THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS TO THE COMMONWEALTH PRESS UNION AT A DINNER OF MONDAY, 30TH SEPTEMBER, 1974

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Oriental custom is to have speeches at the beginning of a dinner. It is a practice kinder to the speaker. It enables him to relax and enjoy his meal in congenial company. Had tonight's been a Chinese dinner, I would have availed myself of this custom.

Television has made public speaking at dinners more demanding. Often, the audience is not the people physically present, but the T.V. viewers, who have not shared in the dining and wining. So it becomes ever more painful to keep up this Western pretence that some men are born speakers who, with brief notes, can get on their feet and regale an audience with wit and wisdom. And yet the West believes Orientals are more cruel.

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However, your President, Lord Astor, is a kind man. He suggested that I may wish to speak about the relevance of the Commonwealth in this changing world. It is a safe topic. Not wanting to be cruel he had refrained from suggesting I speak on the main theme of your conference in Hong Kong, namely,

pressures on the press. However, I know you must be curious about how I pressurise pressmen. Well, in addition to all the conventional pressures we learnt from the West, we also have special inquisitional instruments, ancient modes of torture, specially graduated to inflict pain, more excruciatingly than that the journalist inflicts on the politician, plus of course, interest added for grave injury done to the public good. We have also modernised these ancient forms with the addition of electrical and electronic gadgetry, stereophonic sounds to amplify the terror, and low sound waves to give sensations of an earthquake. In this way, we can transform a bold and fearless critic into a willing and complaint sycophant.

But to get the lurid details, I shall leave this subject or quiet discussion between you and your Singapore colleagues, who I know will be only too happy to tell you all about it when I am not present. I hope that there are representatives from other parts of Asia, Africa, or South America, who can compare notes with your less fortunate colleagues in Singapore.

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Now to less serious subjects like the Commonwealth and the changing world. The Commonwealth, like all living associations, is itself changing, at least as fast as the rest of the world. Britain's membership of the E.E.C. was the most significant event in the last 2 years. The economic bonds of Commonwealth

preferences have given way to discussions for trade agreements, or association, or commercial co-operation agreements with the E.E.C.

The aftermath of British empire is different from that of any other empire. Britain's first overseas colonies were in North America. After they fought for and obtained their independence in 1776, they went on to take over all the Dutch, French and other European colonies in North America and developed into the world's greatest industrial and technological power. That they made this an English-speaking people has had, and will continue to have a profound impact on the Commonwealth and the rest of the world.

It is said that Harold Macmillan saw Britain's role as the cultivated Greek to the newly arrived Roman. But the analogy of the Greek--Roman symbiosis does not do justice to the heritage Britain left behind in America. The Greek language was reduced to insignificance, while Latin became the lingua franca of the then civilised world. In the British-American relationship, it is as if the Greeks made the Romans and their empire Greek speaking. True, Webster's is different from the Oxford English dictionary. New inventions, new ideas, have added new words, expressions and idioms. But there is sufficient feed-back to make the English language essentially similar and understandable, not only as between Englishmen and Americans, but also between them and Canadians,

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Australians, New Zealanders, and the non-native English-speaking Comonwealth. Many of the new Commonwealth countries have found that it is an asset to keep up the learning and use of English. It is now a language of the educated in large and important centres of the new and the old worlds. de Gaulle could have been pardoned for an "expletive deleted" in his other world if he could have heard the recently elected French President meeting the new German Chancellor conversing without an interpreter in English!

And so it is in Southeast Asia. The British gave us their language. When Ministers and officials of the five ASEAN countries meet, they speak English. The Thais have always learnt it with the British accent before the last War, and the American, since then. The Filipinos speak Spanish American. The Indonesians, with their facility for picking up languages, speak English fluently with a Dutch accent. Malaysians, like Singaporeans, speak it with a Malaysian-Singaporean accent, or rather several sub-accents depending on their dialect groups.

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In truth, the British created a world audience which the Americans took over and expanded. Today, the sheer volume of American publications, from dailies to weeklies, to monthlies and books for recreation and education, they

pour out broad as the Mississippi, compared to the River Thames. The impact is pervasive.

