Editorial

Think hard before using illegal drugs

The recent death of Keith T. Ennis '84 is a tragic example of what can happen when people use illegal drugs carelessly. Ennis died of oxygen deprivation after inhaling nitrogenoxide while alone in a locked room.

A person's decision whether or not to use illegal drugs is based upon the accumulation of years of growth and many experiences. If you have decided to experiment with illegal drugs, no matter what anyone says about them, you are probably not going to change your mind now. The important point is this: If you decide to use illegal drugs, be smart about it. Know what you are taking, what the possible effects are, and above all, never take illegal drugs while alone.

The horror stories of drug abuse are true. Great tragedies—like Ennis' death—have occurred due to drug usage, and you are taking, what the possible effects are, and above all, never take illegal drugs while alone.

When you look at this page in next Friday's issue of The Tech, you'll notice a slight difference—my name won't be there. I resigned as editor in chief, effective as of noon tomorrow.

In my four months as editor, I have tried to explain what The Tech does and why it does it that way. I have tried to communicate what I think a newspaper is and what it should be, and how I think The Tech fits into the MIT community. I hope my successor continues this effort.

My leaving was not at all prompted by the headline incident I wrote about last issue. Rather, there were a number of reasons. I submitted my resignation to the Managing Board of The Tech two weeks ago, along with amendments to its constitution and bylaws. I resign so that these changes could be considered on their merits, without involving personalities.

The Tech's highest authority is its board of directors. Acting for that board on a day-to-day basis is the Executive Board, whose four names you see at the top of the masthead every issue.

Individually after that board comes the chairman, who is the leader of the organization; the editor in chief, who is responsible for the words and pictures; the managing editor, who is responsible for the style and production of the newspaper; and the business manager, who is well, responsible for the business. My objections to that structure, briefly, are that a committee system is bad for a newspaper, and that the style of the newspaper influences its content, and should be within the purview of the editor in chief.

 Committees are good for most organizations—like the Undergraduate Association—because they can be representative of a varied constituency. A newspaper, though, has a person who must be personally responsible for its content.

One does expect the publisher should be able to override the editor or business manager. At The Tech now, the production department and the business office have a say in what stories run; the print side has a say in the advertising rates, and so on. This system goes against the separation of departments existing at virtually every other newspaper in the United States.

Those newspapers respect the integrity of their editors. Suppose an amendment or decision is addressed by the newspaper. The business manager would probably be opposed. If he had a say in print decisions, controversial topics might not be addressed by the newspaper.

 There is a conflict of interest. Marshall McLuhan argued very convincingly that the medium is the message. Where an editor placed a story or picture, what kind of graphics and logos he uses, and all other aspects of appearance affect the content of the news. One person—not two, and not a committee—must have final authority to determine what the newspaper says and how it says it.

The editor of The Tech does not have the authority to say what stories go where in each issue. If the managing editor decided to run this column upside-down on page 20 next to the pistol story, I could not do anything about it individually.

If the board of directors does not like how the editor does his job, it should offer suggestions or remove him—not override him.

No one can do the job of editor if he must split his authority and have a committee of people, some with no background in or knowledge of news, over him.

Barry S. Surman '84, the previous editor-in-chief, resigned in November for much the same reasons. He warned me not to take the job, but I didn't listen. I thought the problems he described might be due to conflicting personalities and that a new volume of The Tech would set the cessation of conflict.

In two years I have proposed several amendments and resigned so debate would not become one of whether or not to give me more power. The Tech's board rejected my amendments, however, believing the problem to be one of conflicting personalities. I hope my successor has more luck—or fuer.I fear he will not.

For two years I've been a pretty loud voice on this campus. I've shot of my mouth— or my keyboard—about everything from representative student government to being a fat jock. My resignation from The Tech will not alter that situation. I'll write now and then, and I'll be around in other ways. I'll then, see you in the funny papers.

Robert E. Malchman