

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Amnesty and Contrition

While I am pleased that President Ford has at least brought the amnesty issue out in the open for discussion, he misunderstands the basic reason why these thousands of young men refused participation in the Vietnam War. As a relative of one of those young men who is now exiled in Canada, I think that Mr. Ford's amnesty program will be a failure because he does not recognize that these men do not seek mercy; they do not want a second chance to pledge their loyalty to the United States, as they have done nothing unloyal; they will not make a public act of contrition because they have nothing to be sorry for; they will not do a token act of penance for committing no offense. Mr. Ford is asking them to do something which, in good conscience, they can not do. They feel as strongly about the rightness of their act of war resistance now as they did in the late '60s. What they do want is recognition of the rightness of their position. This can only be accomplished through an unconditional amnesty.

I think Mr. Ford and his advisers will be greatly disappointed with their "unique act of mercy intended to heal the nation's wounds" when they find that only a few of the thousands now in Canada will actually return. Many of these young men have been in Canada for five or more years—they have careers, families, new friends, and they only want to be able to travel freely in the United States. Many will want to return permanently, but not under the conditions presently offered.

When the gates of the military bases open once again to receive these young men, this time for processing into 18 months of alternative public service with an act of contrition, it is sure to be greeted once again with cries of "Hell no, we won't go." Perhaps it is time to let the Congress pick up where Mr. Ford left off, and offer a genuine amnesty, an unconditional one.

Diane M. Cleemput.

Washington.