

Save

April 12, 1969

To: Those sitting in at the Applied Electronics Laboratory

From: Robert Coen, Assistant Professor, Department of Economics

I wish personally to urge you either to end your sit-in or to modify it by allowing those who work at AEL to go about their activities freely.

I enter this plea not because I object to the form of your demonstration, but because the continuation of the demonstration in its present form is an obstacle to mobilizing the faculty sentiment and action that is vital to bring about the changes you hope for.

A demonstration's form must be evaluated on the basis of its efficiency in accomplishing the objectives of the demonstrators. I want to halt the Vietnam war. I want to reverse the ABM decision. I want to halt research at Stanford on the art and science of killing and enslavement, which jeopardizes rather than enhances our national security. I trust that you share these objectives. If so, I beg of you to end your demonstration in its present form.

One week ago the faculty was actively debating--sometimes formally, more often informally--the problems of research policy, SRI, ROTC, etc. Now the subjects I most hear discussed are you, your sit-in, and the question of campus disruptions and disciplinary actions. These latter issues are intensely divisive even among those faculty groups that agree with your objectives. I am afraid that the forces for change among the Stanford faculty are once again splintered, not by disagreements over what is to be done, but over your demonstration. The longer the demonstration continues, the more difficult it will be to reunite these forces.

Unlike you and I, many Stanford faculty members and students object on principle to the form of your demonstration. That they can see no cause worthy of civil disobedience is unfortunate. But it is nonetheless a fact you and I must live with. Given this situation, the matter of form becomes quite important, for it can divide even those groups that agree on content. Please do not become so preoccupied with your own choice of form that you fail to examine the effectiveness of your actions in accomplishing your aims.

I applaud your efforts to open this community's eyes and ears to its involvement in national and international affairs. The thrust of your activities over the past months has been to increase everyone's awareness and knowledge of many important issues. Now it is time for the community to take action. The current sit-in in its early stages helped to focus attention on the need for action and on the possibility that important decisions on these issues might be (and perhaps are being) made without full discussion and consent by the community. But continuation of this sit-in in its present form will only serve to focus attention on disruption, discipline, etc., and divert attention from the truly important issues.

I do not ask that you give up the struggle. I only ask that you change the nature of your actions so that you do not isolate yourselves, me, and many other members of the community and make it impossible for us to participate in decision making. From where I sit, it appears that the continuation of your sit-in in its present form will only make more difficult that already burdensome and aggravating task of getting this faculty and this University's trustees to act in the best interests of Stanford and mankind.