NOT many statesmen become the *enfant terrible* of international politics at the age of seventy-five, as Charles de Gaulle has done, to the ill-concealed exasperation of Lyndon B. Johnson. De Gaulle's recent world tour was a diplomatic triumph, following close upon his visit to the Soviet Union, which opened up new perspectives for European and world politics.

In Cambodia, de Gaulle advanced a realistic solution to the problem which menaces world peace—that the United States must withdraw, or at least announce its willingness to withdraw, as the pre-condition to peace in Vietnam and neutralisation of Indo-China. But the Americans have neither the Gallic realism, nor diplomatic skill, to extricate themselves from an untenable situation. Instead, they blunder brutally into further escalation and drag the world along with them to the brink of disaster.

France, an imperialist power with imperialist aims, took some time to learn the lesson of history. First Indo-China, then Algeria, were needed to show there was another path than to make every national revolution a battleground in a new Hundred Years War between capitalism and socialism.

The contradiction in de Gaulle is well expressed in the anti-climax of the wasteful, and wasted, Muraroa explosion. De Gaulle is the mirror-image of Churchill. The latter achieved a lasting place in history for an historic denial of his whole political life before and after—the grand alliance with the Soviet Union in the war against nazi Germany. Churchill once said: "I did not become His Majesty's Prime Minister to preside at the dissolution of the Empire," yet he presided over just that.

De Gaulle returned to power to restore the glory and military might of France, to keep Algeria French, to forge an unnatural Franco-German unity. If he has restored French glory, it is only because he failed to achieve the rest. De Gaulle's great contribution lies in perception of the new elements in international relations — the relative decline of American economic and political power vis-a-vis both the socialist countries and the capitalist world; the reality and power of the national revolutions; the permanence of socialism as a system, and therefore the
necessity and possibility of co-existence; refusal to be blinded to
the real clash of French and U.S. interests by technicolored anti­
communism.

Thus, despite his many foibles, de Gaulle is a considerable figure
in world politics, destined for a place in history. This can
scarcely be said of his many detractors, least of all of Harold Holt,
who read him a fatuous lecture taken straight out of the Johnson
textbook, cramming of which constitutes almost the only schooling
for Australian foreign policy makers.

Mr. Holt seems likely to be in for even more disastrous excursions
into international affairs than Sir Robert. So it seemed in London,
where he was able to study another contrast to de Gaulle, the
almost-mystic, conservative military leader who can nevertheless
take a political stance independent of the United States, and com­
mand respect from friend and foe alike. We mean that smooth­
faced and tongued middle-class intellectual social democrat Harold
Wilson, erstwhile “left”, who is writing another shameful page in
British Labor Party history.

Gone are the high-sounding solemn promises of technological
and social revolution. Instead, the cold reality of wage freeze
and austerity for all but the richest, in deference to the City,
Wall Street and those international financiers known as the
“gnomes of Zurich”. Wilson told the British Trade Union Co­
gress: “Instead of government by peroration, we took action.”

The Tories had to rest on peroration, because they could never
have got away with the Wilson actions, swallowed by the TUC
bureaucratic majority, albeit with sour grumbles. Moved by a
baronet, seconded by a lord (whose Union had earlier rejected
the wage freeze), the majority forced through the endorsement
by a narrow majority.

The Wilson foreign policy bears not even a faint resemblance to a
socialist foreign policy. It is even a travesty of a British policy;
it is more humbly pro-American than that of Macmillan, Eden
or Churchill ever was.

No wonder the Australian Tory Holt was able to stand shoulder
to shoulder with “socialist” Wilson against the crude Afro-Asian
hordes who actually had the gall to expect that a Labor Prime
Minister would do what he had promised—put down a white-racist
rebellion against the Crown. How naive, to think that suppres-
sion of treason and racism, let alone socialist principles, could count more than City investments in and trade with Rhodesia and South Africa!

The debacle of official British unionism at Brighton focuses attention upon big issues before Australian unionism. Arbitration is in deep, chronic crisis. The 1966 basic wage judgment, reversing the 1965 "principles" which in turn reversed earlier "principles", was quite unsatisfactory to trade unionists. Soon after, the Commission rejected without even giving reasons, a Clerks' Union appeal against a determination of taxation officers' pay. This produced an anguished protest from J. M. Riordan, Clerks' secretary, that the unions would have to consider withdrawal from compulsory arbitration.

