TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE OPENING OF THIRD ASIAN TEACHERS' SEMINAR AT THE SINGAPORE CONFERENCE HALL ON 20TH NOVEMBER, 1966.

Mr. President, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen,

First, let me offer you my apologies for being fifteen minutes late -- not intentionally, because I was asked to arrive at 11.30 by someone who had misunderstood the message. I was taught when I was a boy in school that first you must be punctual. I was also taught that when you do the act of discourtesy of not being punctual you must apologise. And so you see how important it is to catch a man young and early enough and imbue him with the kind of values which makes for a relatively smooth and frictionless society.

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I must ask to be apologised on another count. When I accepted your invitation, Mr. President, to give the opening address at your Asian Leadership Training Seminar, I was under the impression that this seminar was going to discuss ways and means, whereby leadership was made to be nurtured and blossom forth in our young, and I came ready and prepared to discuss all these

common problems which I as head of the executive, and you as people entrusted with the future of our children, must together succeed in doing if we are to succeed at all. But I must say that, early this morning, having read a report of what the President of the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession said about the necessity of teachers, not being frustrated, being organised as a group to exercise their rights and assert their status, otherwise you have a revolution of rising discontent and frustration in the next generation, I wondered if we were not at cross-purposes.

Having read him, or a report of him which I trust could only have been a partial report, I then went through your programme and discovered that there was a real misunderstanding on my part. You are to discuss in the course of your seminar leadership not of your students, but of you as teachers, on behalf of teachers, fighting for higher status, more privileges, and so on and so forth. Because, you start off with a lecture on "Fund-Raising and Collection of Dues" which obviously must be meant for some strike purpose; "The Role of the Treasurer" to make sure that teachers are all adequately paid during strike-time; second day -- "Legal Rights of Teachers and International Recommendation on the Status of Teachers"; then, "Recruiting, Pre-Service Training and Re-Training of Teachers" -- well, that I have an interest in; then, "Programmes for Professional Improvement", which I think I have a very deep and abiding interest

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in; and it goes on to “Information Services”, “Negotiations” and Mutual Benefit Societies”. It ends up with “Teachers’ Hostels and Teachers’ Housing”.

Well, forgive me, therefore, if I am not so well prepared this morning to speak to you on the rights, privileges and the organisational capacities and potentials of the teaching profession. I would have been a little happier if I had seen somewhere on the list of subjects to be discussed: “The Duties and Responsibilities of Teachers”. But, obviously, the modern world is such that when you organise people in professional and occupational groups, one must insist on rights, status, responsibilities and privileges. I hope you will not misunderstand me if I say that if it is leadership that is required amongst teachers in the first place.

There is a great deal of difference between the mathematical wizard and the man who, without the footlights and without the glamour, imparts of himself to his pupil. I would like this morning to take advantage of the opportunity, this rare privilege that you have afforded me, to unburden my soul of some of the problems which have irked me for some time -- the emphasis, the values which we must create in our next generation which can come about only if a person, in whom we have entrusted the future of our children, first agrees with those values,

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and second is prepared to give of himself or herself. For I can think of no closer an association than that of teacher and pupil.

If you wanted to be a leader of men organising them in political movements or in Trade Unions, or captains of industry, then you should not have taken up teaching. It is the one profession, next to politics -- if you do it honestly -- which demands the most of you and gives the least in return; and gives certainly less than politics.

You watch the rugby international giving a full display of his ability, the tumultuous applause, the social acclaim. But, there is none for the school coach out in the afternoon sun, gathering some 15 spindly school-boys, trying to give of himself. And without that coach, that rugby international would not have been possible.

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So it is that I am more enamoured not of leadership in my teachers, but of the qualities that will bring forth leadership in the next generation. And, it is not leadership in the teachers -- leadership of men of the teaching profession -- but a grasp and understanding of the responsibility, of the grave burden which the State and parents have placed upon the teacher when they deliver a child to his charge.

And it is not just the desire to produce a small core of elite performers, either in science or in technology or the Arts or the humanities, or to be leaders of men. Any human society in this technological age, if it is to enter into the garden in which people live happy and healthy lives of the have-nations of the world, must have their broad stratum of educated and knowledgeable men and women. This can only come about with a large spread of average knowledge imparted often by people with slightly more than average ability but certainly with a great deal of more than average love and affection for the pupil put in his charge. For it is when you get them young and malleable that you can sharpen and discipline their minds. It is an influence upon our future generation which is excelled or exceeded only by the parent at home, and not always even by the parent.

For, when you have a society in which large numbers of parents are less-educated than their children, it is inevitable that as the children acquire knowledge and literacy the respect for the teacher, who is better-equipped, better-educated than he the pupil, must be greater than that which the pupil has for his parents.

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And so I come to speak to you about one of the problems which has bedevilled me for the last few years. It is not a parochial problem, for I believe

that this must be the kind of difficulties which countries and societies which want to expand their educational facilities at great speed must encounter. In the course of the last ten to fifteen years, we have mass-produced schools and mass-produced teachers to man these schools. In 1939, or 1941 which was the last year before the Japanese came in with the Second World War, only one out of every three boys of school-going age was in school. Since then, the population has trebled, and there is today no boy or girl of school-going age who is not in school, which is quite an achievement.

