The prospect of nuclear war is incomprehensible as it is terrifying. That both houses of the United States Congress voted decisively this week to appropriate millions of dollars for testing the MX missile is a chilling reminder of the dangerous distance separating the superpowers from an agreement to put an end to the race to build and deploy greater numbers of even more destructive nuclear weapons. A letter drafted last fall by the Disarmament Study Group proposed an end to that insane race, and two months ago that letter, bearing the signatures of over 3000 members of the MIT community, was presented to members of the US Congress:

As members of the staff, faculty, and student body of MIT we share the concern of most American citizens over the accelerated development of nuclear weapons and the inadequacies of the measures and processes between the two superpowers, and over the increasing danger of nuclear weapons in the hands of other governments.

We therefore urge all members of Congress to move toward reducing the risk of nuclear war in any part of the world, and toward the eventual abolition of nuclear weapons, by accepting and implementing the following proposals:

1. The United States should vigorously negotiate with the Soviet Union and other nations, and to apply appropriate verification: first, a mutual moratorium on the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and on missiles and warheads designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons; and following that, a substantial reduction of existing weapons systems.

2. The Congress of the United States should in the interim refrain from appropriating funds to the testing, production, and deployment of nuclear weapons and of missiles and warheads designed primarily to deliver nuclear weapons; and following that, a substantial reduction of existing weapons systems.

3. The United States and the Soviet Union and other nuclear powers should declare a moratorium on nuclear testing, in any circumstances and in any part of the world.

4. The United States should receive negotiations with other countries leading to a comprehensive nuclear test ban in accordance with the provisions previously agreed by the United States and the Soviet Union.

5. The United States and the Soviet Union should work vigorously with other nuclear powers upon a moratorium on nuclear testing in circumstances that do not pass these tests.

Offshore this country — and of other nations in the nuclear club — have clearly failed to make a serious commitment to nuclear disarmament, let alone to assume leadership in the disarmament statement. Hope seems to lie only in the hands of concerned citizens to convince others of the importance and urgency of their message: Mankind and nuclear weapons simply cannot coexist.

The efforts of citizens of the world community to deliver their message will be supported fully; a demonstration of popular, international unity on this issue can be of significant influence. The stated goals of MIT community members urging participants in today's commencement exercises to wear green armbands to demonstrate solidarity with the European disarmament movement are most laudable.

Some supporters of the disarmament movement are hesitant to fully support today's demonstration lest they be seen as fearing the green "armbands" may be interpreted as signs of support for the West German Green Party, or conversely, disdain for former Chancellor Schumacher's Schumacher Club, or for both. In any case, especially those reporting and interpreting them for others, should take care to assume no more than that the wearers of green armbands are trying to make citizens of the world see them as mere stepping stones to the goal of world disarmament.

The other day, a friend was telling me about his decision to leave an important committee in student government. He found the members of the committee rather reactionary, uncaring, and out of touch with the people they are supposed to serve. He debated whether to stay and try to change things, or to leave the committee, moving on to more productive and less frustrating areas of service. He finally decided to leave. "Why should I want my time and energy trying to change the way they think?" she said. "After all, they're all just engineers."

Just engineers. What does it matter how we think or what we believe, since many of us will spend most of our lives selling ourselves to the highest bidder, doing whatever we are told without worrying much about the implications of our work. "After all, someone's going to work here. Why should I sacrifice my career and lifestyle for some ideological crusade?" I can't change anything. Better to look out for Number One and not try to change the world . . ."

Some would describe the insistence of "being a tool" as a form of suffering. Yet engineers are the ones that train people to build machines, but also turning them into machines: unthinking, unfeeling creatures, little more than cogs in the great military-industrial complex. Harvard turns out thinkers and leaders while MIT turns out calculators who follow orders.

That image bothers me, because I think there is more than a little truth to it. So many people do not like, much less love, what they are doing, but continue anyway, hoping a job with a good salary will bring peace and happiness further down the road. The thing that most saddens me about MIT is people who say, "I hate this f—ing place," but are later likely to fondly regard their time here as the best years of their lives.

Engineers should be one of the most creative and exhilarating professions in the world. Approach in the right way, engineering can be an art form as engineers strive to create functional and beautiful things to fulfill important needs as simply and elegantly as possible. Too often we spend our time and energy on projects that either fill no real needs or are simply too large and complex to be beautiful. Anyone can do something more important by taking insight and talent to make them.

No wonder so many engineers find their careers unsatisfying, or see them as mere stepping stones to management. Management is, at best, a necessary evil. We need managers, but too many create stifling bureaucracy, concerned more with money than with quality. Yet the managers make the high salaries and the important decisions while engineers follow orders and live comfortable middle-class lives without thinking too hard. It might not be a great life, but it is just good enough and just secure enough that the engineer will not want to rock the boat and chance falling overboard.

Nor will most engineers take a chance on grabbing a more substantial amount of power and control. Life is easier when the big decisions are made by someone else and one can work within a limited framework without having to answer, or ask, questions about the direction of our society. It is much easier to say, "It's not my responsibility. Blame it on the guy upstairs," than to wrestle with questions of the value of one's actions, both to oneself and to the world.

I dream of a day when people are less specialized, where each can practice the possibility for the world to see, and the fruit they bear. I dream of a society in which values deeper than mere economics form the basis for decisions, where people place more emphasis...