TELEVISION takes its audiences close to events and the men who lay claim to decisive influence on those events. The cameras were very revealing of President Johnson and Prime Minister Holt in their politicians' progress through eastern Australia. Predictably, Mr. Holt came out worse—obviously obsequious, long-winded and boring. Mr. Johnson, more experienced and better coached in projecting an image, was perhaps the bigger disappointment to those who may have looked for any signs of intellectual depth or grasp of the moral and political issues in Vietnam and Asia.

Instead, there were lashings of ham and corn, a virtuoso display of American politicians' expertise and glad-handing. The unprecedented thousands of demonstrators were confirmed in their determination to continue campaigning to keep Australia independent of the United States. The uncommitted who thought through the ballyhoo, even many who went to cheer and wave flags, must have felt some apprehension that such a man sits at the control panel of immense destructive power.

Mr. Holt and most of the press were lavish with superlatives before, during and after the visit; everything was "historic". History rarely judges events as do the men who take part in them. Events called "historic" by interested parties are often unimportant and soon forgotten. The Manila Conference is certainly destined for historical oblivion. It was no peace conference; if it meant anything, this was contained in Johnson's guarantee to Westmoreland on his hurried visit to Vietnam—"everything you want". Manila was the green light for still more ferocious use of American military might in the aggressive war.

HOW goes this war? The press reports alternate between mean-spirited triumph—"militarily the war is being won", and perplexed pessimism—"we are losing the war for the minds and hearts of the people".

Five months ago, our press reported triumphantly on the Australian Army's campaign to win over the villagers of Hoa Long, a mile from its H.Q., with civil aid, a new market, food
and clothing, a school . . . Early one Sunday morning the farce turned into tragedy, as 1,000 troops sneaked out of their camp, sealed off the village and rounded up every male between 12 and 45, every female between 12 and 35.

These people—1,000 of them—were carted off to the provincial capital for “interrogation”. The meaning of this word was revealed by Daily Mirror reporter John Sorrell, who wrote: “I traveled the village with one of the (South) Vietnamese units, led by a veteran captain who had fought for the French at Dien Bien Phu. He found one Vietcong . . . The Viet captain later showed no mercy. ‘I am going to beat him up, then kill him,’ he said. I never saw the man again.”

Hoa Long is the Vietnam war in microcosm, revealing the military, political and moral issues and lessons of the war. The “enemy” is the whole population; 12-year-old girls or South Vietnam Army conscripts (“The local Vietnamese troops were not told of the search until the last moment . . .”).

The South Vietnam Army is led by officers who fought against the Vietminh, to keep their country a French colony. The captain was no exception; Prime Minister Ky, many of his Cabinet and military leaders, were French puppets before changing their allegiance to the Americans.

The whole structure of “government” is corrupt and anti-national. The September “elections” were a farce. Said South Vietnam Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh: “The people voted because they were told they’d get no rice if they didn’t.” Force, and force alone, keeps the Ky regime in power. And this force is now almost exclusively provided by the United States and its allies.

This “foreigners’ war” is regarded by the people as a war of aggression. “Search and destroy” gave a figleaf of propriety by assigning U.S. (and Australian) troops to the front-line fighting, and then handing over the “pacified” areas of the South Vietnamese. Now U.S. and allied troops are to “clear and hold”: foreigners are now to occupy the whole country.

The miracle of Vietnam is that the United States is suffering military reverses as well as political defeats. Never before has such an apparently unequal war gone on so long and seemed so endless. On the Americans’ own figures, they out-number the National Liberation Front by at least eight to one; they claim
a "kill ratio" of ten to one. Technological superiority is immeasurable. They have complete or virtual monopolies in planes, rockets, napalm, white phosphorus, gas and defoliating chemicals, tanks, warships . . . the list is long. The Americans have long surpassed the previous "world record"—they have dropped more bombs in Vietnam than were dropped on Europe in World War II.

WHY no American victory? The obvious and only possible reason—that the people won't submit—cannot be admitted. Their only excuse is "Vietcong terror". Since the balance of terror is so obviously on the Americans' side, this is not a very convincing argument. The main evidence given is the "assassination" of village chiefs and others (up to 16,000, it is asserted).

