Commons has long history of discussion

Editor's note: The relative merits of compulsory versus voluntary commons warrants a discussion long before this year's Dining Commons Rules. The following article, printed in the November 13, 1970 issue of The Tech just before commons turned voluntary, is a collection of 13 years of arguments over commons.

The story of the struggle for voluntary commons is a long and frustrating one which may soon have a happy ending.

In 1937 MIT switched from an Institute-run dining service to one run by an outside agency, The University Food Service at the Student Food Corporation which has it ever since. At that time, there was some discussion of the issue of compulsory versus voluntary commons. The 1965 report of the Ryer Committee strongly endorsed the idea of compulsory commons. To quote from the report: "Pleasant and relaxed dining within the student's own house can and should be a significant educational experience. Very few other occasions can so profitably be utilized for the interchange of ideas between students and their elders." However, according to a memo of William M. Mackintosh, Assistant Director of the Office of General Services at that time, "There is considerable opinion in favor of a voluntary commons meal program."

Voluntary commons, however, ran up against some hard economic facts. A plan was ad-

vance by which Baker's dining hall would serve both Baker and Burton on a voluntary basis (at that time Burton had no dining hall). In the end, compulsory commons won out. Walker and Ashdown remained then as now voluntary commons facilities. In 1960 Burton gained a dining hall and compulsory commons. When McCormick and MacGregor were built they were equipped with dining facilities, and their residents were required to take commons meals.

In the period immediately follow-

ing the opening of the Burton Dining Hall, there were numerous complaints from the residents who previously had not been on compulsory commons. Their complaints were directed at getting more cooperation from the Dining Service rather than directly at obtaining voluntary commons. For example, there was a strong attempt to obtain liberal transfer privileges. However, having students eat in their own dorms had been a primary goal of compulsory commons.

In 1963, the Committee on Student Environment dealt a heavy blow to the cause of voluntary commons. (In a supposedly "timely" report, the Committee set undergraduate housing policy for the following seven years.) The Committee endorsed building dining halls in all new undergraduate residences, retaining compulsory commons, and extending it to all "unfortunate male student-owned" houses as well as McCormick Hall. The Committee felt, the decision regarding creation of the commons plan to 18 or 20 more per week to "student preference."

That voluntary commons remained as an important issue to students after this is evidenced by the fact that the question was discus-

sed on flyers for the 1964 UAP election. One candidate stated: "Two of the reasons for compulsory commons, indirect educational advantages and good health, given by CSF in The Tech are weak. The real reason is financial. The Institute, has, unfortunately, no sizable endowments to provide funds for dorms, etc. Without compulsory commons in Burton and Baker, it is likely that the din-

ing service could not survive."

At the beginning of the 1969 spring term, several West Campus students, mainly from Burton, organized a Commons boycott, with the staged goal of registering dissatisfaction with the existing commons system and achieving at least some type of semi-voluntary commons. Their main financial argument was that several restaurants served better food at lower prices. Their supporters were divided between those who sought better quality food and those who objected philosophical-

ly to the compulsory nature of commons. The students sought access to statistics on commons costs. They were denied them. The boycott was broken by ad-

ministration statements that com-

pulsory commons would remain (Please turn to page 11).