

I'd like to begin by thanking the faculty for taking an interest in the fate of those students who were arrested two weeks ago, and for allowing me to speak on the issue of those arrests today.

My name is Larry Kolodney, and 13 days ago I was arrested by the MIT campus police for taking pictures of the destruction of the shantytown on Kresge Oval. I happen to be one of the two students who pleaded not guilty since I believe that I was legally in the right. However, the question of legal guilt or innocence is really besides the point here. We are not debating the right of MIT to remove undesirable persons from its property. Rather, we are questioning the criteria by which MIT finds certain persons to be undesirable in the first place.

For the first time in fourteen years, MIT has arrested some of its own students for political protest on its campus. And for what? Not for rioting, not for destruction of life or property. Not even for sitting in an office or the like. No, MIT has arrested eight of its own for conducting a non-violent non-obstructive educational protest on an issue of major concern to many members of the MIT community. The real question to be asked here this afternoon is: Exactly what sort of a relationship does the administration have with the rest of the community, that it feels the need to resort to such heavy handed measures to deal with dissent?

To be honest, I was quite startled when the police arrived at 6:30 AM on that Friday morning, for it was indeed frightening to be ~~awoken~~^{awakened} by a "knock on the door in the middle of the night", as Prof. Smullin so aptly described it. But in retrospect, I can't say I was much surprised by the actions that the administration took.

Ever since the MIT Coalition Against Apartheid was formed, approximately one year ago, the attitude of people in power at this institution towards it has been one of insensitivity at best, hostility at worst. When we approached the Corporation Advisory Committee on Shareholder Responsibility about our concerns, we were confronted with one stonewall after another. Requests for information were condescendingly rebuffed. "You really wouldn't be interested in this.", we were told. Later, a token public hearing WAS held, but on the second to last day of classes, and AFTER the current partial divestment policy had already been drawn up and finalized. A proposed public meeting for this term never materialized. From these responses, it seemed clear that the corporation and administration had absolutely no intention of allowing student sentiment to get in the way of their plans. Not even overwhelming support for full divestment in the faculty vote last year had any impact.

When the Coalition realized that working quietly through official channels was not going to accomplish much, it was decided to take the case for divestment directly to the MIT community, by means of public protests. And so the shantytown was built, and our list of demands, (for full divestment, increased minority enrollment, and job security for food service workers) was drawn up, and a week of political activity unseen on campus in recent memory was begun.

And how did the administration react to all this? With the same indifference and hostility that had characterized the previous

Corporation response. At first, the fact that it was a political protest at all was completely ignored. The MIT press releases on the subject made it sound as if it were some sort of an officially sanctioned cultural event.

Later, when marches on the corporation meeting belied this earlier claim, the administration changed its tactic to that of a show of force. We were greeted at the President's house Thursday evening by a literal phalanx of campus police and MDC police officers. Apparently they even had K-9 and SWAT teams prepared to intervene. This in response to a non-violent non-obstructive protest.

On Friday, during the full corporation meeting, we received a similar treatment. At this time we requested that three students be allowed to address the Corporation on the issue of our demands, so that some form of direct communication might finally be established. We were denied even this, and later told that the corporation did not have to answer to anyone but itself.

The next week, after the student referendum was held, the Coalition held a meeting to decide on the future of the shantytown. A consensus was reached at that meeting that although we had been victorious in the elections, our job of education on campus was far from finished. We felt that the shantytown could serve as an educational and cultural center and as a focus of the coalition's activities, and that steps should be taken, not only to maintain it, but to improve it so that it might be considered a genuinely positive influence on campus life.

Of course, this scenario was not to become a reality. The very next morning Senior Vice President Dickson arrived with police and physical plant workers, and proceeded to destroy Alexandra Township in a matter of minutes, arresting eight dazed students in the process.

Thus was ended one of the most significant protest actions that the MIT campus has seen in years. Ended by an administration that at its best tried to ignore it, but by its actions seemed only able to perceive it as a threat.

It is essential to note that during this entire episode that I have described, there was absolutely no attempt on the part of the administration to open up channels of communication to the protestors. The first official word we ever heard from the administration was the five minute warning the V.P. Dickson gave us the morning the shanties were destroyed.

Perhaps if MIT ^{were} was a factory, or some other commercial enterprise, it might be expected that its management would find protests threatening. But MIT is not a factory, but a great university! Its standards should not be simply those of the law. MIT is held to a higher standard, a standard that makes a university not just a training school, but also a place where new ideas are nurtured, where dissent is not only tolerated but encouraged, and where students of the university would never, but never be arrested for staging a non-violent, non-obstructive protest on an issue with which they had tremendous popular support, both in the campus community and the world at large. That standard is called academic freedom.

I believe that a great blow was struck against academic freedom on that Friday morning two weeks ago. MIT sent a message loud and clear to its students and to the world: We have no use for protestors, we have slight patience with dissent. It is interesting to contrast MIT's reaction to those of other universities, such as Princeton and Dartmouth, where shanties stayed up for months, or even of IBM, which somehow felt it appropriate to drop charges against a group of Brown U. students who had occupied one of its offices.

There have been those in the MIT community that have attempted to characterize the Coalition as a group of dangerous crazies, hellbent on destruction. If those same people had avoided this facile characterization, and instead attempted to attend our meetings or even to carefully read our literature, they would have discovered a group of thoughtful and concerned students, frustrated by their apparent impotence in the face of an administration that just didn't seem to care.

I find it somewhat ironic that as the events of the past month have unfolded, various faculty committees were in the process of publicizing their recommendations for a revamping of the MIT curriculum. A major thrust of these findings was of a need for engineers to develop a broader outlook on the world, for them to gain a fuller understanding and concern for the societal implications of their actions, or, to put it more colloquially, for them to give a damn. In light of this need, I ask you to consider the plight of eight MIT students who did give a damn. I ask you to consider the implicit message that has been sent by their arrests to students present and future about the efficacy of social action and the price that is to be paid for caring.

I would like to leave you with the following thought from the late Justice William O. Douglas of the U.S. Supreme Court:

"When the university does not sit apart, critical of industry, the Pentagon, and government, there is no fermentative force at work in our society. The university becomes a collection of technicians in a service station, trying to turn out better technocrats for the technological society. Then all voices become a chorus supporting the status quo; there is no challenger from the opposition warning of dangers to come. The result is a form of goose stepping and the installation of conformity as king. Such has been the increasing tendency in this country for the last quarter century."

I ask you then, members of the faculty, to register your displeasure at this disturbing trend, and to reinforce MIT's position in the long tradition of universities, as a haven for intellectual and political dissent, by giving your support to this measure.

Thank You.