TRANSCRIPT OF QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

FOLLOWING THE PRIME MINISTER'S ADDRESS

AT THE PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON IN CANBERRA

ON 21 OCTOBER 1976

CHAIRMAN: Thank you Prime Minster.

We now come to a period of questions by our press and media members.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, in the parliamentary speeches yesterday, mention was made of your country's move toward self-reliance in defence. Is there a time-table on this? When, for example, would you see yourself as self-reliant, apart from alliances, partnerships and how long in that context do you see your country and perhaps Malaysia requiring aid of Mirage fighters to be stationed in the region?

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PRIME MINISTER: Well, the initial deadline was March 1973 which was the date placed by a former British Labour Government way back in January 1968. I think we did our best to meet that original deadline. And then it got extended up till, I think, March this year, when the last of the British forces left.

How self-reliant can we be? Well, how self-reliant can any nation, other than America and Russia and China, be? We are interlocked and interdependent. We try to minimise the risk of conflicts by adopting postures of non-alignment and policies of non-alignment other than when our survival is threatened whereupon we cease to be non-aligned.

And as for the specific question of the Mirage Squadrons, I think it's principally a matter for the Australians to decide. The bulk of this squadron is in Butterworth, opposite Penang. There is a very small component in Singapore. As long as the Australians want to keep their squadrons in Butterworth, I believe I am right in saying that the Malaysians would welcome it and so would we. But we work on the basis that everybody else can go home but we cannot.

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QUESTION: There was a time when you hailed as an upholder of the democratic socialist faith in Southeast Asia. Since your difference of opinion with the Socialist International and an apparent cooling of individual relations between you and Mr. Whitlam and then perhaps Mr. Dunstan, how do you now view the doctrine of democratic socialism and would you count yourself amongst its adherents?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, words mean as Alice said, "what I think it means", what you think it means and what it generally is understood to mean which you might find in the Oxford English dictionary. You will not find this particular phrase. It has been coined by socialists or social democrats who want to be less thought of as moderate fuddy-duddies and so called themselves socialists but distinguished themselves from the East Europeans by calling themselves democratic socialists. I think that was the etymology of the phase.

Whether I am as democratic a socialist as Mr. Whitlam or Mr. Dunstan, I do not know. I don't think I would increase my popularity rating very high in Singapore if I went trendy. And so I very frankly confessed the other evening that I am an old-fashioned socialist and part of the advantage of being an old-fashioned is, you can be quite consistent and not worry about the latest fads, fetishes, fancies.

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QUESTION: You say that you are an old-fashioned socialist. Yet you began within the confines of the Westminster system. I would like to ask how you would explain the requirement by your government to have a licence before one may hold a public meeting? Why there is a necessity to licence public

newspapers? Why you removed the concept of trial by jury and why you subscribe to the concept of detention without trial?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, fortunately for me, all these concepts were presented to me by a departing British colonial system. So the rationale and the explanation were given by successive British Secretaries of State for the Colonies in Westminster and they were at great pains to elaborate on how different the conditions were in the colonies, backward places like Singapore from advanced developed countries and societies like Britain. I would not bore you with this.

I think there is one particular change we made entirely on our own. That was the abolition of trials by jury. That has nothing to do with Westminster. Well, it is partly because of my own experience at the Bar and that of many others who have practised. And my awful sense of guilt every time I got a murderer off that I really wasn't adding up to the sum total of justice in the land. I discovered how easy it was to get the first police statements, the further statements and go through them with a fine tooth-comb, confuse the witness and the jury. And we have now allowed the accused and counsel to face the impartiality of a judicially trained mind and a trained hearer of witnesses who will decide what is the truth. And I fortunately have not appointed any judges

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since I came into office. So there can be no question of my having fixed the judiciary. They were there; I inherited them.

QUESTION: Sir, your speech seems to indicate a scepticism for the intentions of Indo-Chinese countries such as Vietnam and Laos. Do you support Mr. Fraser's call to develop closer relationships with those countries or do you consider this would help their efforts to promote insurgency in Southeast Asia?

PRIME MINISTER: I would definitely support Mr. Fraser's call to promote better, constructive relationships between the countries of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the countries of ASEAN and the rest of Southeast Asia. Whether, of course, our wishes are reciprocated will have to depend not just upon the statements made by the leaders of these countries but the actions, the deeds and the policies that they implement. And we would strive very hard to see evidence of genuine goodwill for peaceful co-existence and co-operation in Southeast Asia.

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QUESTION: Prime Minister, yesterday, 16 members of the Labour Opposition boycotted your luncheon. In a letter which I understand that you have received, they asked for an explanation on five points. I won't go through the whole five points, but certainly I think the first two deserve putting to you:

An explanation in relation to the detention without trial of many opponents of your government, including well-known journalists and poet, Said Zahari, for periods up to 13 years. And, secondly, the curtailment of trade union rights in Singapore such as the Trade Union Amendment Act of 1966.

