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SACC NEWSLETTER

SCIENCE ACTION COORDINATING COMMITTEE

SACC AFTER MARCH 4

The SACC slogan before March 4 was "March 4 is a movement, not a day". We are now in the process of demonstrating its truth. After more than two weeks of endless meetings and intense discussions -- SACC has held about half a dozen general meetings attended by an average of about sixty people each -- we have a rough plan for action for the next few months.

The focus of the activity will be centered around the proposals we presented on March 4 and the methods to be used to implement them. Two groups or "committees" called CORE RESEARCH and LITERATURE COMMITTEE are in charge of writing the proposals in final form together with a critique stressing their political significance, and they are conducting a more thorough investigation of MIT and its relationship with the military-industrial complex, with special attention to the "activities" of the Humanities and Social Sciences departments and the Sloan School of Management.

The purpose is to provide a context in which the proposals and the methods used to implement them acquire a precise political meaning so that they can become effective not only for their intrinsic value but also as a means of focusing attention on the larger problems from which they derive.

SACC recognizes that any radical action which is taken today has to deal with the fact that the country is at war, and that according to recent statements by government officials, they expect to be at war for an indefinite period of time. This is an intolerable situation and one of our prime concerns should be to oppose it with all our strength. The SACC position on this subject is clear: At the general meeting on March 17 about 60 members present voted unanimously in favor of a motion calling for "immediate and total withdrawal of all US troops from Vietnam". SACC is

also in touch with other anti-war organizations planning spring actions in the Boston area.

An important activity organized by SACC during this week will be the Anti-ABM, Anti-war rally, Thursday, March 27 at noon on the steps of the Student Center. Speakers will be Noam Chomsky (MIT), Leo Sartori (MIT), Edgar Bottome (BU), and Ira Rubenzahl (SACC). The organization of the rally is in the hands of Jim Resneck (x3202). In connection with it a Letter Writing Campaign to Senators and Congressmen is being organized by Lewis Nashner.

Following is a list of SACC committees and persons to be contacted if you are interested in working on them.

Core research Ira Rubenzahl
Literature Com. Daniel Benn
External Publicity - Alan Chodos
Newsletter - Marco Saraceno, Steve Kaiser
Instrumentation Lab - Jonny Kabat
Other universities - Joel Feigenbaum
Action Committee - John Leisman

General SACC meetings are held weekly on Mondays at 8 p.m. in the Student Center (call SACC at x4775 for more information). Meetings of the committees are announced on the door of the SACC office (14N-218).

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide an effective channel of communication with the MIT community and to improve the dialogue with our members -- Articles, comments and criticism are welcome. Bring them in or send them to

SACC Newsletter
Room 14N-218
77 Massachusetts Ave.
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NEWS ANALYSIS

NIXON'S ABM DECISION

by Joel Feigenbaum

ACTION COMMITTEE

Clearly, the goal of any SACC activity should go beyond the acceptance of the proposals. We would strive to educate the student body, both graduate and undergraduate, and build up large scale support for issues such as those brought up by the proposals. We feel that we will eventually be possible to politicize a large part of the student body and that they would, in effect, become part of SACC.

Several methods were proposed:

- 1) A canvass of students
 - a) in labs of the Institute
 - b) in lounges and cafeterias
 - c) in living groups

All of these would consist of one or two members of SACC talking with a group of students.

- 2) Having daily rallies in the Great Court or in front of the Student Center.

- 3) Having parades through the Institute halls to publicize coming SACC events etc.

- 4) Guerrilla theatre.

- 5) Going into classrooms and initiating discussions either through invitation of the instructor or through approval of the students. There was a general consensus at the meeting that in order to sustain student interest over a period of several months SACC would have to initiate new activities as parades, rallies, and guerrilla theatre.

REPORT ON OTHER UNIVERSITIES

During the organization of the March 4 activities throughout the country SACC has obtained a large list of contacts at other universities and is in a position of leadership in the organization of radical activities among scientists. Universities at which groups similar to SACC are functioning are: Wisconsin, Yale, Pennsylvania, Harvard, Columbia, Minnesota, Maryland, Stanford, UCLA, Washington (St. Louis), Rockefeller U.

SACC will cooperate in the organization of the "End Campus Militarism" week in late April. This activity is being organized by RESIST, and NUC. We are in contact with Mike Klare, of NACLA (53 West 89th St., New York, N.Y. 10024) who has a large file of defense contracts in most universities and can be of great help for a thorough investigation of any institution.

