The task we face

It is time to recognize that events on this and other campuses signify something much more than a passing phase of the life of the university in our society for the next few decades.

The universities are simultaneously the sources of the most sensitive barometers of the pulse of our society and the experts whose technical expertise which makes it function. As such, they are both the servants and critics of society. Clearly the universities can abdicate neither of these seemingly contradictory roles; consequently, they must find some sort of trade-off between these two functions which will survive the test of time.

It is vital that all members of the institution recognize community this re-evaluation is happening. It is vital that they recognize that conditions in our society make this inevitable. No one will be able to forecast this needed effort by ignoring those who have already done so. The universities have role to play in this.

When most members of the MIT community arrived here, they probably came with the assumption that a certain "social contract" was in effect, which enabled them to concentrate all their efforts on their professional careers. Their conception of their work did not include, for the most part, grappling with the moral, political, and social issues which are now being raised. Yet MIT occupies a very special place in this country. Under the current circumstances, it would be suicidal for the Institute community to fail to face its responsibilities, to redefine its role in society. If professional work must be placed on the back burner for the moment, so be it. Those who do not do so must find some safe haven for their work after the current turmoil is resolved. In the past, apathy is something which has criticized on this campus, but it didn't really matter if someone was apathetic simply because the years toward which he was apathetic were of secondary importance. The time is rapidly approaching, however, at which those who are apathetic toward the current situation will simply be disenfranchised by the course of events.

If the meetings next week are viewed as the best way to decide upon new ways to achieve needed change rather than a means of avoiding confrontation at a minimum cost, they will be an appropriate first step toward redrawing the MIT social contract. This task will undoubtedly forestall this needed effort by ignoring those who will ignore Mr. Freeman's letter, or try to make it seem unimportant. For the fault will not lie with the "American Establishment," with any society for the next few decades.

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