Then came the unkindest cut of all — flat rejection of the modest enough claim for a $6 rise for General Motors-Holden workers. The unions spent thousands of dollars on this case, even bringing an expert witness from the United Auto Workers' Union of America. This rejection brought forth a plaintive wail from Mr. H. Souter, Australian Council of Trade Unions secretary, that "unions must now reassess their whole attitude towards compulsory arbitration. . . ."

Workers everywhere are asking: What better arguments can be put up for wage rises than in the basic wage and GMH cases? And if such cases are not decided on their merits, how are they decided? The answer becomes clearer with every case. The arbitration system is loaded on the employers' side. Logic, legal precedent, moral standards and economic facts are bent and twisted to find reasons for giving nothing, or as little as is believed practicable. A decision favorable to the workers is won by industrial strength, whether actually or only potentially exercised, and there is very good reason to believe that this conclusion is spreading through the union movement.

It is a two-edged sword for Messrs. Souter and Riordan to flourish the threat of withdrawal at Arbitration, in an effort to influence some small sop to justify the "leave-it-to-arbitration" inaction which passes for trade union leadership at ACTU level. Unionists might ask them to live up to their words. Would they then say, with Bottom in "A Midsummer Night's Dream": "... I will aggravate my voice so that I will roar you as gently as any sucking dove; I will roar you an 'twere any nightingale?"
A widespread mood is developing in the union movement for an accounting of ACTU stewardship. A few more performances like the last Executive meeting of August 29-September 2 will certainly call forth probing questions. At that meeting (adjourned until September 26, after this is written), inaction, irresolution and procrastination in defence of vital workers' interests was matched only by planned efforts at erosion of previous ACTU policy on conscription, opposition to the Vietnam war, and other vital national issues. There is also more than a suspicion that the latter manoeuvres were destined to aid rightwing pressures to push Labor Party foreign policy nearer to one of bi-partisan agreement with the Liberal Government.

One of the least edifying aspects of that ACTU Executive meeting was the majority attitude to the strike of the Northern Territory aboriginal pastoral workers. These courageous aborigines walked off the job at Wave Hill, owned by the British meat combine Vesteys. Theirs was a simple demand—equal pay with white workers.

The Arbitration Commission had solemnly gone through the motions again. It heard a long case, replete with economic facts and moral issues, and then decided for equal pay—in three years. This was an iniquitous decision, rightly condemned by the ACTU. But to no avail; condemnation and moral argument cut no ice with court or cattle kings.

The aborigines went further than condemnation; they stood up for themselves, elected their own leaders, made their own decisions. Their strike will prove historic, not just industrially but in the developing struggle for aboriginal self-emancipation.

The Australian press, with very few exceptions, played down the dispute, in deference to the monopoly interests concerned. The majority on the ACTU Executive also played it down. They made no appeal for all-out union support, financial or otherwise. It was left to militant unions and public organisations for aboriginal advancement to raise money to help the aborigines, to the North Australian Workers' and the Meat Industry unions to pledge industrial support. The ACTU majority occupied itself instead with criticising "outside interference" in the dispute—apparently meaning the aborigines' own organisation. "ACTU rules and procedures" were the main pre-occupation, the winning of a vital dispute was nothing.
The irony of this whole performance lay in the fact that the aboriginal workers concerned—expected to conform to ACTU rules—were non-unionists. They could not join the NAWU because they are paid well below the basic wage. However, the aborigines understand the real principles of unionism. At the date of writing, they are standing firm and learning all the time. Their understanding of unionism is reinforced by their own ethos of tribal solidarity and an ever-growing consciousness of their identity as a people. Whatever its outcome, this dispute is a milestone in aboriginal advancement.

The Northern Territory Aboriginal Rights Council, whose leaders are all aborigines, has written to U Thant alleging, and documenting, extreme racial discrimination practised by the Australian government. This is unlikely to become a major issue in the forthcoming election campaign—itself a commentary on the morality of Australian politics. Yet it will not be entirely absent, one more of the many vital issues confronting Australians when they go to the polls on November 26.

The issues certain to be at the centre of the campaign are Vietnam, foreign policy and conscription. The Liberal-Country Party coalition is not quite as certain of their electoral impact as they make out. They want to exploit to the limit the potential anti-communism of these issues, colored by crude daubs of racialism and anti-Asian chauvinism.

