

## STANFORD SHOULD CUT CORD TO SRI

Stanford Research Institute, founded in 1946, is past the age of dependency. It is strong enough to stand alone, to get along without sustenance and guidance from Stanford University trustees and top administrators. So the umbilical cord between the university and SRI should be cut.

No better proof of the need to sever this tie exists than this week's sit-in at the Applied Electronics Laboratory on the Stanford campus. It has been conducted by students who say the trustees who run the university and SRI have ignored requests to stop research on chemical and biological warfare and military weapons.

The record belies their charge, for the trustees have been responding--- though the responses haven't suited the activists. A major study of the university-SRI relationship is in progress, and only Wednesday the trustees asked SRI to hold up decisions on new contracts for such research.

Even so, radical activists---perhaps afraid they were losing the initiative--- staged the sit-in to try to force action on their protest. Typically, the provocateurs exploited a genuine issue that torments many less extreme and more conscientious members of the campus community.

Stanford ought not to have to endure such embarrassment, nor defend research decisions made by government units in Washington, Sacramento or some city hall or county seat. A university's primary concern, along with education, is fundamental research, not applications.

It is unrealistic to expect the university to exercise close control of a busy, almost autonomous agency that makes a raft of deals with government and private industry--and that at times must drum up work to keep its staff occupied.

SRI and Stanford have had a fruitful association, and their Midpeninsula base has benefitted from it, too. But times have changed. The prestigious direct link with Stanford no longer is vital to SRI's growth. Indeed, SRI has had to steer clear of some sorts of projects lest it cast the slightest shadow on the university's reputation and interests.

Applied research is wholly legitimate. It can thrive on its own.

It is evident that SRI now runs the risk of being harassed and disrupted by students decrying one or another of its operations on political grounds. It need not have the remotest legal association with college students. It needs freedom to sell ideas, to dabble in the market-place, and even to convert itself to a profit-making basis if such a change becomes advisable.

If it can justify it within its own management, SRI should free to contract to advise a banana republic strongman, analyze Air Force bombing plans, or tell a Nevada gambling operation how to lure more customers.

Plainly such functions can result in conflicts, even incompatibilities, with the scholarly standards of the university.

A clean break is what's needed---perhaps even to the point of dropping the 'Stanford' from SRI's name.