PRIME MINISTER: Well, in 1963 when Said Zahari and a few others were detained, the powers of detention were exercised by a Security Committee, in then self-governing Singapore which included a British Chairman, a Singapore Minister and a Malaysian Minister. And after the uprising in Brunei and subsequent disorders in Singapore and Malaysia, a group of people were detained -- I think somewhere around 60 or 70. Two of them have not been released because they refused to give a simple undertaking: one, not to use force to overthrow a government, two, not to support the Communist Party of Malaya. I think they are relatively simple undertakings to give for all peace-loving citizens, and I would sincerely hope that the 16 members of Parliament -- well, I hope more will join the 16 in writing to these two gentlemen and asking them to give these two simple undertakings so that they can have all the freedom they desire. And I think that may have a much more beneficial effect then asking me the same questions over and over again and I become quite practised in my reply.

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The second point -- the curtailment of trade union rights. I think you may have got the dates wrong. You see, these 16 obviously have been misled by whoever gave them the data. The amendment to the trade union legislation was in 1968 after the British withdrawal took place. And we then faced a cut of some 20% of our GNP in less than three years and an increase in unemployment estimated at between 70,000 to 100,000 people, both directly employed by the British and servicing British forces then in Singapore. And if you recall -- perhaps you may be a little bit on the young side, but if you read about Singapore of the 1950s and the early '60s, you will remember, it was quite a riotous and boisterous place, where riots and strikes and civil commotion were part of the order of the day. And we introduced certain amendments like no strikes or no union leaders being able to call a strike without a secret ballot being first taken to make it lawful. I think it was a very considerate and a reasonable proposition because the proof is really in the much more healthy trade union situation which now exists in Singapore, in the blossoming industries and the fact that unemployment is marginal.

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QUESTION: I would like to refer Mr. Prime Minister back again to the letter signed by the 16 members of the Labour Opposition in which they referred to Amnesty International, which has been highly critical of the way you handled your political opponents. In a report published in March 1976 ...

PRIME MINISTER: Are you a member of Amnesty International?

QUESTION: I'm a member of the Amnesty International, local branch ... they claimed political detainees in Singapore, including non-communists who were critical of your government. Would you like to comment on that? And, secondly, they also reported that political detainees in Singapore were subjected to various forms of physical and mental torture. And that was one of the main statements of that letter from the Labour politicians here. In a speech to the Commonwealth Press Union on the 30th of September 1974, you gave your reasons why torture was used when you said, "In this way, we can transform a bold and fearless critic into a willing and complying sycophant." Is this reason still valid today and Mr. Prime Minister, is the practice of torture still widely used in Singapore?

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PRIME MINISTER: Thank you.

I think you border on the comic. I am very pleased that you put them all together because you make my job so much simpler. I'll send you a copy of the speech I made at the Commonwealth Press Union. They included very sober people who would find considerable embarrassment in your

quoting what I said somewhat out of context. I assured the pressmen that all the Singaporean journalists present there knew just what a panoply of instruments we had, both ancient and modern electronic, by which we transformed fearless critics to spineless sycophants.

The question has been answered -- the one on Amnesty International which was quoted by Socialist International which was quoted back by the local branch of Amnesty International in Canberra -- very simple. We have such things called writs for assault. Civil suits can be brought and appeals can go right up to the Privy Council. And we have urged both Socialist International and Amnesty International to finance these suits so that adequate publicity can be given as to our methods of interrogation and torture, if any, and the world will be that much the more knowledgeable about how we do things in Singapore.

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May I explain that every five years at the outside, I have to -- you may find this very difficult to believe but I do have to submit myself to a secret ballot and for every individual you detain, you antagonise his family, his friends and you give a stick to your political opponents to beat you with. And I have not the slightest doubts that may political opponents will take these sticks and beat me at the next election. If you want to help them, there is

nothing to prevent you when election time comes to turn up in Singapore and watch the fun and games.

QUESTION: Mr. President, may I ask the Prime Minister what does he see as the future of the Commonwealth of British nations?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is a little out of context, that question. I think if you ask me: what is the future of the Commonwealth of British nations, I say it's got a future if they stay British. The phraseology now is the Commonwealth -- and it is not British, it is still English-speaking, by and large -- and I believe it is going to go on, to everybody's surprise because it is a useful forum to let off steam and perhaps having let off steam for the mass media, meant for the world and for home consumption, you then meet quietly outside and say, "Really I didn't mean all that. What I meant was ..." And it is a very useful forum.

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QUESTION: Mr. Prime Minister, do you accept the assurance China gave Mr. Fraser during his visit, that it would not support insurgency movements in Southeast Asia? Were you given a similar assurance when you were there and is there any evidence that this assurance is not being adhered to?

