SPEECH BY MR. LEE KUAN YEW, SECRETARY-GENERAL, PEOPLE'S ACTION PARTY, AT THE PARTY CONGRESS HELD ON SUNDAY, 19TH DECEMBER, 1971, AT THE NATIONAL THEATRE

From time to time a political party must make a review of its position and then decide on what has to be done in the next phase of its life. The PAP has never been so sturdy and strong as at the end of 1971. We have more widespread and more constant support. We have better leadership material, in intellect, energy and education, then before. We are attracting people of ability and integrity to active participation in the party. The ground organisations to mobilise support for the party and for the government, both at national and at constituency levels, embrace every street, high-rise Housing and Development Board flat, and kampong.

National Archives of Singapore

Our history explains our present strength. Even before our formal inauguration as a party on November 24th, 1954, a group of us had already spent nearly 10 years preparing for the launching of our political movement. We had worked amongst intellectuals in the universities here and in Britain. We had organised and mobilised support in the trade unions, first in the public sector, then in the private sector. Then through joining forces with a pro-communist

group in a united front, we enlarged our base to include the Chinese-educated workers and intellectuals.

During the united front period, our strength built up rapidly. By June 1959, we assumed office after winning a decisive election. We survived all the shocks and upheavals of 1961 and 1962 when the united front broke up. In the end, contrary to many pessimistic forecasts, the non-communist democratic socialists remained in control of the party and the government. Rebuilding rapidly the party machinery, the party won the general elections again in September 1963.

We had brought Singapore by consent into the Federation of Malaysia. In the Federation, we stood our ground in the years of great crises, 1964 and 1965 when communalism replaced communism as the primary threat to the integrity and survival of our people. Suddenly we were unceremoniously asked to leave the Federation in August 1965. As a party and a government, we pulled Singaporeans together despite the shock of separation. Another shock came in January 1968 when the British Government announced its decision to withdraw all their forces by the end of 1971.

National Archives of Singapore

We worked out a plan to generate enough expansion and momentum in the economy, to absorb the loss of 20% of our GNP, in just over three years. We won the 1968 elections, unopposed in 51 seats, and winning the other 7 contested seats. And we have not let the people down. Today, Singapore is stronger economically. Singaporeans are more cohesive and united. Singaporeans have a greater capacity to ensure her own security.

Meanwhile, systematically we have infused new blood into the party. The party has been restyled to be more relevant and sensitive to the problems of the 1970's. A younger generation has grown up not knowing the old problems of colonialism, poverty and illiteracy. Today, they take our independence and successful development for granted. They do not know of the struggle, the fears of total collapse in failure, the planning and effort that have created the jobs for anyone willing to work. There are decent homes at low rents, with water, electricity, and modern sanitation, for every citizen within a matter of months of registering. Our education is heavily subsidised, and with a wide variety of training to suit individual ability and aptitude, from university, Polytechnic, to technical and vocational institutes. Good medical services at normal charges, and a wide spread of social amenities -- these are part of the ordinary social landscape.

National Archives of Singapore

The trials of 12½ years in office have given us considerable experience in anticipating and dealing with all manner of awkward problems. We shall transmit to a younger generation within the party this accumulated knowledge, and the expertise on how to mobilise people in Singapore, and for what purposes. Many of us here today paid an enormous price, and some nearly lost their lives, to learn all these. We must ensure that the next generation is worthy of the task they will inherit and able to preserve and improve upon it. Our past is an indicator of our future performance.

The 1950's was a decade of struggle for freedom. The 1960's was a decade of battle crises, when seemingly insuperable odds were overcome. The 1970's is a period of consolidation.

We must remain alert. We cannot afford to relax in our efforts. Fresh talent and young enthusiastic activists must carry the party forward. We shall broaden and add to the organisations on the ground, increasing our capacity to mobilise support amongst the broad mass of the people, whether they be workers by brain or by hands.

National Archives of Singapore

As a government, we must raise the standards of our society, not only improving the material part of life, but, more important, giving our people an

appreciation of things beautiful and artistic. A lively, industrious, and ingenious people deserve a healthy and gracious environment, and ingenious people deserve a healthy and gracious environment, for their efforts. All these achievements must be matched by a keen sense of nationhood, a group instinct for survival and progress in security.

National Archives of Singapore