But it has to be paid at a tremendous price. The intimacy between teacher and pupil, the individual characteristic of a particular teaching institution, this has all been lost. Schools do two sessions -- morning, and afternoon. Two different schools are occupying the same building, same classrooms, same playing-fields. Different teachers have same Principal -- a very tenuous nexus. The school buildings are all the same in design, to make for cheap and efficient building.

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There is no difference between School 'A' and School 'B', and there are so many schools that you name them after the streets: Upper Thomson Road Secondary School, Bartley Road Secondary School. You might as well call it the 42nd Street Secondary School.

When I went to school, the school meant something to me. It had a name. It had a history. It had a roll of illustrious products. It had great teachers. It had principals who were proud of the school and grew up with the school. We belonged to that school, all those who wore a certain badge. And in the afternoons, it was still our school. We went back and played games there.

But this is not so now. The school is a convenience. You go. It is not yours, because you have to clear the desk by one o'clock before the afternoon occupant comes in. The teacher also clears his desk, because he also has an afternoon teacher coming in. The living institution is lost.

But this is not half as bad as what has happened with the mass-production of teachers. Men and women have been induced into the teaching profession on the basis of monetary reward.

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Now, I have said that I believe that if I have to choose one profession in which you give the most for the least it is probably teaching -- if you take it seriously. You have to have the temperament for it to coax, to stimulate, to cajole, to disciple a young mind into good habits. You must have an aptitude.

The people that I remember most in my life were the people who made the greatest impact on me as a student. Not that they were the best-equipped, qualified teachers in their line, but because they really gave of themselves and took a personal and particular interest in all their pupils and in me personally, which was the part which I remembered. And so it was when I went on to university. I have heard many a brilliant lecture. But it is the man with whom I sat in a tutorial afterwards and discussed the problems, and in particular one who in bouts of asthmatic fits used to take out his apparatus, inhale deeply of himself, and then used to go back into the intricacies of Roman Law, who made an impression on me is indelible. He gave of himself.

We have produced teachers as anonymous, faceless, and as listless in some cases as the institutions which now house them. The net result is that now we are producing a literate but not an educated population. They can read; they can write; they can go to the cinemas; they understand the television programmes; they can pass examinations. But if you go around some of the community centres and you see the complete absence of social discipline, then you will know that somewhere something went wrong.

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How else do pupils who are properly taught and trained in well-equipped schools by -- on paper -- well-qualified teachers, act with a complete absence of

civic and social responsibilities? Nobody bothers to switch the television set off or to make sure that it is properly tuned. It must be the community centre leader who does it. Nobody takes the trouble to make sure that ping-pong bats and ping-pong balls in community centres are put aside in the proper place meant for them and not just discarded and thrown about because it was provided free by the community. Something has gone wrong.

But I believe that this is an inevitable price which rapid expansion demands that we pay. But it is not one which I intend to continue paying. I read recently of some disorders and troubles amongst other students in other countries, including university students, and I read that one of the problems was that there was only one teacher to somewhere around three hundred students, that some of the teachers were so afraid that some of their students may excel them later on that they go to libraries and lock up some of the books. This is a serious report put out by a very serious, thoughtful newspaper. They are not prepared to give of themselves. They are afraid that the pupils will be better than them and will oust them out of their jobs. How can you ever teach anything?

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I now come to the last part of my speech. I read of your president speaking about a social code of ethics, standards. But that is to talk about teachers as if they were accountants or stenographers or dentists or doctors. I

think that the relationship between master and pupil cannot be categorised and cannot be commercialised. You can sit down with a boy for one hour and go through a lesson, or with a whole classroom of boys and go though the lesson and give nothing away -- no expenditure of nervous energy. I have had such teachers. I remember them vaguely as drones. They come in, ask you to open the book at chapter seven. They then recite certain passages, underline certain parts, and ask you to underline it also. An hour passes, and they go off, leaving absolutely no impression.

And there are those who come and leave something behind. All the time it is an enormous amount of effort to give of yourself. How do we put this right? Some things are easier to put right than others. The schools, we can put up. Our population is under control -- good family planning, rising standards of life, a home for every working family, and most important of all educated womenfolk. And the birth-rate figures are down from 4.1 per cent ten years ago to 2.4 per cent, going down and probably stabilising at 1.5 or 1.4 per cent. For the first time, this year two primary schools were empty. They are empty, but the others are still running two sessions. We have gone over the hump.

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If the economy surges forward as it has been, then in another ten years a large majority of the schools, probably all the secondary schools and a large

majority of the secondary schools, will only run one session. It is their schools and it must acquire a character of its own. True, we cannot pull down all the school buildings and make them look different. But we can give them additional characteristics -- halls, gymnasium and all the other things which make for a living institution. These things can be put right; the science equipment can be put in, calisthenics, all the paraphenalia -- libraries, modern equipment.