The extended decision to deploy the ABM, which began with McNamara's speech of August 1967 has opened up for us a rare window into the corridors of our government. From now on little can be hidden.

It is interesting to review the various justifications and proposals for deployment in light of the assertion by Professor Hans Bethe of Cornell that the Sentinel system is in principle ineffective and in addition is vulnerable to saturation by warheads, decoys, balloons and chaff.

First was McNamara's thin deployment around the cities. Assuming it were effective, this system would protect against accidental Soviet or irrational Chinese attack. This was and remains the best argument for deployment.

But it didn't wash. First, it was pointed out that the probability of accidental detonation of a Sentinel warhead is not much less than that of an accidental Soviet attack (Inglis, Saturday Review). Then too, it was hard to demonstrate that a Chinese government which meekly countenanced our bombing of North Vietnam to within 40 miles of its border would be so irrational as to launch a meager attack in the face of our Minuteman, Polaris and SAC deterrent. The most serious criticism was that any deployment around our cities must be viewed by the Soviets as an offensive move, since decreasing the vulnerability of our population increases the possibility that we could launch a first strike without sustaining "unacceptable" losses in return.¹ Even Nixon concedes this latter argument.

Following the vehement criticism by scientists outside of the government, the inhospitable reaction in Reading to the Signal Corps Generals and the demonstrations elsewhere Laird suggested a new plan. This would be slightly larger and clearly deployed against the Russians (to enhance our strength at future disarmament talks). Edward Teller, at MIT last month, called it a pilot program for the thick system. We like to think that the March 4 research stoppage, which began at MIT and spread in one form or another to about fifty other schools, had something to do with stifling at least the rhetoric of the Laird-Teller proposal. For the first time, large numbers of scientists made a relatively militant demonstration of their conviction that powerful interests in our society are misusing technical capabilities in a wasteful, dangerous and even repressive fashion.

NIXON'S MARCH 14 SPEECH

On March 14 came the Nixon "compromise" plan to deploy a "thin" system around some of our missile sites. This was worked out with Henry Kissinger, while Laird was out beefing up NATO. It has some of the earmarks of a sound understanding of the balance of terror.²In this sense, it is a "compromise": it alarms neither the Russians nor our own urban citizenry. In a very elegant way, Nixon counters the argument that the system won't work very well--since it's no longer meant to protect our cities, it doesn't need to.

But a compromise is after all a synthesis of two partially valid antithetical propositions. The Nixon plan hardly deserves this description. All previous arguments for deployment are no longer even valid. It is mark of touching ignorance, profound cynicism, or complete desperation for Nixon to argue that the proposed deployment "is a safeguard against any attack by the Chinese Communists that we can foresee over the next ten years" and that "it is a safeguard against any accidental attack that might occur of less than massive magnitude which might be launched from the Soviet Union". Clearly no one in China would use up his trivial delivery capability in order to try to dent the US retaliatory force. Nor would an accidental, small scale Soviet attack be likely to damage our deterrent.

But Nixon adds a new argument to the arsenal of gratuitous justifications: that our second strike capability is in need of protection. We must admit that the fact that this justification has been so long over-looked by our strategic planners does make it appear to us as something of a *deus ex machina*. This prejudices us, but we are prepared to be convinced. If the Administration would make rigorous public documentation of the new threat to our retaliatory capability, it would certainly help. Also, of course, analysis of the relative cost-effectiveness of alternate protection mechanisms should be made public. For example, could one increase the hardening of Minuteman sites by digging them deeper or adding more concrete? You can do a lot of that stuff with a few billion dollars. Or perhaps some sites should be destroyed and more Polaris built instead - would that be cheaper and safer? Indeed, is there any serious study within the Administration about the possibility that some schedule of unilateral disarmament might in fact optimize the greatest portion of our citizens' and the world's goals?

What does the ABM fiasco teach us? What does it mean when two administrations, unable to find one good argument to justify a multi-billion dollar project, instead seek to promulgate many mutually inconsistent and completely fatuous arguments? One thing should be obvious: the ABM will be built regardless of any consideration of purpose or effectiveness.

No longer should the cry of national security rally any citizen to immediate support of governmental military policy. Those scientists and engineers who have been vital to the present state of ABM "development" are now realizing that they have been party to the perpetration of a grotesque hoax. MIT, which has made great contributions to ABM "technology" must cease allowing its facilities to be wasted in this fraud. It must stop lending its technological prestige to the misleading legitimization of this ludicrous effort.

