

**REPLY BY PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW TO STATEMENTS
MADE BY THE AUSTRALIAN PRIME MINISTER, MR. WHITLAM,
ON BBC PROGRAMME 'MIDWEEK', 9TH AUGUST, 1973**

ROBIN DAY: Well, this has been a Commonwealth conference unusually free from the acrimony of past conferences but you'll have seen Mr. Whitlam in that interview take one or two swipes, some of them in good humour, at one of his neighbours in his part of the world, the Prime Minister of Singapore and we've asked Mr. Lee Kuan Yew to comment. Now you remember Mr. Whitlam said that Mr. Lee with Mr. Edward Heath, our Prime Minister, was one of the two conservative Commonwealth leaders left. Mr. Whitlam wondered why Mr. Lee Kuan Yew had not sent troops to Vietnam if he was so concerned with security in Southeast Asia. And the Australian Prime Minister suggested that if Singapore was so keen to get its nationals back from Australia for military service you ought to ask for them to be extradited. Now let me put one or two of those points to the Prime Minister of Singapore. First of all, that you and Mr. Heath are the only two Tories left in the Commonwealth. Do you accept that accusation or praise?

LEE KUAN YEW: Well, there's a brigadier from Ghana, there's a general from Nigeria, there's Forbes Burnham from Guyana, I don't know who's left, who's right. I think these are very ambivalent terms but I would find myself amused, I think, to believe that I am in the same class as Ted Heath. I don't go yachting, I've got very Plebian tastes in either pastimes or food.

ROBIN DAY: Mr. Whitlam said that you and Mr. Heath were irked by the fact that the Commonwealth conservatives have been halved in number since the Singapore conference and that's why you were making cracks about socialist governments in developing countries.

LEE: Well, you know I've never liked this asides where one isn't present. When I made these statements I made them to his face in his presence and I would far rather he were present here with me

ROBIN: Well, so would I.

LEE: so that we could sort these things out.

ROBIN: Well, I'm doing my best. What about the point that he made, which I think was a serious one, he said that why hadn't you sent troops to Vietnam if you were so concerned about security in Southeast Asia.?

LEE: Well first, why should I? Because I thought the intervention in Vietnam by Foster Dulles was a mistake. But the mistake having been committed, it affected the whole of Southeast Asia and not to go through with something like -- not as the Suez operation with the French/Israeli/British conspiracy but having made a start, having dug their toes in Vietnam, to scuttle out means to jeopardise the rest of us in Southeast Asia.

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ROBIN: What about the further point by Mr. Whitlam that your Singapore students who come to get training in Australia, he was saying that if you want them back you'll have to do something about it, he talked about getting them extradited.

LEE: Yes, I'm quite happy to do that. The point was that he will not allow me to do it, or his Immigration Minister is not going to allow me.

ROBIN: Why won't you allow them to stay in Australia?

LEE: We have only one precious natural resource, that's trained manpower. Three good men in a factory can give ten thousand good jobs -- a marketing man, a manager, a good engineer -- those are the three he wants. If he wants the chap who is on the factory floor we can send him thousands of those.

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ROBIN: Generally speaking, Prime Minister, we've asked you to come in and talk about these things that Mr. Whitlam has said but do you think that these are a good sign that Commonwealth can have these goes at one another.

LEE: Yes, I think so, I'd much prefer my seeing him here in a conference, face to face and saying it rather crisply than for me to have to send protest notes to each other. Or worse, conduct an exchange through the mass media, it doesn't get us anywhere.

ROBIN: He seemed to imply that you didn't get enough chance to indulge your undoubted talents for parliamentary debate in Singapore.

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LEE: Alas, what can I do, once the communists take to the streets and they can't muster sufficient support when they want to get back into parliament

ROBIN: What you need is a good leader of the opposition in Singapore, isn't it?

LEE: I wouldn't mind letting Mr. Gough Whitlam send one or two
keep me busy and in trim.

ROBIN: Prime Minister, thank you.

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