Vietnam and the Draft

250 College and University Student-Body Presidents

(1969)

Students have, for a long time, made known their desire for a peaceful settlement. The present negotiations, however, are not an end in themselves, but rather, the means to a complete cease-fire and American extrication. And until that cease-fire is reached, or until the Selective Service System is constructively altered, young men who oppose this war will continue to face the momentous decision of how to respond to the draft.

In December of 1966, our predecessors as student body presidents and editors, in a letter to President Johnson, warned that "a great many of those faced with the prospect of military duty find it hard to square performance of the duty with concepts of personal integrity and conscience."

Many of the draft age have raised this issue. In the spring of 1967, over 1000 seminarians wrote to Secretary of Defense McNamara suggesting the recognition of conscientious objection to particular wars as a way of "easing the coming confrontation between the demands of law and those whose conscience will not permit them to fight in Vietnam." In June of 1967, our predecessors submitted, along with a second letter to the President, a petition signed by over 10,000 draft-eligible students from nine campuses, calling for alternative service for those who cannot fight in Vietnam. There have been many other similar attempts to influence Congress and the Administration. Nonetheless, despite all our efforts, the Selective Service System has remained impervious to constructive change. Presently, thousands of fellow students face the probability of immediate induction into the armed forces.

Most of us have worked in electoral politics and through other channels to change the course of America's foreign policy and to remove the inequities of the draft system. We will continue to work in these ways, but the possible results of these efforts will come too late for those whose deferments will soon expire. We must make an agonizing choice: to accept induction into the armed forces, which we feel would be irresponsible to ourselves, our country, and our fellow man; or to refuse induction, which is contrary to our respect for law and involves injury to our personal lives and careers.

Left without a third alternative, we will act according to our conscience. Along with thousands of our fellow students, we campus leaders cannot participate in a war which we believe to be immoral and unjust. Although this, for each of us, is an intensely personal decision, we publicly and collectively express our intention to refuse induction and to aid and support those who decide to refuse. We will not serve in the military as long as the war in Vietnam continues.