TRANSCRIPT OF ADDRESS BY THE PRIME MINISTER, MR. LEE KUAN YEW, AT THE ROYAL COMMONWEALTH SOCIETY, LONDON, ON 9TH JANUARY, 1969

Mr. Chairman, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

What we all recognise first is the vastly different mood in Britain. It is reflected in the press, on the television and even in statement in the House of Commons. It shows a deepening disenchantment with the Commonwealth, and the problems of colour in Britain, in Rhodesia and the failure of some black African governments after independence to maintain British standards of government -- they have all made their contribution to this. They reflect a change of life. As Britain and the British Labour Government discovered, even though the Labour Party said in the autumn of 1964 that they wanted to revive the Commonwealth, the transition from empire to Commonwealth was accompanied by the loss of economic worth of the Commonwealth to Britain as other industrial countries with more pressures to rebuild their damaged economies -- Germany, Italy, France, Japan and even America -- moved in, into each independent Commonwealth territory with great alacrity and with gift parcels in their attache

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cases to make it convenient for ministers to lower the tariff walls which had provided Britain with a sheltered market.

I sometimes think that the TIMES or the ECONOMIST, with each special supplement on the independence of a former dependent territory, besides quite rightfully congratulating the British Government and those that they had governed for making peaceful progress towards disengagement from colonisation and nationhood, could perhaps also have put in the obverse side -- how much British manufacture was sold per annum, what the tariff walls were, and how important it was that British exporters must meet delivery dates, must meet competition from hungrier and keener workers and entrepreneurs and industrialists from countries like Japan and Germany. But alas, it was not so. And the recurring crises on the strength of the £, the unpopular prices and incomes policy, the attempts at rationalising and making management more efficient by mergers and vertical and horizontal integration, the proposal to make unofficial strikes illegal and punishable -- they all represent a preoccupation with Britain's domestic problems as she tries to re-structure her economy and her society to meet the very different circumstances in the aftermath of empire.

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I fear that the frustrations at the attitudes of European countries she helped to save in the last war and at the querulous colonise she nurtured to independence

and after independence poured aid into and in return received churlishness and sometimes abuse -- all these have not made a contribution either to Britain's future role or the welfare of these new independent Commonwealth members. But then I recall that when a British minister was asked in Parliament not so long ago why it was that action was taken by an independent Commonwealth government against Britain when she had only recently poured a great deal of her resources to safeguard that country's sovereignty and integrity, he replied that Britain did not do these things in expectation of gratitude.

It is difficult at this moment to take an optimistic view of the future of the Commonwealth if one concerns oneself just with the immediate present. But if, and as I have attempted to do, one looks forward a few decades ahead and looks backwards a few centuries to see what indications this can give from past performance of future expectations, then I think the last 400 years have given an indication of the capacity and quality of a unique island civilisation, and this is not an exercise in nostalgia. I have no desire, in recounting these events, to try and revive a sensation of past grandeur. But the fact remains that no island-nation has ever before in history created an empire overseas so vast and so powerful that at the end of empire, are created centres of civilisation in North America -- the United States and Canada combined -- five to six times bigger in population than Britain, six to seven times larger in industrial capacity; centres in

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Australia and New Zealand, potentially civilisations which could grow as big; and, but for a change in the tide of history, a civilisation in the south, the central and the temperate highlands of Africa.

But it is Britain's very success in empire and in creating civilisation overseas which now threatens her economic position and saps away trade and influence. Because, unlike the French and their empire, British brains can more easily drain to wealthy affluent English-speaking communities in America, in Australia, in New Zealand. It is true Europeans too migrate to America and some Germans migrate involuntarily to help the American space programme! But there is for the French and for the other Europeans, a difficulty of jumping over a language hurdle and then the uncongenial thought of living in a culture not one they are accustomed to and which they find alien. This is not so with the Englishman.

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I was recently hibernating and ruminating in the University of British Columbia, and it astounded me to discover that half the teaching staff are British-born, bred and educated and some in Canada only as recently as three months. This was underlined even more vividly one Monday morning when I had a Canadian broadcasting team interview me sound-on-film and every one of them had been born, bred and trained in Britain and is now a Canadian.

The probabilities are that if Britain does not re-establish the soundness of her economy, maintain and sustain the creativity of her research projects and keep abreast in technology, then Commonwealth members now linked through Britain and through Britain to each other, a link now radiating from the centre outwards -- will forge new links. And, if I may borrow a phrase from another context, polycentralism will be the inevitable consequence, as the advanced English-speaking countries -- the Americans, the Canadians and the Australians -- take over the ready-made markets that Britain leaves behind.

