TRANSCRIPT OF SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT A DINNER HELD AT THE TANJONG PAGAR COMMUNITY CENTRE, IN HONOUR OF NATIONAL SERVICEMEN ON 15TH SEPTEMBER, 1968

Mr. Chairman, Friends and Fellow-citizens,

When I was a young man, Singaporeans were never asked to stand up and be counted. We were the helpers, hewing wood, drawing water or pushing the pen, but never the gun or the sword. All this has changed, swiftly and dramatically.

There are not many countries in South and Southeast Asia that have military service as part of the education of their citizens. Before implementing National Service, a government must trust its people. Otherwise, the regime recruits only the select, those whom they think they can trust with guns, and around this officer cadre they build up a full-time regular force. We have decided that this was not the way for us. We must and can trust our people. As we train every young man and woman in the handling of weapons and the deployment and logistics of armed units, we put power in the hands of our younger generation.

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We did this because we have confidence in their judgment, in their loyalty, in their discipline. Otherwise, we have the example of the Congo to remind us of what can happen. One day a man is corporal, the next day he is general, the day after that he is president. It is because we are reasonably confident that an educated and relatively sophisticated population will be a check on such excesses that we have embarked on the system of National Service.

One of the objectives is to involve the whole community in not just building a prosperous community, but of making them conscious that they must be fit and disciplined to protect the prosperity they are creating. Every citizen has a dual role. He is a worker contributing to his country's economy, he is a fighter contributing to his people's security.

A people is as good as they think they are. If you do not think you can make the grade, if you have not got that confidence, then you will never succeed. If you have faith in yourself and give of your best, then, given a great deal of hard work and a modicum of good fortune, we shall succeed. And success begets success. That has been the story of the last three years, and I hope of the next three, before the end of 1971.

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