

MIT's Faustian Bargain: Signs of Malaise

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a voracious consumer of defense research dollars (\$38 million in 1985), last year began to reexamine its ties to the Pentagon. Sparked by a petition from 40 members, the faculty put together a special inquiry in 1985, called the "Ad Hoc Committee on the Military Presence at MIT," chaired by economist Carl Kaysen.*

It has been a low-key review, unlike the storms that hit defense researchers in the 1960's. The recently published Kaysen report found that the Pentagon pays for 16.8% of MIT's research, making it the third largest funder after the the Department of Energy (22.5%) and the Department of Health and Human Services (17.2%). Pentagon funding is not as important now as it was in 1967, when it stood at 35%, but it is rising, as is industry support. Only 11% of all research at MIT is directed toward military applications, the Kaysen group found, which is less than students imagine.

However, the report did find widespread unease among the faculty over the government's push toward a narrow, more applied focus in military research.

This study began as a survey of attitudes on military funding. But it devoted special attention to the Strategic Defense Initiative, Kaysen said in a telephone interview, because faculty members see SDI as a departure from tradition. Under the old system, Kaysen noted, the universities and the military agreed that "the advancement of pure science and general technical expertise was a good thing. . . . Now the question is, are the security agencies going to narrow their focus?" Are they going to ask for specialized weapons research, and will they expect the universities to endorse this as a good thing as well?

This concern became acute this year because MIT is increasing its reliance on funds from the Department of Defense (DOD), and SDI is the fastest growing part of DOD research. Furthermore, at least one DOD official has made it clear he wants loyalty as well as technical advice from those who receive grants (*Science*, 25 April, p. 444).

A survey answered by 45% of the MIT faculty last fall evoked general dissatisfaction with the SDI. Only 5% of the 430 respondents said SDI would be generally good for the university, while 39% said it would be

bad. The rest were unsure or said it would have no effect.

On technical credibility, only 3% agreed that SDI would "make possible an effective nationwide defense against nuclear weapons," while 74% disagreed. A majority (58%) endorsed the statement that SDI is "unlikely to result in a useful defense system."

MIT faculty members were equally harsh in their judgment of SDI's political value, even if it is assumed the system will never be tested in war. Most disagreed with statements that SDI would be an asset to the U.S. strategic position (58%), be a good bargaining chip (40%), or have a good effect on the economy (57%). On the contrary, an overwhelming majority (75%) agreed that it would channel research away from the civilian economy, result in a new "defensive" arms race (75%), or escalate the "offensive" arms race (66%).

Members of the engineering school faculty, who rely more on defense funding than MIT as a whole, were less concerned about SDI's impact on the university and also more hostile to the survey. But the Kaysen committee notes that the "only significant" difference in the engineering school responses was that these faculty members were more often "unsure" about the strategic, economic, and political values of SDI.

Most interesting, perhaps, was the finding that 10% of the faculty members who received or expected to receive SDI money also said that SDI was bad for the university.

Kaysen said that many people have warned that taking money from SDI will bring about "intellectual corruption" at MIT. The situation reminds him of the "War on Cancer," an earlier crusade in which "a lot of dough was being shoveled out." Academics took the money with no expectation of solving the problem, telling themselves the funds would still go to a good cause—their own research. "A scientist who takes money and says, 'I know this doesn't make any sense,' gets into a difficult position," said Kaysen, "because one of the things the academic community is supposed to do is to provide an honest, earnest view."

The committee ended its report with a series of hard and perhaps unanswerable questions: "Will a tacit conspiracy of silence arise . . . ? Will the widespread acceptance of SDI funding result in the muting of public discussion of the program's merits by technically competent critics?"

The study gave no answers but passed the problem to MIT President Paul Gray. He will create another committee to decide what the university should do. ■

ELIOT MARSHALL

DOD's New Research Fund: 963 Seek and 86 Receive

The Pentagon's offer to fund scientific research under a new program known as the University Research Initiative (URI) has produced a massive response. Whatever qualms universities may have about military funding, they do not express them in grant-seeking behavior.

The Department of Defense announced recently that it received 963 proposals for research under the new program. If the Pentagon were to accept all of them, it would cost approximately \$6 billion. However, only \$110 million has been budgeted for URI. Defense scientists selected 86 worthy projects at 70 universities. Negotiations are under way to work out details on 3- to 5-year contracts that will begin in 1987.

The winners—a mixture of private and state schools from all parts of the country—made proposals that range from research on artificial intelligence to x-ray optics. California scored higher than any other state, with nine universities on the final list. ■

ELIOT MARSHALL

Scientific American Sale to German Publisher Okayed

The sale of Scientific American, Inc., to Verlagsgruppe Georg von Holtzbrink, a major German publishing enterprise, was affirmed on 7 July when the Scientific American board rejected an offer from British publisher Robert Maxwell. von Holtzbrink came out on top of a formal auction with a bid of \$52.6 million (*Science*, 18 July, p. 279). Then, just 2 days after the agreement was signed, Maxwell, who owns Pergamon Press Ltd. and the *Daily Mirror*, a London tabloid, offered \$61 million for the company which includes *Scientific American* and W. H. Freeman and Company, the textbook house.

Issues about how Scientific American, Inc., would be managed by either of the potential new owners were important to the final decision to honor the board's initial agreement with von Holtzbrink. The German firm has a tradition of giving its holdings a good deal of independence and intends to leave the present management in place. Maxwell, known for a flamboyant style, let it be known that he would have made changes. He now has withdrawn his offer. ■

BARBARA J. CULLITON

*The other members were Herman Feshbach (physics), Allan Henry (nuclear engineering), James Kirtley, Jr. (electrical engineering), Vera Kistiakowsky (physics), James Melcher (electrical engineering), George Rathjens (political science), Louisa Koch (graduate student), and Daniel O'Day (undergraduate).