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Schmidt, Royal J

Here's One Educator Who Airs

For more than 20 years, Dr. Royal J. Schmidt, chairman of the Political Science Department of Elmhurst College, has made a point of speaking out to the public, as well as to his students, thru the letters to the editor columns of Chicago newspapers.

"Whenever a topic seems to me to need a little attention — which can be fairly often — I try to present points of view that otherwise might be overlooked," he said.

But unlike many other inveterate letter writers, Schmidt does not lash out at the Democrats or Republicans or liberals or conservatives for society's ills. Instead, he draws on his long academic career to try to present a more studied approach.

"I try in a nonpartisan way to analyze some of the problems of democracy," he said. "Whenever something seems to suit my interests and I've done some research in that area, I send something in. And the newspapers usually get around to printing them eventually."

Believing that "the essence of politics is compromise," and that "on most issues the truth lies somewhere between the extremes," Schmidt tries to present a balanced view. "I have a commitment as a teacher to be as objective as I can," he said.

Schmidt, 57, of 500 N. Third, Maywood, has been chairman of the Political Science Department since he joined the Elmhurst College faculty in 1948. He specializes in American foreign relations and diplomatic history.

As a professor at a small college, he is more concerned with teaching than research, altho he has published one book and is working on another about diplomacy in the period between World War I and World War II.

"It will be called 'Herbert Hoover and the Uncertain Peace,'" Schmidt said. "I've finished the research, but it will take a while to get the writing done."

Schmidt has also done research into the history of Du Page County. He has written a booklet on the county during the Civil War and is on the board of trustees of the Du Page Historical League.

"It was rather difficult to gather information on the county's history because I couldn't find any old local newspapers," he said, "but the people of the county were very helpful in giving me old letters that gave a

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good idea of what was happening during the Civil War. You'd be surprised how enthusiastic the people are about the history of Du Page."

In his specialty of foreign relations, Schmidt is hopeful that recent events mean Russia might soften its stand in Southeast Asia. "Russia has been pretty much of an enigma," he said. "If she really wished to taper off the Viet Nam situation she could have exerted more effort quite a while ago. Now, for reasons of her own, she may be ready to do this — as her attitude toward the blockade shows."

In the wake of the assassination attempt on Alabama Gov. George Wallace, Schmidt is uncertain whether stricter gun control laws should be passed. "You must first decide if such laws will be enforceable, and even if they are, you must decide if they will be enforced. It all gets back to the fact that the success of any law or any government rests with the consent of the people," he said.

As much as Schmidt likes to present his own opinions, he does not want to see colleges take stands in favor of any point of view.

"That can only polarize things," he said. "There is a constant battle to line up colleges in favor of some cause or another. I take the point of view that the right to teach and learn is more important than any single cause."

That might be conservative, but where education is involved you can't be too conservative."

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Schmidt in his office at the college. (Trib photo)

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