The village chiefs were themselves practitioners of terror, the main instruments of Diem, anniversary of whose downfall was marked by a ceremonial parade in Saigon on November 1. The American professor, Bernard B. Fall, writing in the U.S. magazine Ramparts, states:

"... Diem ended the 400 to 500 year tradition of the democratic election of village chiefs by each village . . . He began making local appointments from Saigon, and the appointees—many of them outsiders—were met with open hostility by the villagers. Diem's men would have to go outside the village to the police post to sleep safely. Many of them were known to be gouging the villages. The hard fact is that when the Viet Cong assassinated these men, the Viet Cong were given a Robin Hood halo by the villagers."

Denis Warner confirms that this position has worsened, at least in one important respect:

"Corruption has reached limits which test credibility. Far too little of the great American aid programme reaches its destination and far too much goes into the hands of unscrupulous officials . . . I talked to one American official who said he always added extra to aid consignments so that district village officials would have a share allocated to them." (SMH 4/11/66).

The balance of terror reveals the deep moral sickness of American imperialism. Its apologists shudder with horror at "Vietcong terrorism", accepting with apparent equanimity at best, and all-out support at worst, the impersonal, one-sided, technologically advanced barbarity of high explosive, napalm and chemical warfare.

Western capitalism is morally sick, and the loss of moral feeling in Vietnam demands and receives its intellectual rationalisation. Dean Acheson, co-author and now Elder Statesman of
the Cold War, said in a speech at Amherst College in December, 1965:

"The end sought by our foreign policy . . . is, as I have said, to preserve and foster an environment in which free societies may exist and flourish. Our policies and actions must be decided by whether or not they contribute to or detract from achievement of this end. They need no other justification or moral or ethical embellishment . . ." (Quoted by Bernard Fall in Ramparts).

Thus a spokesman for the Christian West sententiously but clearly asserts: The end justifies the means.

One million Vietnamese died in the nine years of the independence war against the French. The deathroll since the Americans "escalated" the war two years ago already nears 250,000. Such slaughter is horrifying genocide; it must be stopped by still more resolute action of all who condemn the war. This means every socialist country acting in concert and putting aside all differences to help Vietnam; it means every person and movement opposed to the war, in every capitalist country, working in unity to exert maximum possible pressure for an end to U.S. aggression. This is particularly a task for Australia, so much a part of the U.S. war, where so much public opposition, concern and uneasiness exists.

THE anti-Johnson demonstrations may finally prove the most important event of the visit. It is no exaggeration to say this marked a new higher stage in the protest movement against the Vietnam war. A new determination, a wider social base, a more militant spirit, these were new features serving notice upon the Establishment that the opposition is growing wider and deeper.

Other straws show how the political wind is blowing. The Independent Liberal movement, irrespective of its ultimate support in votes, is an important direct challenge to government policy on Vietnam from a new social force. Divisions within the Liberal Party and still more notably between the Liberal and Country Parties, are strongly affected by the sustained opposition to the Vietnam war and conscription.

The far right is mobilising all its forces to meet the threat of the protest movement. It is only too easy to dismiss the far right as extremists, cranks and fanatics, unimportant and slightly absurd. The arrest of 19 American "Minutemen", with an astounding armoury of weapons, allegedly for use against "leftist" camps,
may cast a different light upon the Far Right here, since it peddles the Birchite propaganda which inspires the Minutemen. However, the real danger to Australian democracy does not yet come from extra-legal fascist violence.

The threat is powerful and more sinister—the strong and growing influence of the Far Right within the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party extreme right almost defeated a candidate for Warringah pre-selection, although his anti-communism is above suspicion, because he opposes apartheid. Some selected Liberal candidates are connected with Ustashi terrorists (through the "Anti-Bolshevik Bloc of Nations" and "Captive Nations Week"); they favor "war on mainland China" and see Communist influence everywhere.

This could perhaps be dismissed too if it were not known that some powerful figures in the Holt Ministry were also associated with these groupings. Killen, Kent Hughes, Wentworth and Jess have colleagues in seats of power. The threat to Australian democracy is real; it comes from the Far Right and sees its course to power as through Liberal government.

There are enough legislative powers, and a growing group of influential Ministers, to ensure an attempted crackdown on protest movements. This could arise if the government suffered loss of seats, thus feeling insecure, or maintained its majority, and felt untrammelled by public opinion. And defeat for the government could easily decide the Far Right upon other paths, such as Colonel Campbell and his New Guard took a generation ago.

