

August 8, 1968

Gentlemen:

I wish to submit this statement for your consideration in evaluating the role of ROTC at Dartmouth. I do not intend to discuss details of the ROTC system, with which I have had little direct experience, but rather to try and focus on the larger issues involved. The statement, therefore, is the result of my conception of the proper purposes of an educational institution, my understanding of the present world situation, and the relation between them.

The first fundamental question is whether your consideration, and that of the Faculty, is to be addressed only to "local" matters - that is, to the details of how ROTC affects the operation of the College - or whether the impact on society at large is also to be weighed. There are particular features of the ROTC program which are clearly objectional, such as the compulsion exercised in the case of contract students. Perhaps an alleviation of these specific evils could be negotiated without essential change in the system. But I believe that such a purely local approach is not justified, and that it makes no sense to smooth the rough edges off the ROTC system without asking ourselves for what purposes it exists at all. Why should Dartmouth College carry out an extensive, time-consuming program which is not related to the goal of liberal education? Or, why should it do so for the military and not for other, e.g. commercial, interests? Any justification of the existence of ROTC, it seems to me, must be on the basis of the presumed value of the program to the larger society, rather than to the College as such. Thus we are necessarily led to the second point of view on the nature of your deliberations.

The main pro-ROTC argument, I think, is the one which has been expressed by several of our colleagues: since the U.S. has, and will continue to have, a large armed force, it is desirable that its officers be recruited from such intelligent and liberally-educated groups as the students of Dartmouth College. Thus, ROTC, which unquestionably is mainly a recruiting rather than a training device, serves to help provide the best possible officer class, imbued with humane values as well as technical ability.

I believe that the apparent appeal of this argument is unjustified, or at best unproved; that although of course such values are desirable everywhere, there is no sign of any special benefit resulting from the recruiting of our students as officers. I speak from the point of view which holds America's role in Vietnam to be an "overwhelming atrocity." (The words are those of Don Luce, who after nearly ten years in Vietnam recently resigned as head of International Voluntary Services in protest against U.S. war policies.) Now, if there were evidence that ROTC officers had in large numbers struggled against the evils of this war from within the army, by refusing to fight in Vietnam, or at least by refusing under the Nuremberg principle to carry out certain types of inhumane actions, then I might well be persuaded that ROTC was worthwhile. I know of no evidence that this has happened, or more accurately, that it has happened on a larger scale among ROTC officers than others. Unless something of this sort can be proved, the value of the College's effort to provide "superior" officer material seems very questionable.

On the other hand, I think there are important social and political reasons why Dartmouth's participation in ROTC is highly undesirable. I believe that the United States bears a major share of the blame for the continuing tragedy and stupidity of the arms race and cold war. The proper role of a free college or university at a time like this, in my opinion, is not to enlist as a

partizan on one side of the conflict, and in particular not to become in any sense a branch or agent of the government of the country in which it is located. It ought rather to strive to maintain its independence and neutrality, as an institution, in order to provide a framework within which all points of view can be presented and weighed as objectively as possible. This is not only its proper function as an educational institution, but also is the best way it can serve the true interests of its country (as distinguished, possibly, from its present government) and of humanity at large. Such a role is not possible everywhere, unfortunately; it is therefore all the more imperative to attempt it where it can succeed. To some extent, such things as ROTC and military research programs have corrupted this independent role at most institutions in this country. This has happened to a lesser extent at Dartmouth than at many other places, but still it has occurred here as well. It ought to be opposed, and eliminating ROTC would be a step in the right direction.

There is another important consideration. That about which Dwight D. Eisenhower warned us in his final address as President has to a great extent come to pass. A glance at the national budget, or at recent Congressional debates on such matters as the Sentinel anti-missile system, leaves little room for doubt that the power of the "military-industrial complex" has become very great indeed. Far from being a passive servant of the national will, this complex is one of the most important factors in the determination of much of the foreign and domestic policy of our government. In short, United States militarism is now a leading world problem, and a cause for serious concern as to the future of our (relatively) free institutions at home. Dartmouth College could, and in my opinion should, refrain from actively participating in the programs of the military establishment. This would include, naturally, dropping ROTC. To do so would of course have only a small direct impact. But the College's example might prove surprisingly influential in these days when there is widespread recognition that we live in a sick society. And perhaps this is a situation when a right action must be performed as an act of faith in the future, rather than for the sake of its immediate consequences.

I have explained above the real reasons why I want to see the Dartmouth ROTC program scrapped - not improved, not even "de-institutionalized," but abandoned completely. Perhaps I might have tried to be more political by giving instead more limited arguments toward a lesser, "practical" goal, but I have yielded for once to the temptation to tell the whole truth as I see it. I hope that the Faculty of Dartmouth College will be able in turn to make a decisive and forthright response to what I believe is a very serious problem.

Signed John W. Lamperti
 Prof. of Mathematics