All Commonwealth members, however, with the exception of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, have lower standards of living and a lower level of technology than Britain. It is going to take them a very long time, some if ever, to get to the present levels of science and technology in Britain. But if Britain can get back into the top league of the industrialised and technological nations, either through a bigger base in the European Economic Community or an Atlantic free-trade area, and perhaps an Atlantic free-trade area linked with a Pacific free trade area in place of a common market, then the links with London in trade, industry, education, technology will be re-established, renewed and reinforced.

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Even though many members of the Commonwealth today may not realise this, they may find hitching on to some other technological wagon a little more exacting and stifling. Americans and Russians may be generous peoples, but their governments expect total and unqualified commitment and unquestioning support, and when American proteges or former proteges like China or Cuba, turn ungrateful, then reactions and sanctions from the Americans are sharp and angry. So too Russian displeasure with Czechoslovakia.

At the moment, Britain is bedevilled with this problem of colour. But it is not a British problem, not even that of Rhodesia. It is a world problem: White and non-White. And when the non-Whites are Africans, the problem becomes particularly awkward and sensitive. For reasons of history, it is erroneously believed that the black is always inferior for he has no relics in stone, no written language, no literature. And centuries of deep prejudice, slavery of the blacks with the Arabs as masters long before slavery in the New World, they have all accentuated this deep prejudice and led to irrational animosities between black and white. But I think it is usual to remember that to make penance it was Britain that led the crusade to abolish slavery. It is also useful to remember that this prejudice is not just a prejudice of the Americans or the Western Europeans. Slav-African riots in Lumumba University are worth mention. And even the Asiatic is inflicted with this irrational prejudice. Fifty thousand black GI babies

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are a psychological and a pathological problem because they are not accepted into Japanese society, and many of them have gone to Brazil. And Red Guardism notwithstanding, I think African leaders should do well to remember that if they have African students in large numbers, not just African leaders being banqueted in Peking, the same problems will arise.

All this is part of history. I feel that cautious optimism on the future of the Commonwealth is not misplaced.

The French resisted freedom movements. Now they have excellent relations with the former Francophobe states -- not just in Africa where they gave over the reins of power without conflict, but more strikingly so in Indo-China. After a decade of bitter, cruel and vicious war, the North Vietnamese Government are on excellent terms with General de Gaulle and his Government.

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In the last 2½ days, I have seen and heard signs of a growing realisation -- unlike the Conference in September 1966 -- that it is not just the problem of the moment that should decide our relationships with Britain. A more sober reassessment of the value of these ties, and not just sentimental values, is being made. One advantage is that of not being overwhelmed in an unequal partnership or association with Americans or Russians. And Commonwealth members may

find it less stifling if, despite their proximity to the gravitational pulls of these countries with very big GNPs, they have at the same time some connections with the British in their economic, their educational and their social fields. But the danger is that by the time this realisation sinks in, it may be too late because Britain may have either dropped out of the top technological league or, because disgusted with the excesses of language and postures of Commonwealth members, she may have allowed her special knowledge and expertise of former administrators, merchants, bankers, technicians to be lost as they age and pass away.

I would like to end by recounting what I believe is one of the most remarkable things that have happened in Southeast Asia. Three hundred and fifty years of Dutch exploitation of the Netherlands East Indies was followed by 20 years of hatred and the suppression of Dutch enterprise and industry, the expropriation of plantations and mines and the obliteration of the Dutch language. Today, the Indonesians find themselves more at ease with the Dutchmen than with anybody else. They established a donor-donee relationship with the Russians. They studied with uneven results the Russian language and culture, and it ended abruptly with hundreds of thousands of Indonesians massacred -- an unascertained, and probably unascertainable, number being communists killed by Communist arms. Now the Americans have stepped into

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the Russian status of donor, but the relationship is not a comfortable one. The hardheadedness of the Japanese the Indonesians find harsh, and so they seek to re-establish their ties with the Dutch. But many Dutchmen who knew Indonesia and Indonesians well have aged. It may take sometime to regather, reorganise and revive this expertise.

The moral, both for Commonwealth members and for Britain, is that whatever the present disputes and quarrels, the former dependencies may in the end, find the British and their technological and industrial power the most valuable and the most comfortable to make use of provided, as the Russians and the Americans race to Mars and to the moon and beyond, Britain is able to keep abreast with these new frontiers of science and technology. For it would be a great pity if and when the moment of truth arrives, Britain has already dismantled the organisation and lost the expert knowledge and skills acquired through decades and sometimes centuries of association. And then many people will be that much the poorer off, if the knowledge and expertise now in the files of the colonial office and in the memories of former colonial administrators, engineers, technicians, merchants and bankers were allowed to be lost.

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