Melman addresses the effect of the military on the economy

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industry in his presentation. Historically, American industry has functioned successfully by minimizing production costs while producing quality, affordable, good at maximum rates of profit, Melman said. The militar-industrial complex "sharply curtails" this basic production process by its practice of minimizing production costs as well as profits, he said. High levels of government subsidies enable defense contractors to function this way, Melman explained.

Melman criticized America's military based economy on another score, saying that it produces socially worthless products. Nuclear weapons and the guidance systems "are useful for giving military utility, but you can't eat them, wear them, live in them... and they serve no purpose as a means of production." One role of the economy is to organize people to work, said Melman. In light of this, "the military economy is not simply neutral, it has a negative effect," he explained.

Furthermore, the military economy uses up valuable resources and generates incompetence in production, Melman said. Federal tax dollars could be better spent on housing the homeless, maintaining and expanding America's transportation system, improving the water supply, and cleaning up industrial wastes, to name a few, he said. Melman urged Americans to push politicians to work toward converting our present military-centered economy to a civilian-based economy.

Transportation and the military

Massachusetts Secretary of Transportation, Frederick Salvucci, began his presentation by pointing out that "one of the ways the military-industrial complex helps to keep this economy and society under control is fear of unemployment." This fear, especially among blue collar workers who are most exposed to it, is "one of the elements that maintains political support for military spending," said Salvucci. Salvucci proposed increased spending on transportation and other domestic services as a means of decreasing unemployment rates while at the same time producing a product that benefits the community. In turn, the lowering of the unemployment rate will serve to "liberates" workers from the fear of unemployment and thus their misguided support of military spending, Salvucci said.

The transportation system plays a critical role in maintaining Boston as a center of finance, education, medicine and government, Salvucci said. He said Boston's overcrowded subways and highways at rush hour are due to an oversizing of the transportation system, and he urged the public to push for increased federal funding of transportation services in place of military spending.

"The Military and the Economy" symposium was sponsored by MIT's Technology and Culture Seminar, MIT Student Pugwash, and the Disarmament Study Group.

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