Students split on gulf war

Column by Bill Jackson

Right now, on the MIT campus, everybody's constantly talking about the war. All the time. Everywhere. Yesterday, a Lobdell Court worker asked me if I wanted “pickles, pickles or Patton defense missiles.” One of my profs handed out a syllabus which ended, “LATE MAY: FINAL EXAM; To be scheduled by Scheduling Office. EARLY JUNE: TRIP TO SAUDI ARABIA: To be scheduled by Local Draft Board.”

Interestingly enough, with all the talk of war on this campus, I have no idea where the average MIT student stands on the war. On one hand, the third floor of the Holiday Inn — cops, Student Center — has been occupied by peace activists for weeks now. On the other hand, pro-war activists have posted the Institute with creative signs along the lines of “So damn imag e must be stopped” (Yuk, Yuk). Oh, sorry, the “Yuk, Yuk” was mine.

When I think international experts, I think Kissinger, Hammermanskidy and Simpson. I didn’t even know the Simpsons had their own foreign policy.

But this doesn’t tell me anything about the average student. First of all, I don’t think that a lot of the people on the third floor of the Student Center are MIT students. I base this on several observations. First of all, I don’t recognize most of them and MIT isn’t their bag. Second of all, they have infinite amounts of time to spend down there, and most MIT students don’t. But the most important reason is the sign at the east end of the Infinite Corridor.

This sign declares “Get Organized” in hippy-trippy Nosrite writing and then tells us about the “Peace and Justice Center,” which, says the sign, is on the third floor of the “Student Union Building.” No one on campus, except some of the “peace activists,” I mean the “activists” who are MIT students. I base this on several observations, which will be explained later in this column.

Anyway, the point is that no MIT students would ever refer to the Julius A. Stratton ’23 Student Center as the “Student Union Building.” The sign must have been painted (or tie-dyed) by a non-MIT student. In fact, it seems doubtful that MIT students were involved in any part of the process at all, considering that most MIT students are just barely able to fill the poster maker. “It’s not a student union; it’s a student center!” It seems as if people from outside MIT occupy us just to live on Stratton third and protest the war. All the time. Every day.

Of course, we know that nobody will ever ask them to leave, no matter who they are or what they do, because a famous revered person (who makes pretty speeches that rhyme) stood in front of a lot of cameras and declared that our Student Center was now the “Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Peace and Justice Center.” I don’t understand how this can stand. I mean, the last time I saw Jesse Jackson tried to rename a place, nobody liked it. Maybe he should have been calling New York the “Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Hymintown.”

At the same time, I’m not convinced of the numbers on the other side of the issue. How many pro-war activists are there on this campus? Not sure. They are at least enough to cover the place with wonderfully intelligent posters. My personal favorite, besides the aforementioned “So damn image must be stopped” (Yuk, Yuk), was Rocky: “That trick never works!” Perhaps the Smurfis: “Papa Smurf says, always keep your gun handy and know where your gasogram is.” For those war-time Rupert’s, the cup in the running close second behind Bart is the group of people I know who wanted to declare the second floor the “Bark Goldwasser Memorial Hymintown Glower Center.”

The letters to The Tech, usually a reasonably accurate barometer of student opinion, are all over the map and show no coherent student feeling on either side. So, I declare this a stalemate. But this doesn’t tell me anything about the average student.

And I don’t blame student opinion for being that way. During a recent press conference, I heard a military spokesman refer to KIAs and WIAs. It took me a few seconds to catch up with him: KIA means “killed in action” and WIA, “wounded in action.” Just as soon as you figure out that “Operation Desert Storm” is a synonym for “Bomb ‘Em Till They’re Goofy,” you throw another grenade at yourself. My favorite peace poster that came during Bush’s State of the Union address, when he lamented that this war comes during a “temporary interruption of the largest peacetime expansion in our history,” just a moment while I shovel away the map and show no coherent student feeling on either side. How many pro-war activists are there — on this campus? I’m not sure. Well, you get the idea.

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