MIT makes first step
many more needed

The MIT Corporation Executive Committee's decision to approve the installation of kitchens in East Campus and Senior House was a good first step. It will save millions of dollars by not having to renovate Walker Memorial at this time. Reducing crowds will benefit those people who will continue to eat at Walker. Most of all, it will benefit the residents of the two dormitories, who will again be able to eat what they want when they please.

This successful proposal demonstrates the positive results that may be achieved when the MIT Administration adopts an open-minded, cooperative attitude toward student suggestions. Students were welcomed literally, not metaphorically, because they were not treated as naive adversaries with nothing to contribute.

Approval of the east campus dining proposal is MIT's first step toward admitting it was a good idea, costly mistake when it fostered mandatory commons on the hopeless class of 1984. The MIT Administration should acknowledge its error and abolish mandatory commons.

It is unfortunate that the only time the MIT Administration will accept a student proposal is when it will save MIT more than it will save the students. If MIT made its students when mandatory commons was first instituted had not been met — food quality has not improved, menu choices remain virtually unchanged, cost has steadily increased, and everyone seems to have forgotten the food cooperative proposal.

The acceptance of the east campus kitchen proposal also belies the Administration's contention that the institution of mandatory commons would promote socialization among undergraduates. Upperclassmen, after one, two, or more years at MIT have, presumably, met and made friends. If they have not, lunch will not do it for them. Freshmen, who do not rely on the benefit from eating together, freshmen, however, have other social outlets, such as 8:01 lectures and 18:01 problem sets, to bring them together. In fact, mandatory commons may be social barriers, not socializers. They prevent freshmen on commons from socializing with those who are not, or with upperclassmen who arrived at earlier commons and are not needed.

While a crowd of diverse people can eat on commons, some not, may choose to patronize a Central Square fast food place voluntarily, no one eats Walker (turkey tetrazzini) without being forced. Telling adults what to eat, and when, is not a position MIT should take.

The actual, rarely mentioned reason for mandatory commons was to prevent dining services from raising prices to even more exorbitant levels or going bankrupt. Since Food Services is an in-house operation, MIT would not like to admit this may happen. Nevertheless, MIT must be forced to compete for students' food dollars, rather than relying on a captive clientele. If MIT cannot price its food reasonably, it should get out of the food business, and award an MIT Dining contract to an outside source.

If these mandatory commons would empty some dining halls, MIT should close them then, as they are currently considering closing Walker in the evenings. Savings could be passed on to remaining diners in the form of better quality and lower prices.

The east campus kitchen proposal was a good first step. It should not be the last.