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Education in the Shadow of Contempt

In his article "The social sciences and public policy" (3 May, p. 508), David B. Truman wrote:

A more deliberate effort will require from active academics a serious, explicit, and continuing concern for education. One gets the impression that departmental and professional gatherings, except as they discuss a particular discipline, are the last places, not excepting general faculty meetings, in which to encounter serious thought about education. Presidents and deans are expected to pontificate on such matters, and the talk of professional educationists is tolerated if they keep to themselves, but an impression is conveyed that such concerns are not quite respectable for serious scholars. The impression is not accurate, of course, but circumstances give it some appearance of validity.

These, as well as many other points in the article, soak up added significance with every confrontation of students and college administrations, including Provost Truman's own ordeal at Columbia University. The article deserves serious attention. . . . We shall comment on a few of the issues touched on in the quoted passage.

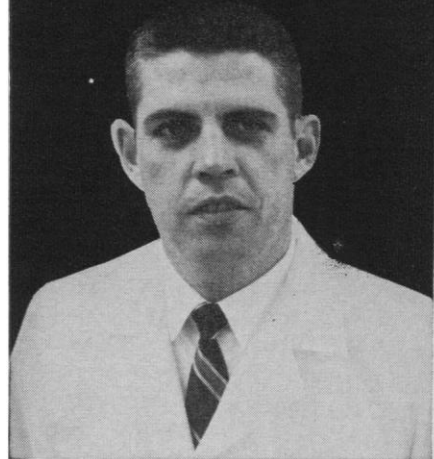
1) If Truman is right, then we have the odd spectacle on our university campuses of many scholars, including many social scientists, taking little professional interest in what, by all odds, is one of the most fundamental of all social processes—education.

2) No less strange is the cavalier, almost contemptuous, attitude, sensed by Truman, toward those "educationists" who *do* make it their professional concern to study the educational enterprise. This attitude is not only strange—in the light of the commitment of the academic world to scholarly study of all phenomena—but it may have had consequences far more serious than a low position for educationists on the academic totem pole. In many instances this attitude has prevented academicians from hearing warnings that educationists were issuing decades ago and to which the current campus upheavals are now giving a tragic point.

3) The policy of relying on academicians in the diverse intellectual disciplines (history, economics, sociology, philosophy, psychology) to save education from the educationists, a policy in which millions upon millions of dollars have been invested by both the private foundations and government, we believe, is both theoretically and practically bankrupt. Truman's analysis indirectly explains why this belief is

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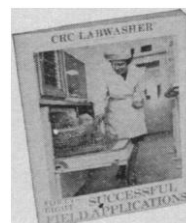
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justified, because the same factors that produce an inverse relationship between the development of a discipline as a science and its involvement with social problems also operate against the professional involvement of academic specialists in problems of education. Beginning with the fact that many disciplines have relevance for problems of education, it does not follow that their disciples will be willing or even able to work on these problems.

4) However, if the academic specialists are willing and able, the problem of finding an academic structure in which they can do so is perhaps not so obdurate as Truman seems to indicate. To be sure, the departmental structure—based on the academic disciplines—is eminently unsuited to interdisciplinary attacks of societal problems. Nevertheless, modern American universities do have on their campuses institutions that are interdisciplinary—the professional schools. The schools of law, medicine, engineering, architecture, and agriculture all use distinctive domains of practice to focus the results of many disciplines. The school of education is also such a structure; social scientists who really want to devote themselves to the study of education are more than welcome, and who knows, they may even find the intellectual climate there quite invigorating.

HARRY S. BROUDY
M. C. WITTROCK

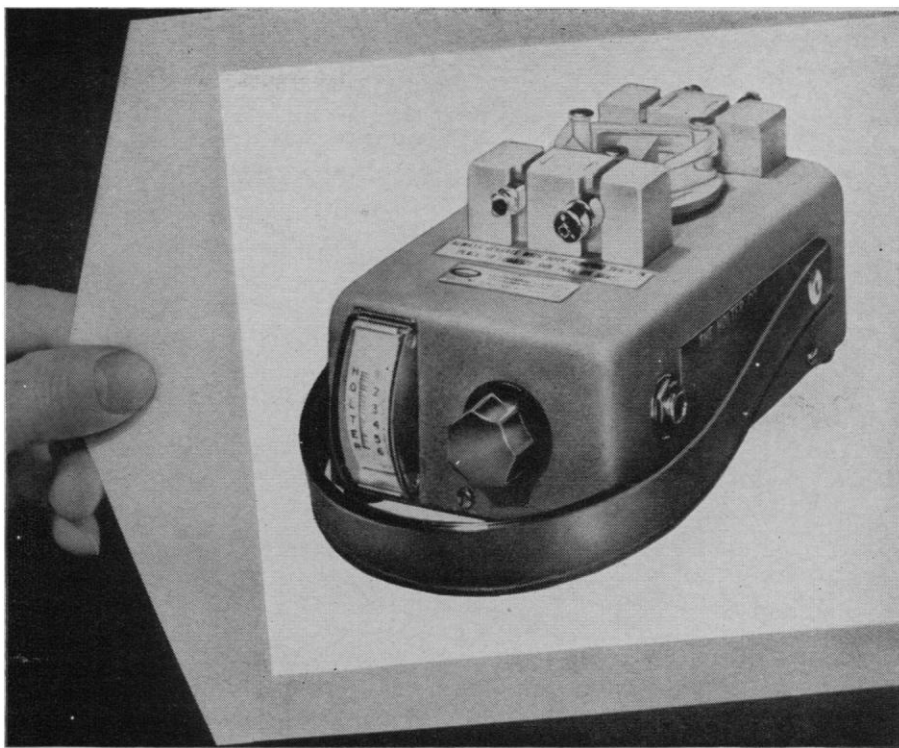
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