

4/21 Save

SRI Staff Member Speaks Out Against Severance

TEXT OF A LETTER FROM A CONCERNED SRI EMPLOYEE TO CHARLES ANDERSON, PRESIDENT, SRI, April 18, 1969:

Unless the administrators of SRI have reasons for severance from Stanford that they do not wish to make public, I can see nor reason for severance. None of the reasons given seem adequate. The fact is, we are guilty of doing the research that outrages the moral sense of the students. Our own guilt feelings have contributed heavily to the atmosphere of panic around here during the past week, and those feelings also explain the extreme emotions not only in those of us who want severance but in those of us who do not.

It is my opinion that the students deserve more respect than they are getting from many of our staff. For one thing, they are closer to the humanistic traditions that inspired our Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, than our most of us, who have had to make some compromises with our ideals in order to survive in the real world. They too, will have to compromise eventually, but each succeeding generation in this country has had to compromise a little less, by virtue of their own efforts. If we take the organic view of society we can consider the students as our own conscience. They are more free to act on their beliefs than we are, and they deserve our respect, and they deserve to be listened to.

The solution to our current problems seems obvious to me. It is not severance, but retention of the present relationship with the University, with the addition of a committee to develop moral guidelines for acceptance or refusal of contracts, and a review board to use these guidelines and with the power to refuse contracts for the kind of work that would result in expertise more harmful to the human race than beneficial. The human race is the important consideration here. It is the crux of the student protest. The ideals of the students transcend national boundaries, and so should ours. With such guidelines we would be morally armed for conflicts with the students of the type we are currently undergoing, and we would be able to avoid the current image of SRI flailing about like a ship in search of a rudder. Yes, we will lose some contracts, and some personnel. But it is my conviction that the most brilliant of our staff will stay with us, and the less brilliant will go. This is always the fortune of an organization that allows itself to be motivated by humanistic principle, as opposed to expediency and short-range considerations.