MIT, protesters need discipline

MIT damaged Alexander Township last Friday when it decided that the MIT Coalition Against Apartheid's occupation of Kresge Oval had lasted longer than was reasonable. In this action, MIT, an institution of high educational standards, should have placed more importance on patience and rational discourse than on quick solutions. The administration had some valid reasons to dismantle the shanties: the apparent threat of student attack on the shanties and the coalition's widely announced intention to remain on the Oval indefinitely.

The shanties could not remain on the Oval indefinitely. The Oval is a highly-used area during the spring. Other groups who support the anti-apartheid movement should not be pressured to give up their right to full use of the Oval.

In addition, although MIT has a responsibility to protect free expression on campus, one cannot reasonably expect the Campus Police to protect the shanties for an indefinite period of time.

But the MIT administration did not make a good faith effort to maintain open lines of communication. The past two weeks were marked by silence where there should have been direct discourse among the leaders of the coalition, concerned faculty, and administrators.

MIT should have stated a public policy on protests and MIT's method of handling them. Students should define the goals of their protests and conclude them when their goals are met.

Friday's action builds a wall between the students and those who should be working closely with them. An educational institution should not be run this way.

OPINION

MIT's action disappointing

Last Friday morning at 7 am, before most students were awake, Senior Vice President for Student Affairs William R. Dickinson '56 ordered the arrest of eight MIT students. The students, members of the Coalition, intended to prevent non-violently the eviction of a Coalition of Alexander Township, MIT's own symbolically South African shantytown.

Now, I am sitting at my desk, unable to go on from here with my work. My feelings are mixed: outrage, anger, and disgust - but also disappointment and sorrow.

As a member of the Coalition, I am angry. I cannot help but see this action as anything but a particular example of the administration's ongoing refusal to deal openly and in a straightforward way with the divestment movement on this campus. I see a majority of students in this campus vote for divestment - and then I see what some would conclude was the administration's response: a crackdown.

I speak not only as a member of the Coalition who felt that the shanties had served their purpose - but that it was time for us to successfully conclude this phase of our protest by taking them down ourselves. I had hoped that we would be given another chance to make our arguments.

"Just give us the weekend," I asked of West Plaza Director of Operations Stephen R. Immerman - but the administration could not even do that.

I speak not only as a member of the Coalition, but as a student. As a student, I feel that it is more than just the personal pile of wood and tarpaper that was occupying Alexander Township. It is about our worth as students in the eyes of this administration. When I think about it in these terms, the administration's actions last Friday mean much more.

For, in spite of all my anger about MIT, I was unable to see the world around me. I was involved in politics and activism, and about a governing body that virtually ignores the wishes of its students and faculty, and in spite of any other complaint I might have about the Institute, I continue to recognize that MIT was a relatively tolerant institution.

During the tumultuous years of the anti-Vietnam War protests, many colleges and universities throughout this country invited the local police forces onto their campuses to help students and break up demonstrations.

But at MIT, through all the building takeovers and office occupations, the Cambridge police were not brought on campus to take away students.

Yet there they were, last Friday morning, not 30 yards from the Kresge Oval: the Cambridge Police and paddy-wagon which took eight MIT students off their own campus for trespassing.

And that is only the most blatant and most recent incident. Last week President Paul E. Gray '54 was seen walking around with a bodyguard, and in response to the March 6th evening rally, a W3PM van and a K-9 unit were put under alert.

What is going on here? Has this Institute become so small and shallow, so insular and sure of itself, and so out of touch with its own students that it will tolerate protesters and marchers and a few stacks of wood without resorting to police-state measures?

Is this an open community where people can freely exercise their right of symbolic speech, or a world of mitigated, controlled expression?

Is this an institution of higher learning, with all the attendant attributes of academic freedom, tolerance of dissent, and encouragement of the critical spirit - or is it just another corporate factory designed for churning out engineering entrepreneurs in the most cost-efficient method possible?

The question is clear, for its answer determines where our values lie. If we are an institution of learning, the protest and criticism will not only be tolerated, but welcomed. If, on the other hand, we are primarily a degree factory concerned with maintaining its balance sheets, such dissenting activities are only a nuisance to be removed, and students and protesters alike more than problem solving.

In this respect, the actions last Friday morning say something about the administration's attitude toward each and every student on this campus, not only toward the eight arrested. Every student will have to decide what those actions say to him or her.

The few those actions say, "We don't care." Those actions say, "Ignore all our eloquent words about the high ideals of an educational institution. This is an action that matters."--

The current arc of curricular and co-curricular activity at MIT suggests a particularly strong commitment to harnessing the energy of many of you expressing MIT's desire to educate "leaders" with a sense of "radical responsibility." Dean of Undergraduate Education Margaret L. A. MacVicar recently [TechTalk, Feb. 5] that the goal of the new curriculum would be to help students develop "a critical view of their world."

I want our undergraduate students to serve their own citizenship in [our] complex, sophisticated, delicately balanced world, she said. "It is uniquely MIT's opportunity to prepare the world's arguably brightest talents to access between technical excellence and inhumanity and the world's arguably brightest talents to access between technical excellence and inhumanity and humanism and bad decency in this world, we will remember MIT's lesson.

It's getting late, I think, and I have to work. But to those who are surprised or confused at our anger and disappointment, remember that one is often most disappointed by those who are looked up to the most, and that one can be most saddened and angered by the failure of those whose principles are held the highest.

The last in analysis, is why I think I was out there on the Kresge Oval, because I want MIT to care; I want MIT to be on the noblest of standards and the reality seems so

The events of last Friday made that contradiction all the more painfully evident.