The labor and democratic movement must be alert to the threats to democracy posed by the undeclared war in Vietnam and the whole dangerous course of the foreign policy summed up in the notorious: "All the way with LBJ". As Mr. Barton, leader of the Liberal breakaway movement said (SMH, November, 7):

"I think the suggestion that anyone who opposes the Government is a communist is not only wrong, but is a symptom of a condition in this country where people are afraid to stand up for their principles because of the possibility they might be attacked in this way."

Racialism and anti-communism are, of course, the only real Government justification for the Vietnam war. The old "yellow hordes of Asia" catch-cry has now become a more multi-coloured scare—The Red yellow hordes. The Far Right is thus the more welcome, since it is very much a White Man's movement. In it are
to be found friends of Smith's Rhodesia and Vorster's South Africa; anti-semites; even an academic who asks us to ponder how "we" would feel if outnumbered by aborigines, as South African whites are outnumbered by blacks.

ABORIGINES are greatly outnumbered by whites; of course no one in authority has worried very much how they feel about this. White domination of the Aborigines has brought them untold suffering and misery in the 178 years of European settlement. Seventeen years of Liberal government have brought forth a new policy, assimilation, and many assurances that the bad old days have gone forever.

Present-day realities have suddenly been revealed in all their shocking harshness. And this revelation has been brought about by an historic action of the Aborigines themselves. The Aboriginal stockmen's strike in the Northern Territory has many far-reaching implications. It has once again shown that direct action is the way to get results, a lesson that the Aboriginal strikers have emphasised for white workers. The results already gained are concrete—changes in regulations governing accommodation and keep; admission that supervision of previous regulations was lax or even non-existent; exposure of the callous inhumanity towards the Aborigines by Vestey's and other big cattle companies; misuse of Aborigines' social service payments by some station managements.

The strike has already forced a substantial increase in the wage scale, in the face of the Industrial Commission. This agreement, reached by the ACTU with cattle owners and government, has been rejected by the strikers and the North Australian Workers' Union because it falls short of the minimum possible settlement—the basic wage for Aboriginal stockmen.

It seems certain that the struggle will continue next year, when the cattle companies again want Aboriginal stockmen. This underlines the need for continued financial and moral support for the strikers. Support so far has been remarkable. Dexter Daniel and Captain Major, representing the Aboriginal strikers, have made a tremendous impression in Sydney and Melbourne. Thousands of dollars have already been sent to the N.T. Aboriginal Rights Council and the NAWU. As usual, the bulk of the money has come from militant unions and from job meetings. A very heartening new development is financial support from the universities, mainly from collections by radical students.
An interesting sidelight on the strike is the various responses from the Establishment. Predictably, the cattle owners reacted by accusations of “Communist influences”. The Federal Government has been discreetly silent. The metropolitan press first tried to blanket the strike and its exposure of intolerable conditions in silence. There were only two exceptions from the beginning—the Northern Territory News in Darwin, and Tribune nationally. To their credit, most metropolitan papers have subsequently come around to news and, in general, favorable comment on the strike. An interesting exception is the Packer press. The Bulletin has so far made no comment on the strike, and a rough check of three months’ issues shows only two lines reporting the fact that Wave Hill was out.

The salient fact is that this strike was “caused” by no-one except the cattle owners and the government. It was “fomented” by no-one except the Aborigines’ own leaders. It is most significant that this strike has already brought forth such new developments as the Gurindji demand that Wave Hill be turned over to them, and the assertion of Aboriginal identity as a people.

The Aboriginal strike is the signal of the end of “assimilation”, herald of the new path of development for the Australian Aborigines.

FOR ELECTION COMMENT SEE INSIDE BACK COVER.

“The reason for such a crisis in ideology is that capitalism is losing its ability to appeal to reason . . . there is no reasonable explanation for the mass napalm burning of people. There is no reason for malnutrition in the midst of affluence . . . So capitalist ideology has been forced to retreat from the arena of reason, of debate about ideas, about truth . . . has retreated to the back alleys where it makes its appeal . . . to prejudice, to fear, to jingoism . . . The idea that it is all right to burn villages with women and children in Vietnam because they are a colored people is making the rounds in the ideological sewers.”