Non-registrant explains decision to take leave: Cannot afford to attend

To the Editor:
The following is the full text of the letter which was presented at the MIT faculty meeting last Wednesday, Sept. 21:

I am writing this letter to explain my reasons for taking a leave of absence from MIT this fall, and to contemplate the regrettable circumstances that have made such a course of action necessary. As a non-registrant for the military draft, I am denied federal financial aid under a new law known as the Solomon Amendment. I am therefore not financially able to attend MIT this term.

The decision to remain a non-registrant in the face of this new law is a difficult one for me. Although my conscience clearly requires that I be opposed to war, I continue to grapple with the question of whether not registering is the appropriate way for me to stand up for that belief. Nevertheless, after much consideration, I feel that I must continue to hold that stance. But I shall maintain an open mind that continues to struggle with the ambiguities of that position.

Likewise, my decision to leave school is not one that I undertake lightly. I am fully aware of the value of a university education. To be truly educated, I believe, is to possess much more than merely the technical skills required for a challenging, well-paying job; it is to have the intellectual and spiritual resources to pursue a flourishing life. "Education," Emerson once wrote, "should be as broad as man... The great object of education should be commensurate with the object of life. It should be a moral one; to teach self-trust; to inspire man with an interest in himself; with a curiosity touching his own nature; to acquaint himself with the resources of his own mind, and to inflame him with a piety towards the Grand Mind in which he lives."

Many of the abilities included in such a noble ideal cannot be explicitly taught, and depend upon less tangible dimensions of human experience. The ability to create, to see connections, to make metaphor—all contribute to the ability to grapple with issues that rarely have clear-cut answers. It is therefore imperative that institutions of education provide an atmosphere that nurtures and encourages those abilities to develop. This is why universities have traditionally been places of free and open discourse, places where even unpopular opinions and ideas are allowed full expression.

Because I so value these principles, I am deeply troubled by the Solomon Amendment. Indeed, anyone who is concerned about maintaining a free academic environment should be troubled as well, regardless of his opinions on draft registration. In fact, the Solomon Amendment is a law that requires institutions of learning to violate the principles upon which they are founded. It is a law that strikes out at and discourages some of the very students who would doubt, who would question, who would struggle with difficult moral dilemmas. It is a law that unfairly encourages many, on the basis of economic class, to disregard their consciences, to go against their better judgment, and to follow a course of action that they consider morally questionable. It is sad irony that an institution of education should be made party to such a law.

Although I am disappointed in MIT's reaction in so readily complying with Solomon, I recognize that MIT also is in a predicament and is trying to steer a practical course of action. The fact remains, however, that I will be unable to attend school this fall because of a law that MIT, as an institution of higher education, should be vigorously opposing with all the means at its disposal. I shall continue to be open to those who would educate me further regarding MIT's position; I welcome advice and counseling from those who sympathize with my stand as well as from those who are critical of it. I especially call on those members of the administration, faculty, and student body who share my concerns about academic freedom to join me in voicing their protest against the Solomon Amendment.

Regardless of my non-student status this fall, I intend to continue my education. I shall have a position as teaching assistant for the Concourse STS-200 class, and I shall continue to have a job as a computer programmer for the Psychology Department. I have enjoyed and greatly benefited from my time as a student at MIT. I look forward to returning and finishing my physics degree if it is possible for me either to reapply to MIT next fall or to find alternative financial resources.

Scott R. Saleska '85

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