

STATEMENTS AND SPEECHES



INFORMATION DIVISION
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EDUCATION FOR CITIZENSHIP

An address by Mr. L.B. Pearson, Under Secretary of State for External Affairs, at a special Convocation of McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, May 15, 1948.

If I were graduating today from a University or a College I would, I think, be both bewildered about the present and anxious about the future. My heart would be clouded with doubts and questions. Unless, of course, it was so filled with pure joy at the successful completion of my academic work and the achievement of my degree that it could find no room for any other emotion. As a matter of fact, when I finished my own undergraduate course at Oxford University, when I had filled the last sheet of the last examination pad, my feeling of elation at having come through that ordeal alive, was so great, that I fear I had no thought at all, save that of celebration. The dry squeezing process to which I had been subjected, simply had to be reversed, and that left for the moment no time for any anxiety or doubts about the future.

The undergraduate or graduate of today is a more serious person, I think, than he was twenty-five years ago. He certainly has more about which to be serious. He is also, I think, less easily fooled, less inclined to accept without query and analysis the casual platitudes that are so often the lazy substitutes for thought; the eloquent, but often empty, promises that a new world, a brave new world is spread before him; that all he has to do is to conquer it and war with becoming modesty and victor's garland. The undergraduate of today knows that it is more than a short, sure step from college commencement to the Cabinet, the Supreme Court or the Board of Directors.

The reason for this more realistic attitude is not hard to find. The generation who are leaving college in 1948 have some knowledge of the wastelands of both our pre-war and post-war world. Many of them have also had a bitter experience of the bloody and desperate years between. They are therefore not likely to fall easy victims to shallow talk about a new Jerusalem fit for heroes.

This is a sombre and sobering time in history and the younger men and women of today are reacting to it, it seems to me, courageously and with good sense. Thank God for that. For it is about our only hope. As I visit colleges and universities, and I do whenever I can, for they are a refreshing change from parliamentary corridors and United Nations Committees, I sense a solid realism among students, an impatience with the conventional answer, a desire to find out, and a determination to put their discoveries to a good social use. In short, I sense magnificent material for education, but I don't always sense that education or educators are living up to the opportunity that this material affords.

We have gone far in this western world, in providing facilities for the stimulation of curiosity. We have elevated the achievement of mechanical skills and the pursuit of scientific facts into a high position in the educational hierarchy. We have put the