

Letters to the Education Editor

Activist Doctors

MEDICAL STUDENT activism, discussed in Michael G. Michaelson's "Medical Students: Healers Become Activists" [SR, Aug. 16], focuses attention on problems which confront medical educators and may contribute to their solution. There are several current trends that have serious implications for those who train physicians: First, population is increasing rapidly; second, health care is coming to be expected as a right, not a privilege; and third, medicine is getting more complicated, demanding more erudition and specialization by its teachers and practitioners. Medical educators are thus called upon to increase the numbers of health personnel, basic scientists, physicians, nurses, technicians, etc., to develop better and less costly means of delivering care, and simultaneously to maintain scientific quality in an era when that requires more time and money than ever before. The best thing about student activism in the face of these problems is that it means these students care, and that some of them will continue to work on the problems in years to come.

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THE SEEDS of understanding the true nature of our medical education system are present in Mr. Michaelson's article, despite his conscious avoidance of thorough analysis.

The following criticisms are not exhaustive, but should stimulate a consideration of the article's superficiality:

1) Abraham Flexner was confronted with a contradiction between what was clearly an explosion of technology in medicine, and its free-lance control. I suggest that it was not in the interest of science or humanism that the Flexner report was so rapidly implemented. It was the clear need to consolidate control over the training of doctors and thereby improve the monopoly of doctors by the dominant economic class.

2) Just as the contradictions became sharp between technology and the form of control in Flexner's era, they have again become sharp and unavoidable. The immense reactionary power vested in the American Medical Association monopoly over the medical industry has been unable to cope with the more sophisticated finance now needed by the second largest industry in the U.S.—"health care." Science and technology have brought about a massive, new world-wide market of sick and suffering. This requires a concomitant change within the organization of the industry to meet this new opportunity. The medical schools stand at the entry position to the industry. It is the critical point for the industry to meet the call for unimaginable growth and profits. Naturally, students would feel the

squeeze of expanding enrollment, work speed-ups, assembly-line efficiency called for by the industry in its efforts to produce doctors. Ironically, the student, socially isolated and politically reactionary by long grooming and selection, strikes out at an enemy of both the industry and himself—the curriculum. Everybody wants better, less painful curriculum, i.e., more M.D.s.

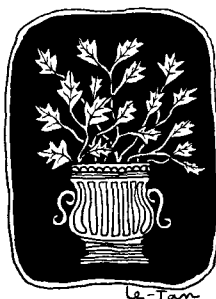
3) Dr. Ebert's remark that medicine has been a "middle-class institution" brings out the most fundamental fact that is completely glossed over by Michaelson. Medicine, the industry, cannot be understood if one ignores the precise way in which it is dominated by a single economic class. What Ebert so generously recognizes is that the contradiction between the pattern and availability of health care for the dominant economic class and that available for the working and welfare classes is so glaring that it threatens to burst the American myth that "if you just work hard and partake of the commodity-oriented society, you will inevitably rise into the chosen class." The medical industry, in addition to expanding its monopoly control, must repair this glaring contradiction now visible to the public. Letting a few black students into the profession, altering the curriculum here and there, establishing a skimpy network of neighborhood health centers are token measures to pacify the people, to make it seem as if the industry had real concern for illness and debility.

It is only through establishing intensive self-criticism within the student movement and using guiding principles such as serving all the people that the true struggle against class control of the industry can be waged.

WILLIAM BRONSTON, M.D.,
New York, N.Y.

An Unkind Blow

AS A PARTICIPANT in Harvard's Advanced Administrative Institute this summer, I enjoyed Peter Schrag's report "Gloom at the Top" [SR, Aug. 16]. Some of his insights have helped me clarify my own thinking about what happened—and what didn't happen—to the schoolmen in attendance. I would like to point out, however, that Schrag's reference to recent *School Management* articles on student activism is unjust. Our position has been that student activism is entirely a positive force in American education. Our editorial



objective has been to persuade school administrators to adopt a positive, cooperative—not co-optive—posture. Perhaps if Schrag—who is one of the finest writers around—had read the articles, instead of just the headlines, he would not have dealt us such an unkind blow!

JAMES E. DOHERTY,
Editor, *School Management*,
Greenwich, Conn.

Catalyst for Women

JAMES CASS's editorial about Catalyst [SR, July 19] was excellent and well deserved, but I am sorry that he gave that organization credit for the Partnership Teaching Program in Framingham and in other schools around Boston. That project was conceived and administered by the Women's Educational and Industrial Union and received support for the first two years from the Carnegie Corporation.

FLORENCE ANDERSON,
Carnegie Corporation,
New York, N.Y.

Taylor Demurs

IN HIS REVIEW of my book *Students Without Teachers* [SR, July 19], Paul Woodring misses the main point I was trying to make about the origins and effects of the student protest movement. It is too simple to say that I "blame the professors" for student unrest. It is a lot more complicated than that, more like the Kitty Genovese case, with the professors as spectators at the killing of the undergraduate mind. There are five chapters in the book dealing with the complications.

