Tech policy

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Letters to the Editor are welcome. They should be addressed to The Tech, PO Box 29, MIT Branch, 2249 1 king St., MA 02139, or by interdepartmental mail to Room W20-483. Letters should be typed and bear the author’s signatures, addresses, and phone numbers. Unsigned letters will not be accepted. The Tech reserves the right to edit or condense letters. We regret we cannot publish all of the letters we receive.

Column/Scott Saleska

SDI: consider consequences.

(Editor’s note: The following is half of the text of Scott Saleska’s reply to the address of Dr. James L. Ronson, director of the Institute for the Study of Advanced Concepts, and chairman of the office of technology assessment in the Department of State’s Bureau of Intelligence and Research. The full text is published elsewhere.)

I don’t want to trouble you all too much at this time with argument; you have probably already seen or heard much of the technical feasibility of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI). It is not that they are particularly difficult or obscure—it is just that I would prefer simply to express my concerns about your program. Dr. Ronson, from the point of view of a student of science,

You speak a good deal about progress, and say that what you are trying to do with the SDI program is add the case of progress and the development of new technologies.

And that is something few people here would argue with—after all we are, most of us, very interested in technology, and we have a lot of fun with that. It is why most of us are here.

But the point that I am making is that we must see ourselves with more than just our own fun, and our own personal intellectual challenges in technolo.

We also have the responsibility to do something thinking about the consequences of our work.

So, progress, Dr. Ronson? Of course. But that alone is not enough. We must also ask, as politicians do, what the consequences of progress for whom? Where are we likely to find the beneficiaries of this particular technology—not just technology in the abstract. What are the human and social costs, the potential for negative consequences?

If the societal “progress” that SDI gives us is a greater danger of nuclear annihilation, that is not the sort of progress I think we really want. We should want valable resources— that we should want valable resources—where are we likely to find the beneficiaries of this particular technology—and excite it in us.

Now, before I am accused of being a huddler, or of wanting to "hold back progress"—let me point out that technological development can, at any given moment, proceed in a virtually infinite number of directions. But because our technological resources are not infinite, we are constantly required to make decisions.

Therefore, the research that is right for us at this moment, and why are our priorities now?

Guest Column/Rich Cowan

...technical, political flaws

While collecting signatures on the pledge against Star Wars re.

search in Lobby 10, I am con.

versational. The conversations are with. I have.

The question: "How can you oppos.

ers want to stop the research. We find out if it's feas.

able.

Pressed for time at the booth by students rushing to class, I'm inclined to give the short answer:

"The entire Star Wars (SDI) re.

search program requires defense against cruise missiles, which evade radar detection by follow.

ing the contours of a terrain. Even if SDI accomplished its goal, the Soviets are not capable of deploying more threatening submarine-launched cruise missiles a few seconds from our coast,"

Though I believe this short an.

swer is accurate, I am not sure all students don't like it. Some of them fear that the govern.

ment would not be stupid enough to spend $3.7 billion on a defense.

But remember who’s in the White House when Reagan was governor, near.

ly 10 years ago. In the March 1977 speech to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, President Carter said: "In the years to come, the United States and Great Britain. Despite the treaty, these companies are licensed to receive hundreds of millions of dollars of ballistic missile defense contracts from the government."

Other MIT students believe we’ll eventually discover a way to stop cruise missiles even though SDI doesn’t try right now. This is a natural reaction for MIT stu.

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