THE ISRAEL-ARAB WAR has tapered off to an uneasy cease-fire interrupted by armed flare-ups. Israel now occupies almost all Egyptian territory east of Suez, a large part of Jordan, and part of Syria. Moshe Dayan and his mentor, Ben Gurion, are Israel's heroes of the moment. Dayan was also strategist and executor of the 1956 surprise attack, which certainly won a temporary military victory but ended in political fiasco. 1967 is unlikely to have any better result for Israel in the long run unless there is a rapid and far-reaching political change.

A major aim of Israel and imperialist strategy, as in 1956, was the downfall of Nasser, the Syrian government and other anti-imperialist Arab regimes. This failed and the Arab nations are more than ever convinced of the need to take an anti-imperialist path. Their hostility to the United States is stronger than ever. If the Arabs see Israel as part of the United States' attack on Arabs' national independence and aspirations, this is not unnatural.

The Australian press, typically, has tried to cover up the significance of United Nations' voting on the Middle East. Yet every significant Asian and African country voted against Israel; only the United States, Australia and 15 other countries joined Israel in abstaining from the latest UN vote that again condemned the occupation of Jerusalem by 99 to nil.

Hegel wrote that "tragedy consists, not in the conflict between right and wrong, but in the conflict between right and right". The Middle East crisis is certainly affected by the conflict between Israel's right to national existence, and the right of the Palestine Arabs to live in their homeland from which they were driven in 1948. Over a million Arab refugees were driven out of Palestine in 1948; today, their numbers are swollen by hundreds of thousands more forcibly driven out of occupied Arab territories.

However, the basic cause of the Middle East conflict definitely lies in the conflict between right and wrong, the struggle of the Arabs for national independence against Western imperialism. The oil cartels take at least $1,000 million profit annually from the Middle East, most going to the US monopolies. The United States, taking over from Britain and France, tried to maintain political and military supremacy by establishing reactionary regimes and using the Sixth Fleet and military bases.
By 1959, the balance of forces had definitely swung against imperialism; the Bagdad Pact had disintegrated and its successor, CENTO, had proved largely ineffective. National revolutionary movements have arisen all over the Middle East and have succeeded in several of the more important Arab countries. The Arabs' national revolutionary movement has evoked fear and hostility from the United States, which stops at nothing to protect its oil interests. This is why the USSR has helped the Arab countries to protect themselves from imperialist attacks in the past, and is today giving them new economic, political and military aid.

In 1951, Mossadegh of Iran (a Middle Eastern, though not an Arab nation) nationalised foreign oil concerns. A few months later he was overthrown in a military coup now openly admitted as engineered by the CIA. In 1958, the Americans landed in Lebanon and threatened Syria; in 1963, Kassim of Iraq was murdered the day after he announced his intention to nationalise foreign oil installations. Syria's 1967 nationalisation of the oil pipeline was soon followed by American efforts to overthrow the government, co-ordinated with Israeli military attacks and air-raids on Damascus.

Israel's co-ordination with Western, particularly US, attacks upon the Arab national liberation movement, is sometimes justified as a forced alliance with anyone who will help a beleaguered country. However, Israel's ruling policy has been one of decisive pro-Western, pro-American alignment, supporting United States imperialism not only against the Arabs but also in Vietnam, in the United Nations and in opposition to the socialist countries. This whole policy has estranged Israel from its neighbors and its potential friends, and unless it is changed Israel will always be at odds with its neighbors.

The first essential step towards peace and co-operation is immediate and unconditional withdrawal from all occupied territory. The second step is for Israel to accept a non-aligned position, renunciation of support for American policies in the Middle East, and negotiation of Arab recognition of Israel's right to national existence, the right of the Palestine Arabs to choose return to their homeland or receive compensation, and equality of Jews and Arabs in Israel.

Any other policy will lead to growing dependence upon the United States, West Germany and a few other regimes without prestige or capacity. And dependence upon the United States leads to unexpected problems.
EVEN MR. HOLT may be discovering that “All the Way” means a bit further than he thought. When Mr. McNamara returned to Washington from his ninth and gloomiest Saigon visit, he virtually pronounced a death sentence on an unknown number of young Australian conscripts. Those already there must be ‘used more effectively’, while more men are to be requisitioned from the ‘allies’, as imperial Rome levied its vassals.

Vietnam has already been the graveyard of many military and political reputations. Generals have come and gone; Harkins, Wheeler, Maxwell Taylor, Sharp. Now Westmoreland is implicitly criticised in McNamara’s demand for more effective use of US forces. American political figures have fared no better. Cabot Lodge had two ‘tours of duty’, to no avail. He and Lansdale were shifted because their ‘pacification’ failed, but the new ‘pacification’ measures have virtually collapsed. The Saigon ‘government’ is in scarcely better shape. McNamara himself may be near the end of the political road; even Johnson is running short of time.