But, eventually, you come back to the principle digit: the man who sits in the classroom, the Form Master. If he is only thinking in terms of this as just a job, as a factory worker thinks of his work as just a job watching the bottles go by and the stoppers being put on each bottle, and he fills each boy's mind the same way as the machines pour in mellifluous liquid into the bottles as they go by, then we have failed.

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So I wonder whether I will gain something when you come to discuss programmes for professional improvement. But what I fear is not that the teachers are not capable of professional improvement. I think they are. And given better training facilities, and re-training and post-graduate training, particularly if pay increases and bars are associated with the passing of certain forms of re-training activity, then I am quite sure that they will all make the grade. This is a society that responds to the incentive. What I wonder is whether

or not in fact we have inducted into our teaching profession men and women who by nature were not really teachers.

There is a big difference between the performer and the teacher. You may be a boxer and win the heavy-weight championship of the world, and I would imagine that Mr. Cassius Clay is a formidable opponent to meet on any dark street any time at night, but I should find it hard to believe that he can impart into our young the art of gamesmanship, fighting qualities, fisticuffs according to the rules. Somebody more mundane, somebody for whom the blaze of the foot-lights has no attractions but who finds a great deal of solace and satisfaction in bringing up a boy to the height of his fulfilment, has to do this.

Now, how do we achieve this? I have dark thoughts. Your subject for the second day is "Recruiting, Pre-Service Training and Retaining". I am thinking of "Recruiting, Pre-Service Training, Post-Service Training and Excluding". So you see, that is where trade unions may come in and qualities of leadership may be necessary!

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But this is the problem: At the end of the day, what is the productivity measurement for a teacher? We have just set up a national productivity research centre. We are going to re-vamp the methods by which we pay our workers. No

more this time-consuming waste of clocking-in and clocking-out and giving the least of themselves. How many blocks of wooden bricks have you produced in so many hours? What is the norm? What is the payment? What is the bonus beyond that norm? How do you measure that with a teacher? How many pupils have you taught and how many have passed the examinations?

Well, I know certain schools in Singapore with very high reputations for getting students to pass examinations. On close examination, we found that the schools, because of certain geographic and other advantages, were in a position to weed ruthlessly and took in only those who were capable of passing even with very little tuition. How do you measure? Really, the only person who knows is the pupil, for he was at the receiving end, and he either got something or he went away empty. And I would like to believe that even in the context of modern methods of Trade Union activity, group and occupational discipline, the teaching profession can maintain this crucial element, the dedication that is required.

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Many years ago, as a young man, I saw a film about English schools and school masters. I never went to an English public school. But I thought that that was what a school master should be. It was called “Goodbye, Mr. Chips”.

At the end of the day, when you have left your school and you felt that you had left a friend and mentor behind, then that man whom you felt so much for and who must have felt for you to have given of himself, that man deserves a gold medal. He probably will not get it because very few people will know that he deserves that gold medal and the people who know are often unimportant people. Somehow we must find a way out of the morass we have got into out of rapid expansion. We must stop paying the price that we have paid. If we do not do that, then we will have a listless population, one which is literate and can answer all the quiz questions but which has no social feel or civic sense. They do not make good citizens, and they do not together comprise a society that deserves to succeed.

Finally, Mr. President, may I wish you in your sojourn in Singapore, and your distinguished colleagues, not only a pleasant but also a stimulating time. I think nowhere in the world have we got four major streams of civilisation and culture interwoven as I hope we are interweaving them here. The British came, and for 150 years they stayed, and there is an overlay of western values, the language, culture. But they neither smothered nor destroyed what was here, brought in by the Chinese, by the Indians, and the Malays, many of whom came from neighbouring islands. We are not hoping to put them through a sausage-machine, mince them up, and make them come out regular lengths at the end of

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it. You might do that with meat and sausages. You cannot do that with human beings without irreparable damage to human personality.

So, to each what he originally had -- his culture, his language, a link with his past, his heritage. And to each something added, so that they can meet and talk and understand, laugh at the same things, be pained and disturbed by the same things, and eventually integrate into one society. Problems of language, problems -- more important -- of values. Languages can remain different, but the values must be the same. For if one section, one cultural group believes that it is good to be domineering and harsh and cruel and that then you are respected by the rest, and the others believe that that is a vicious, vile man, then there is no end of trouble in your society. And so you must extract from all these various cultural values some common denominator which cannot be pre-determined. Trial and error, and eventually you will produce something which is homogenous as far as Singapore is concerned.

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I am not sure when this process can be said to have been completed, but I feel that if we go a long way towards success, it does hold out some hopes of a peaceful co-existing world. For a people of different values and different cultures must inevitably conflict as they did from time to time in the past and continue to do so. Then, it must spell a lot of unhappiness all round. And it is in

that hope that conferences, such as this, do provide meeting-grounds to discover how very much in common we have together, that I think that your time and mine would be worthwhile meeting and foregathering on such occasions. Thank you.

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