Scientists who are working on military systems which are "effective" must question the arguments which have been offered for the necessity of these projects. Sophisticated weaponry for use in Vietnam must be validated not in terms of effectiveness, but in terms of the validity of our purposes in Vietnam. The arguments which have been offered by three administrations in defense of our Vietnam policy are no less confusing, inconsistent and duplicitous than the justifications served up for the ABM. MIT must discontinue such war-related research as its development of all-weather helicopter guidance systems. Further, MIT should stop providing technological cannon fodder, which it does by encouraging engineering students to work in cooperative programs, in industry, and on classified projects related to the ABM or to the war in Vietnam.

If the ABM gives us some insight into the credibility of our military policy, it also forces us to ask a good number of hard questions. If one insists on calling the Nixon plan a compromise, what is the force or rationale which is opposed to the overwhelming arguments against deployment? The usual answer is the military-industrial complex. But this is a phrase, not an explanation. Is the problem due to the megalomania of our military establishment, embroiled as it is in interservice rivalries and intra-service empire-building? Or the collusion of rapacious business executives in interaction with boondoggling Congressmen, or in the "techno-structure", with its need for the careful planning, secure growth, and the demonstration of technical virtuosity which military development and production affords?

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A more important question is whether the problem can be sufficiently isolated so as to enable one to approach its solution. Can the United States "afford" to de-escalate the arms race? If our government's justifications for the Vietnam war are as false as the ABM arguments, then why are we in Vietnam -and what relation do the underlying causes for the war have to the real reasons for ABM deployment? What dynamic is there at play which forces us to build useless weapons extravaganzas, and to waste 32,000 young lives and \$100 billion in Vietnam, while our cities rot, our air and water is polluted and while starvation and preventable disease plague the lives of hundreds of thousands of black citizens?³

At MIT, which has provided so much military/economic technology and which could be vital in curing our desperate social and environmental problems, we have a chance, to examine some of the questions which have just been raised. Is it financially, legally and politically possible for MIT to disentangle itself from the important part it plays in the promulgation of military policy?

Finally we come to some issues of what is usually called "foreign policy" which have been raised by Nixon's version of the ABM. We can take hope from the fact that Nixon's rhetoric in the new proposal is designed to minimize the possibility of straining relations with the Soviets, particularly on strategic matters. There seems to be a sense that a runaway arms race with Russia, and the ensuing possibility that neither side will have a precise understanding of its own first or second strike capability is too dangerous a prospect to live with. (This is not inconsistent with the economic need for continued weapons production. Defense industries cannot operate in the unpredictable environment of an all-out arms race. These firms have a need to plan and control their sources of capital and input materials. Also, the relative importance of defense and consumer-oriented industry must not be too violently upset). Nixon appears to understand that the stakes are too high and the risks too great to attempt anything but conciliation; not even armaments can safely be sold to the American people on the basis of a Soviet menace.

In what some people will consider to be an extraordinary statement for an old red-baiter, Nixon said, on March 14:

"I would point this out, an interesting thing about Soviet military and diplomatic history; they have *always* thought in *defensive* terms, and if you read not only their political leaders, but their military leaders, the emphasis is on defense."

Nixon explains the necessity of the Soviet ABM deployment in terms of the Chinese threat, thereby reducing Soviet-American tension, and incidentally giving further justification for our own project:

"I would imagine that the Soviet Union would be just as reluctant as we would be to leave their country naked against a potential Chinese Communist threat. So the abandoning of the entire system, particularly as long as the Chinese threat is there, I think neither country would look upon with much favor."

It seems quite clear that no crass, overt and dangerous hostility can be allowed to alter the existing situation which permits the US to protect her "interests" in Vietnam and Latin America without substantial Soviet interference, while the Russians in their turn continue their hegemony in Eastern Europe and consolidate their position in the Mediterranean.

This open call to the Russians for a mutual understanding based on the common threat of an underdeveloped, non-Western nation should have very interesting consequences.

Footnotes

1. The ABM deployment around Moscow is of the old Nike-Zeus type and is well known to be truly useless.
2. President Nixon seems nearly to have mastered this principle (the influence of Henry Kissinger is here apparent). In somewhat garbled fashion he said on March 14:

"Moving to a massive city defense system, even starting with a thin system and then going to a heavy system tends to be more provocative in terms of making credible a first-strike capability against the Soviet Union."

3. See The New Republic. March 8, 1969, article by Robert Coles.

Editors

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