The facility of our understanding each other in the commonwealth is likely to continue. But it will be unrealistic to ignore America's economic weight, her scientific lead and technological ascendancy. This wealth has its repercussions on the mass media. Ten years ago, the British quality newspapers had more experts on Southeast Asia than the Americans. Today, after US$130 billion spent on Vietnam, the Americans have more experts. Even the best of British quality papers are unable to maintain correspondents in each of the major areas of Southeast Asia. They have to use stringers. And recently I read an interview given by President Giscard d'Estaing in a British newspaper. It was an interview given by the French President to an American, James Reston, Printed in the LONDON TIMES by arrangement with the NEW YORK TIMES. There was a finality in this symbolic acknowledgment of the overwhelming weight of American resources.

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With the world changing so fast, it is dangerous to predict trends even up till 1980, let alone the year 2000. If present trends continue, experts say that all the industrial world's reserves of some US$400-500 billion will belong to a few Arab oil producers. And this is just the beginning. Can it be that the Americans

and Russians have created a new "Pax Soviet-Americana", this condominium M.Jobert quite rightly resented? Have their nuclear missiles formed the neat balance of the new Roman Arch beneath which the oil producers are disporting themselves with their fabulous wealth? For days, weeks and months after the oil embargo last year, I watched incredulous and in awe. An oil sheikh had only to leak good news to the press, for instance that the embargo was likely to be lifted, and Dow jones and FINANCIAL TIMES indices would go up. Then when another oil sheikh announced the price of oil would double from 1st January 1974, Dow Jones and the FINANCIAL TIMES indices slipped down, as did other stock markets in Frankfurt, Tokyo and Paris, and, alas Singapore.

All this had a most fantastic impact on floating exchange rates. Young money brokers, presumably bright and sprightly, calculating that the oil burdens on the balance of payments would be least on America, decided that the US$ must be worth more than the Pounds, Yen, the French Franc and the Deutsche Mark. And they made the $ go up within a matter of hours by more than 10%.

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I watched this buffeting of the financial and currency systems of the world, wondering whether some super wizard had decided to punish the strong industrial nations for the cavalier way they had treated the long suffering Arabs. But alas many longer-suffering masses in India, Bangladesh, and Africa were

punished as well. Day by day I watch stocks and shares, short-term deposits and gold bullion, like so much "Monopoly" money or plastic chips in a casino, go up and down, and eventually end up in a heap in front of a few fortunate enough to have oil and to take advantage of the modern day Roman Arch-- a neat balance of nuclear missiles between America and the Soviet Union. It is a breathtaking pastime, this new sport, which we in the still poor third watch in bewildered amazement as the fourth world punishes the first no doubt for the vicarious satisfaction of the third. But I cannot help wondering what would happen in somewhere, somehow, someone moves one little nuclear keystone from the "Roman Arch" of the new "Pax Soviet Americana". Or indeed what if the two policemen in this condominium decided they should stop all this gambling in the interests of an orderly world?

But meanwhile the world scene keeps changing like a kaleidoscope. The world's greatest boxing contest will take place, not in America, but in Kinshasa.

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The contestants will get at least US$5 million each. Indeed one of them is already demanding more, even though both their purses are tax-free in Zaire. I expect that is as good a reason as any staging it in Zaire. But it will take place at 3 a.m. in Kinshasa, and for British viewers too. But what can one ask for when vast sums for television rights via satellite are being paid by American networks.

3 a.m. Kinshasa time is American Prime viewing time, 10 p.m. on the Eastern Seaboard, 9 p.m. Midwest and 8 p.m. on the West Coast.

Alas it will be 9.30 a.m. Singapore time. And some group of enterprising manufacturers of soft drinks and other health-giving products, are getting together to ensure that our factory and office workers will take time off to watch this great event. But I cannot say I am enamoured of entertainment at the start of the working day.

But last week I read that BBC TV was going to run, for two years, a trial newspaper on television "Ceefax". Press the button and you can have the sports or business page, home, European or overseas news. IBA, Independent Broadcasting Authority, will run a similar experimental programme called "Oracle". This was good news indeed. It is giving back to the printed word via the electronic media, the importance it should always have, over the picture and the spoken word. I could not help wondering whether this is not once again the Briton playing the Greek in the Roman Empire. Let us hope this will not be like what the Comet was for the Boeing's and the DC8's. But even if it is, it proves that the British are still an imaginative, inventive and creative people, reaching out for the frontiers of knowledge despite a smaller economic base. And the British contribution to contemporary literature not least because it's in elegant

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prose is still considerable. And I consider myself fortunate to have learned the classical version of the language to my continuing joy and advantage.

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