The more vigorously and squarely the Liberal Party case is confronted, not just in its effects but its causes, the more will support be won. Particularly is this true of a factual critique of the theory of the US alliance—the real foundation of the revealing slogan "All the way with LBJ". Unfortunately, this cannot be expected from the Labor Party, even from Dr. Cairns, enmeshed as he is in the logical consequences of his acceptance of some special relation with the United States. Only the Communist Party will make a forthright and fundamental challenge to the government's foreign policy.

Nevertheless, the electoral campaign will force a confrontation between Liberal and Labor foreign policies—and there are enough differences to mean that every Labor voter is expressing all-out rejection of the Holt-Hasluck line. The ever increasing brutality and immorality of the war, its character of outside invasion and aggressive war against a whole people, is becoming ever clearer.
Growing Australian casualties are causing deeper thoughts about why young lives are gambled and strengthens the opposition to conscription for Vietnam to around two-thirds of young voters.

The Vietnam issue has stirred public interest in foreign policy to an extent rarely seen in Australia before. Yet it may well be true that still only a minority, for or against, will be finally decided on how to vote by this issue. It is a good sign for Australia's political future that interest and passion have been stirred outside narrow limits, still better that the protest movement has been stronger, more articulate and convincing than those supporting the government, despite conformist pressures. Yet political polarisation may be on the committed left and the right, leaving most people still only superficially moved on the great issues of foreign policy.

However, military, political and economic facts of life have forced these issues into everyone's consciousness, even if in another form. Fate of the basic wage rise, affecting some eighty per cent of the people directly or indirectly, has become a public scandal. The responsibility for the wholesale raid upon incomes through price rises—by private and public institutions alike—has been placed upon McMahon's Budget, even by his political accomplices in the states.

Dishonestly devised to avoid electoral reaction, the Budget has pleased no one. No social service improvements, except an inadequate pension rise (swallowed up in price increases); a staggering extra burden in NSW and Victoria (with seventy per cent of the electors) hospital fees, fares and all sorts of charges; no solution to the education crisis. It is almost an open secret that a savage supplementary budget is likely if the Liberals get back.

The Australian economy is in a serious state of stagnation in most sectors. The flourishing sectors are those (mainly owned by foreign capital) gouging out Australian mineral wealth for export of raw materials—and foreign exchange to overseas shareholders. Those industries servicing this process, in construction and supplies, are also doing well. But the building, automobile and durable consumer industries are going backwards. Last year, production declined in seventeen of the thirty-five basic commodities reported on by the Bureau of Statistics.

Unemployment is rising, in a season when it usually falls. Lay-offs in the motor industry are only the most significant of
cutbacks in employment. South Australia has been particularly hard hit, while the politically touchy state of Queensland is also worse hit economically than the average. Memories of 1961 must be haunting Holt’s thoughts, which of course only presage an even dirtier campaign than usual. Yet 1961 proved that economic issues are decisive in deciding waverers, and can cut right across the violent anti-communism upon which Liberals and DLP rely to stampede enough voters.

Black storm clouds are rising over the world capitalist economy. Wilson may have been exaggerating to swing TUC votes when he said that another crisis like that of the 1930's could come if sterling collapsed. However, there is no doubt that acute trade and financial problems are a constant threat. Problems posed by the rapid growth of productive forces are putting intolerable strains on the capitalist world with its restrictive relations of production, internally and between nations. These are more and more expressed in the sphere of finance and trade.

The development of sharp economic issues, coinciding with and demonstrably linked to great issues of war or peace, provide a wonderful opportunity to confront the complacent, supine and orthodox capitalist policies followed by Holt, Hasluck and McMahon.

It would be foolish to overlook the difficulties facing those forces wanting to end seventeen years of Liberal rule, not least the obvious defeatism and even active sabotage by the ALP and trade union right. However, predictions by press and Liberals and DLP of a smashing win, gaining ten more seats, are most unlikely to be achieved if anywhere near a decent campaign is waged by all genuine anti-Tory forces.

Certainly every Australian socialist, militant unionist and peace activist will throw everything into the campaign to defeat the government. Party and policy differences will be sunk in this common patriotic endeavor.

Equally certainly, whatever the outcome, the left will need to be thinking ahead, searching for new paths of advance to action for peace, to curbing monopoly power so living standards can be raised, and preparing the movement for the struggle for socialist transformation. The Communist Party will combine its independent election campaign with elaborating its views on the policies needed for 1967 and after.