Military failure is obvious, even though the United States has brought enormous power to bear upon Vietnam, including the Seventh Fleet and part of the Sixth. It is using 4,300 modern aircraft, including nearly half the US Army’s helicopters; 3,000 heavy artillery pieces, and infantry equipped with weapons that the Americans claim as the most modern in the world. It has dropped more bombs than were dropped in Europe in World War II, and added large-scale chemical and gas warfare.

The Americans have tried many different strategies and tactics. In 1963 they introduced the heliborne tactic; in early 1964 the tactic of attacks with armored cars was used; in late 1964, massed use of the puppet army; in 1965 the US used combined naval, ground and air forces. In 1966 and 1967 the Americans launched a series of ‘search and destroy’ and ‘pacification’ operations. One after another, there were proclaimed as great victories — Attleboro, Cedar Falls, Gadsden, Junction City and Tershying. But the nett result is failure. The Sydney Morning Herald’s correspondent, Margaret Jones, writes:

“The Pentagon claims its search-and-destroy operations are very successful, but correspondents in the field report that areas like the Iron Triangle from which the Vietcong were swept early this year, are now back in communist hands.” (S.M.H., 5/7/67)

The latest assault on Da Nang (July 14th), with its loss of dozens of planes, 200 casualties, and the simultaneous release of 1,200 guerrilla prisoners nearby, showed the impossibility of securing US positions.
Margaret Jones' already quoted article supplies the answer to why the Americans are losing the war. She writes: "Some correspondents in the battle area are calling the war unwinnable, because the roots of revolution are deep in the peasantry . . ." The Vietnamese, by no means foolish optimists, are confident of victory. The Vietnam Courier (June 5th) writes:

"The Vietnamese people's struggle will go through difficulties and hardships, but we are resolved to fight until complete victory. One hundred thousand or several hundred thousand additional American troops can in no way save the US from defeat."

The heroic and expert fight of the Vietnamese people is the main cause for this certainty of victory. A not unimportant factor is the political consequences within the United States of an apparently endless vista of a war that garners neither honor nor victory.

AUSTRALIA FACES THE SAME perspective, even if on a smaller scale. More troops, more casualties, more taxes, more price rises, more crises in education, more decline in social services—and more questioning of the war, the foreign policy behind it, and the wisdom of a government that has sacrificed all independence and freedom of action.

Stresses and strains caused by government policies are profoundly influenced by the Vietnam commitments. Internal contradictions within the government are sharpening, going deeper than personality clashes or Liberal Party manoeuvring to cut the Country Party down to size. They are policy differences that go deep, affecting trade, rural policy and foreign investment.

Controversy over the Basic Industries Group is surely one of the strangest political incidents of recent years. No one will admit to knowing anything about it, except the 'extremely rich' Mr. C. W. Russell. The Prime Minister knows nothing; Mr. McEwen, who started it all off by his blistering attack, is now emulating Brer Rabbit and lying low. Mr. McMahon seems to know more than most, if one follows the old political maxim: Never believe a rumor until it's been officially denied.

The last has not been heard of BIG or of the deep policy differences within Cabinet and the government parties. And the agonising decisions facing the government over Vietnam, the Budget, trade policy and the industrial situation will stoke the fires.

THE LABOR MOVEMENT can turn these divisions to its advantage, if it develops a much more dynamic policy of exposure,
confrontation and action. On the industrial scene, union unrest is rising to new heights. 400,000 metal workers are about to stop work, hundreds of thousands more will protest over the total wage decision, postal workers are acting both for improved conditions and in answer to high-handed government authoritarianism. Predictable government decisions on Vietnam can be answered by vigorous action for a real peace policy, and the Budget could be met by a serious criticism of the government's whole economic policy and advancing a socialist alternative for a new radical program of struggle for reform and social change. These are the real issues of policy that were and will be discussed at the series of Labor Party, communist and trade union conferences that began in June and will end in September.

The Labor Party conferences were inconclusive. In Melbourne, Mr. Whitlam's intemperate attacks strengthened the left rather than weakened it. In Sydney, the right held on to control, though its margin was not always secure despite some dubiously inflated delegations from unions committed to the machine. South Australia was mainly concerned with the problem of maintaining the State government, while in Perth the advances made by the Whitlam group may be more apparent than real.

A curious feature of Labor Party conferences is that the differences are usually fought out on apparently secondary issues. Thus, tickets, positions and organisational questions take first place. The Whitlam probes against Vietnam policy were not pressed, and Mr. Barnard corrected his Saigon 'indiscretion'. A tacit compromise on Vietnam appears possible at the Federal Conference, in which the left will hold more than it concedes, but the right will bargain on having the numbers later on to 'interpret' policy in its own way.

