Protest of ROTC is not harassment

To the Editor:

In a March 5 letter ("Don't ban ROTC"), William Jonsson '88 implies the community to not harass military members of the Reserve Officers Training Corp. He alleges that ROTC members were abused during a recent demonstration on campus.

The sole evidence that Jonsson offers of harassment is the protest sign which read for "ROTC out of MIT." He asserts that there would have been an outcry had the sign been stood for the removal of blacks or gays from MIT. Jonsson then concludes that there is a pattern of dangerous "hooliganism." Demonstrators did not harass individual students in ROTC

To the Editor:

After reading the letter by Jonsson, I was shocked at the incredible shallowness of its premise.

Jonsson displayed an utter lack of understanding of prejudice and harassment and seemed to prove a political point with a ridiculously ille- vestigated analogy.

Jonsson was upset because some members of a rally called for "civilian alternatives to ROTC" on the campus. This constitutes a form of harassment, as though he himself is not a qualified beauty of the hooligan group shouting "GAMIT out of MIT," to quote him. He perceives that his normally disallowed behavior is protected because of widespread student/faculty dislike of ROTC. Besides the questionable basis of Jonsson's claim, his argument fails on flawed logic. He confuses opposition to an organization (ROTC) with opposition to a group of individuals (ROTC students). The protest demonstrated a lack of sympathy to ROTC students. In fact, they were trying to help those very individualists be protected.

Jonsson contributed an important distinction when he equates membership in ROTC with being black or gay. Membership in ROTC is voluntary, being black or gay is not. It is Jonsson's estimation that ROTC members are paid to discriminate against the entire ROTC. ROTC members ought to be/facebooked with consequences of their choice. In join- ing the military, they relinquish their right to reach independent ethical decisions. In joining the military, they commit an institution that subjugates peoples in totalitarian regimes and threatens the world with nuclear holocaust.

Confrontation of ROTC members need not and should not be harassment. If the decision to enter ROTC is one of free will, then the decision to leave ROTC presumably is subject to a similar act of free will. Given the existence of ROTC on campus, the strategy of peace activists ought to be to convince ROTC members of their error. If peace activities are refused to engage ROTC members in dialogue, then they would be denying the ROTC members' ability to engage in moral reasoning.

Unfortunately, the decision to join ROTC is not always completely free. Some people are propelled into the military by financial hardship. Though pro- positional does not equal compul- sion, and people are not abashed of moral responsibility, peace activists must recognize such mitigating circumstances. This is one reason why a peace movement without a class analysis is incomplete. It would be necessary to harass individual members of ROTC. To do so would embarrass them from the underlying issue. While ROTC members bear in- dividual responsibility for their participation, ROTC itself cannot be without moral responsibility. It is not a plug-in group that can be called forth by its members. ROTC is instead part of a militaristic system whose existence is upheld only in terms of profit and international levels. Demanding "ROTC out of MIT" speaks not to individuals or their right of voluntary asso- ciation, but rather to systemic bases that precede, yet extend far beyond, MIT.

Larry Kolodnev '85

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Protesters are singled out for their views, not their actions

To the Editor:

We would like to respond to Dr. A. Lin Goodwin's letter, "What's the issue?" (Tech, March 10). Goodwin states that "few students have actually complained about the disturbance." We would disagree.

Protesters are singled out for their views, not their actions. Protests are met with police activity to be convinced of ROTC members' removal of their error. If peace activities are refused to engage ROTC members in dialogue, then they would be denying the ROTC members' ability to engage in moral reasoning.

Unfortunately, the decision to join ROTC is not always completely free. Some people are propelled into the military by financial hardship. Though propositional does not equal compulsion, and people are not abashed of moral responsibility, peace activists must recognize such mitigating circumstances. This is one reason why a peace movement without a class analysis is incomplete. It would be necessary to harass individual members of ROTC. To do so would embarrass them from the underlying issue. While ROTC members bear individual responsibility for their participation, ROTC itself cannot be without moral responsibility. It is not a plug-in group that can be called forth by its members. ROTC is instead part of a militaristic system whose existence is upheld only in terms of profit and international levels. Demanding "ROTC out of MIT" speaks not to individuals or their right of voluntary association, but rather to systemic bases that precede, yet extend far beyond, MIT.

Andrew Taylor '87

Perhaps Pierce and the others feel we should reimburse them a portion of their tuition. We doubt, however, that this would satisfy them. Further, why should they single us out? Do they feel they are emotionally threatened by the Logans, or by MIT's rolling ready equipment cars? We surmise that what bothered them so much were the issues that prompted the protest. Pierce also makes the vague observation that "freedom of speech does not imply any that this freedom cannot be exercised at any time." While we agree with his review of constitutional principles, his application of them to this situation is treasonous at best. What function does the govern- ance of rights? Pierce says "when my education is interrupted only so they can communicate their point, their right to free speech must end." If Pierce feels violated by our actions, we hope he ac- cepts our apologies. Perhaps he would also consider accepting protests as an important part of the MIT larger educational, not social, work.

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