Editorials

General Assembly: Now is the time to act

As Undergraduate Association President Michael Witt '84 calls a newly elected General Assembly to order Thursday evening, students and administrators alike will wonder if student government will choose to be a viable, constructive force on the MIT campus.

For years, the Undergraduate Association has been generally ineffective, unresponsive and, in some cases, detrimental. This spring, the General Assembly has asserted itself, however. It has demonstrated it can be an important and influential advocate for undergraduate students at MIT.

The General Assembly, as the representative body of the undergraduates, should play an active role within both the student community and the larger Institute community. It should take decisive action in defining the roles students and the Office of the Dean for Student Affairs are to play in the management of student activities. It should thoughtful examine the complex relationships among the various committees, boards and councils comprising student government, and establish workable mechanisms for their accountability to their student constituency. It should evaluate the range of governmental functions and services and determine how they can be more effectively managed. It should insist that it alone hold authority to set policy and to speak on behalf of the undergraduates.

General Assembly representatives should take seriously the task before them this year. Their decisions, their actions and even their attitudes will greatly affect the future course of student governance and student activities. Not only today's MIT students but also tomorrow's rely upon them to do their job well.

Urban Action brings community contact

It is too easy for MIT students to become withdrawn from the "outside world," cut off from concerns of people who are not MIT students, and even to forget how to interact with them. Urban Action, a community service organization revived at MIT last summer, can help bring MIT students into closer contact with the community in which they live.

Urban Action has two purposes: matching prospective volunteers with groups that will find rewarding and helping MIT groups organize their own service projects. It has placed MIT students in the Big Brother and Big Sister programs and in volunteer positions in local hospitals and other groups. Urban Action has helped several fraternities organize construction projects, such as rehabilitating abandoned dwellings for use by low-income families. It has also organized special events with elementary school children and Halloween parties with senior citizens.

Urban Action presents MIT students with an opportunity to bring MIT students into closer contact with the community in which they live. Urban Action can help bring MIT students into closer contact with the community in which they live. Urban Action can help bring MIT students into closer contact with the community in which they live.

To the Editor:

In his column, "Misrepresentation and fear fuel nuclear-free measure" [Sept. 27], Simson L. Garfinkel seriously distorts the meaning of the Nuclear Free Cambridge Act by way of omission of an important exclusionary passage.

At the heart of Garfinkel's argument against the initiative act is his belief that if the act passes, MIT will not be "allowed to teach any more courses on nuclear devices or nuclear war." The text of the act, however, gives quite a different story. Section 6(3) states "Nothing in this act shall be construed to prohibit or regulate... basic research, the primary purpose of which is not to work towards the development of nuclear weapons.

The act thus covers no activities that occur on this campus, or Harvard's, for that matter. Any project having a primary purpose of developing nuclear weapons is classified, and MIT has a policy of not doing classified work on its Cambridge campus. Also, any such work is, by its very nature, federally funded by specific contracts that are available under various existing legal routes.

Thus with sufficient research, it is quite possible to determine exactly what work falls under the act's primary purpose of development clause.

It should further be noted that the act very clearly defines "nuclear weapons" to include such technologies as guidance systems, but only if such systems are "destroyed or rendered useless in the normal propelling, triggering, or detonation of the weapon." Thus general work on, such systems, e.g., for commercial airplanes, is not covered under this act.

The rest of the column is a mixture of ludicrous logic and an odd type of technocratic attitude. Garfinkel interprets the statement 'the use of resources for nuclear weapons prevents these resources from being used for directly needed human services' to mean that the act calls for researchers to be forced to design and drive buses. The word "resources" in the act actually refers mainly to our tax dollars, which year after year are wasted on the instruments of death instead of being invested in social needs.

Obviously these are problems whenever a company modifies its product line, or a federal contract runs out. This type of job insecurity, though non-optimal from the workers' standpoint, is quite the norm in American society, and especially in the defense industry. It should be noted here that the disappearance of jobs on nuclear guidance systems at the Draper Laboratory might be partially cushioned by the fact that Draper already does some commercial guidance work. Unless Draper decided to move, one would expect that they would expand that commercial work.

Garfinkel's technocrat elitist attitude is shown in the statement "the people in the group do not feel comfortable with technology they cannot understand." Application of this line of thought, usually used by nuclear power advocates, to the area of nuclear weapons is rather odd. One doesn't need to know a lot of math to realize the staggering numbers of people who will be killed if nuclear weapons are ever used again. And one doesn't need to be a political science major to realize that the new, accurate first-strike weapons, made possible by the sophisticated guidance system work done at Draper, are an all-too-likely route to the outbreak of nuclear war.

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