One of these is devoted to making a distinction the reviewer says the author did not make: between the violent like Varnado at San Francisco State, who use terror and disruption as announced tactics for destroying democratic institutions, and the rest of the radicals and activists, who want drastic reforms in the society and its educational system but not through the destruction of the university. My point is that as educational institutions the colleges and universities are by definition instruments for seeking non-violent means of resolving social conflict, and that it takes not only intellectual courage but moral intelligence to deal nonviolently with situations of the kind that the Reagan-Hayakawa people make into political entertainments.

Mr. Woodring accuses the author of ignoring the "necessary distinction between undergraduate colleges—which are primarily educational institutions—and universities, which have additional responsibilities." But that is the whole issue on which a large part of the book's argument is based. If the additional responsibilities turn the university into a knowledge factory for staffing and running the post-industrial technocracy, the university has lost its mission.

The students are forcing their colleges and universities to come to terms with that issue, and in doing so they have done their country the greatest of educational services.

HAROLD TAYLOR,
Holderness, N.H.

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Cool Man In a Hot Seat



James E. Allen, Jr. (right) takes the oath of office of U.S. Commissioner of Education—"Riding into battle with Temperance at his side."

by RICHARD H. DE LONE

Shortly before President Nixon's Inauguration, his education task force warned him that in the eyes of most Americans he lacked "the kind of special concern for education the times require." That task force report, which was never officially made public, urged Nixon to demonstrate quickly a "vivid and real" support for education.

He could do so, the report suggested, by a special message to Congress delivered early in the administration calling for increases of about \$1-billion in existing federal aid programs; proposing a new, billion-dollar urban education act; and by reversing campaign impressions that he favors general federal aid to education spent solely at the discretion of the states and that he would go slow on desegregation. The task force also recommended a "substantial upgrading"—possibly to cabinet level—of the post of U.S. Commissioner of Education. The commissioner himself, the report said, should be a man of "the highest possible stature" with experience in elementary, secondary, and higher education.

To date, the President has heeded only one of those caveats: he appointed James E. Allen, Jr., commissioner and assistant secretary for education. Allen, in fifteen years as New York State's commissioner of education, had achieved the degree of stature recommended by the task force report. When the Senate confirmed Allen's appointment last May 5, the Nixon administration gained a vigorous, liberal educa-

tion reformer. That same day, Allen received "vivid and clear"—if somewhat superfluous—reminders that Nixon's Washington is not the most hospitable environment for a man with his credentials: Nixon announced \$370-million worth of cuts in the Office of Education's proposed budget; Allen went before a Congressional subcommittee to defend those cuts—about which he had little say and for which he had little enthusiasm—and, for desert, he learned that his new home had been burglarized and thoroughly ransacked. The allegory was obvious: the administration was cutting back on domestic programs to curb wartime inflation, and "law and order" were needed before education. By nightfall, Allen jokes, he was ready to head back to Albany. "But then I remembered that things weren't any better there."

And indeed, they were not. There are a number of reasons why Allen accepted the U.S. Commissioner's post (and a pay cut of \$20,500 to \$27,500) from Nixon, although he had turned down the same job eight years earlier when President Kennedy had made the offer. First, the post is an important one now, with a major budget to administer and considerable influence on American education. This was not true during the early Kennedy years. Secondly, men such as John Gardner urged him to take the job precisely because they felt a need for strong liberal voices in the Nixon administration. But it is also true that Allen's credit in Albany had just about run out, and he knew it.

With a shrewd and careful—if often controversial—use of power, the aid of two supportive governors, and a strong state tradition in education, Allen com-

plied a record in New York that made him clearly the nation's outstanding chief state school officer. Under his leadership, the state department sponsored a variety of programs, from pre-kindergarten to adult education, that reads like an encyclopedia of educational innovation in the Fifties and Sixties. In higher education, community colleges sprang up across the state as part of a master plan that ranks with those of California and Florida as the most comprehensive in the nation. He presided over the growth of the state department from an agency with less than 400 employees and a budget of \$383-million to a department of 3,000 employees (about 100 more than the U.S. Office of Education) and a budget of \$2.2-billion—losing his ability to know everyone by name along the way.

In the process, he promoted a number of pioneering pieces of education legislation. To name a few, New York state was funding innovative programs before Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 (which Allen helped shape). New York was the first State to adopt a program of aid to parochial schools, providing texts and materials of a nonsectarian nature. In 1967, the legislature approved an urban education bill making \$52-million a year available to big-city school systems for projects that are part of a comprehensive plan for institutional change. New York has the only state equivalent of the federal Teacher Corps. This fall, a \$26-million program of state aid to private colleges and universities begins, based on the number of graduate degrees awarded.

The list runs on, but it is accompanied by a list of controversies. Shortly after he became state commissioner,

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