Mr. Whitlam's main emphasis just now seems to be on a new image of a streamlined modern organisational structure, backed up by a youthful, vigorous leadership in parliament and party. From outside, it appears that the plan for reorganisation is mainly concerned with increasing the weight of NSW in the Federal Conference, and so changing the balance in favor of the right. Unfortunately, NSW is scarcely the best advertisement for the dynamic image. Old, tired, conservative, rigid, anti-intellectual are better descriptions of the NSW leadership than the Victorian, whatever the latter's real or imagined weaknesses may be. Mr. Colbourne seems the authentic image of the NSW machine.

The NSW branch earlier this year tried to ban its members from peace activity, and renewed this effort by the narrow margin of 30 votes at the June Conference. The machine's weight was thrown against certain executive members regarded as left of centre not only to assert right domination in general, but also
to get the numbers for the Electoral College that was to pre-select the NSW Senate candidates. It was an open secret that Senators Murphy and McLelland were marked for the axe, in favor of two older and much less talented candidates. This was another example of the NSW machine’s preference for yes-men rather than young men of ability and vigor who take Labor Party policy seriously. Since the NSW executive is Mr. Whitlam’s main prop, its activities cast some doubt on his image-building. Although the rightwing was supremely confident—a ‘victory party’ had been organised for the evening that turned into a wake—the electoral college gave McLelland and Murphy the first two positions.

The struggle in the Labor Party still seems evenly balanced, and probably there will be little change after the Federal Conference in Adelaide. The basic policy issues will remain unsettled.

THE COMMUNIST PARTY CONGRESS gave its main attention to policy, although also deciding important proposals on Party structure and rules. Both had been circulated for wide discussion some seven months before Congress assembled. When the 159 delegates took their seats, they knew what the basic issues were, and knew the general views of their electors on these. There was no wide gulf between two groups as have developed in the Labor Party—there was a wide range of basic unity on aims, methods and tasks.

This by no means precluded debate, differences and controversy, of which there was enough to hold every delegate’s interest to the end. This basic unity did ensure that differences did not harden into irreconcilable positions, factions or tickets, but that all main decisions were debated out and finally adopted unanimously or by wide margins.

These decisions included endorsement of the Party’s analysis of the significance of technological change and its effects on social structure and class forces, adoption of the aim of working towards a coalition of the left, and the aims and general principles of striving for unity of the labor movement as the centre of this coalition. The Congress reaffirmed the Party’s support for the Vietnamese people’s struggle against US imperialism as the main task in the struggle for peace, and as a vital part of the struggle for social advance in Australia.

Important changes were made in the Party Constitution, all designed to strengthen party democracy and create new conditions for a vigorous Party life. The aim of building a mass Communist Party was endorsed, and decisions adopted setting out the methods of working towards this aim.
Decisions were taken for a vigorous drive to develop and explain the Party's ideas and policies on all the main issues confronting Australians, including a much deeper analysis and research into Australian society. Publication of a book, pamphlets and brochures was decided on, and new methods of promoting marxist study and analysis within the Party and publicity were adopted.

The 21st Communist Party Congress may be estimated in the future as marking an important step forward for the Party itself, the left as a whole, and the labor movement.

TECHNOLOGICAL AND OTHER SOCIAL CHANGES, placing new issues before all classes and political trends, raise the most vital questions for Australian unionism. The Communist Party Congress suggested that modern unionism should assert the rights of employees not only to higher wages, shorter hours and social security, but also to education, individual dignity and democratic control of decisions now made in huge and impersonal concerns, run by high paid bureaucrats, in both monopoly and government enterprises. It suggested that unionism needed closer cooperation between industrial and white-collar unions, amalgamation and other improvements of union organisation. The essential feature of such organisational improvement should be grass-roots democracy, initiative of workplace organisation and individual unions, not bureaucratic control by a small body of conservatives at the centre. Modern unionism must be militant, democratic and assertive of the new demands of today's workers. The contention of lines in the union movement, the struggle between right and left, centres precisely on these issues.

The forthcoming Congress of the Australian Council of Trade Unions will debate these issues. While the conservative right may be well prepared in control of votes, it has nothing to advance in the realm of ideas, policy or dynamism in building the unions. Its policy, confined to legalism, arbitration, behind-the-scenes manoeuvring and passive unions controlled by high paid officials, is in deep crisis following the total wage decisions, the prolonged margins case and other arbitration failures.

In these circumstances, only the most determined minority of opponents of action on the ACTU executive voted against a protest action on the total wage, and the whole executive supported the Metal Trades margins stoppage, albeit with as many qualifications and restrictions as the majority could impose.

All these issues, rather than mechanical majorities ensured by AWU affiliation, will influence the course of the ACTU Congress and the future of Australian unionism.