemala in the 1950's is striking.

The Carter Administration supports the military-civilian junta and portrays it as caught between left and right-wing extremists. When a moderate...