PRIME MINISTER: I think it is highly improper for me to accept an assurance given to Mr. Fraser. The People's Republic of China does not expect me to accept an assurance given to somebody else. They will think it most rude of me. Did they give me such an assurance? I think I was very careful to spell out in my speech in Peking what they actually said to me. And if I may paraphrase myself: Premier Hua said to me that the Chinese Communist Party is a Marxist-Leninist Party and as such supports Marxist-Leninist parties everywhere. However, what the Singapore Government does with her own communists is the business of the Singapore Government and China does not interfere. Barring slight errors in emphasis and phraseology, that was the gist of the statement given to me. And I hope China has not interfered and will not interfere.

QUESTION: Is there any evidence that it is interfering?

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PRIME MINISTER: I think you have not listened to me as carefully as ... You must read the words very carefully: "What Singapore does with her communists is Singapore's business and China does not interfere."

QUESTION: I am talking about Southeast Asia ...

PRIME MINISTER: Yes, yes. Well, I think that may go for other countries in Southeast Asia. But when they said, "What Singapore does with her own communists is Singapore's business and China does not interfere", she does not interfere with what Singapore does with her own communists.

QUESTION: Prime Minister, during your "Monday Conference" appearance, you referred to Australia as an enclave. I wonder if you can elaborate on that. How do you see Australia fitting in or not fitting into this part of the world?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I was talking about the tariff wall that surrounds Australia and the inability of the simple manufactures of Southeast Asia being able to get over that wall and sell in Australia.

I don't know if you want me to elaborate on the 'enclave' theory. But I think all enclaves are bad in this interdependent world, I mean, and all countries do have fences put around them. And if you want to establish long-term relationships of friendly interdependence, then you must be prepared not only to sell to those countries but also to buy from them. And as of now, the balance of trade of all these countries in Southeast Asia with Australia is very much against the underdeveloped countries of Southeast Asia.

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QUESTION: Prime Minister, if I could ask a further question. Is the Soviet Union still trying to have access in Singapore for naval repair facilities or any other facilities for that matter and if so, what is your current attitude?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, I have said on two occasions since I arrived that the Soviet Union is uninhibited by any sense of guilt or constraint in acting other than as the great power that she is and she sees no reason why she shouldn't repair her ships in Singapore, whether they are trawlers or cargo vessels or even tourist vessels. But I do not know what exactly is the reason they have, as yet, not sent in naval vessels. They did send a naval tender -- it is one of these feeding vessels, a mother ship, I think way back in 1972. If I remember rightly, that was as a result of some provocation given, that Singapore would be scared to repair Soviet vessels because other people might get angry with us. So they sent in a mother ship and we repaired it. But they haven't sent in anything more sophisticated, perhaps, because they have got very sophisticated gear on board and they wouldn't like anybody else other than trusted Russians to go prowling around these ships.

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QUESTION: Prime Minister, in the House of Representatives on Tuesday, Mr. Mike Holton, a Liberal member from Country Party, Victoria,

referred to the distasteful demonstrations against "our most distinguished visitor, the Prime Minister of Singapore, Mr. Lee Kuan Yew." He went on to say: "If it can be established that students from overseas are among those employing these hoodlum tactics, will the government consider sending them home forthwith?" My first question is: Do you agree with that or do you agree with the reply of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Peacock, who said: "It would certainly not be my view despite the strong implications contained within the question that students should be sent home merely for demonstrating."

And if I could refer to your days, Sir, on a rather more philosophical note, when you were at Cambridge, did you actually indulge in student demonstrations yourself?

PRIME MINISTER: Well, when I was a student, it was a different world and demonstrations were relatively peaceful and tame affairs because we were a tame generation. I don't know if I have found it very wild or terrifying. In fact, I am somewhat surprised that people would get up so early in the morning on my behalf. And I was cheered that there were people who still believe in getting up bright and early and no doubt having let off some stream, would go on to more constructive pursuits, I don't really mind. I mean, if it gives them joy, it wouldn't subtract anything from me. My only sense of grievance is every time it

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is raining and I have got to get out from the car and go into the wet and dash into the foyer, they were missing. They are only fair weather demonstrators.

QUESTION: Given your adherence to the North Vietnamese propaganda about ASEAN, do you believe there is a danger that you might get a Warsaw Pact-type situation developing in Indo-China countries?

PRIME MINISTER: No, I am not an adherent. I am just a conscientious follower of what they put out. And I think it would be a mistake not to take seriously what they put out. And they are very careful in their choice of words, which they broadcast and which we monitor and they mean what they say. I don't think there is any danger of our misunderstanding them and leading to an impasse just because we think they are saying things which they don't mean. I think they are serious men who seriously intend what they say and we keep on making friendly overtures in the hope that sooner or later they would come to the conclusion that we are our own masters, that we want to be at peace with them and that perhaps there is some benefit in constructive economic relations and less what they call people-to-people help in liberation wars. It may be rhetoric. I hope it is. Then all would be well!

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