END OF AN EPOCH is too dramatic a term for the announced resignation of Albert Monk as ACTU President. Yet this imminent departure of a well known figure does in a certain way dramatise the issues Australian unionism faces today. The press with its usual cheap sensationalism, is reducing the future of unionism to a struggle for power between Messrs. Hawke and Souter. While this is a real conflict, in which the battle lines have already been drawn in their first statements, the real significance of the conflict is to be found in issues that face the movement, in the perspectives, problems and tasks of unionism today, in the policies which it should adopt and practise.

The old-style reformism, of which Albert Monk was an outstanding representative, has moved into a blind alley where it threatens to lead the movement. This reformism has always tried to fit unionism into the capitalist power structure, through an intricate balancing of arbitrationism and behind-the-scenes negotiations with governments and employers on the one hand, and the irrepressible pressure for militant action on the other. Purpose of the balancing was always to keep the union movement within the system, regarding militant action as a necessary evil that had to be ended as soon as possible, on which some its practitioners developed a considerable expertise. The old style reformism also tried to balance the trade union movement, co-operating usually with the more extreme rightwing, more open advocates of arbitration and union-employer collaboration and opponents of industrial action, against the left and militant influences.

Old style reformism faces several challenges today. These may be analysed as social and industrial, political and psychological. Social because of the great changes only beginning as the scientific and technological revolution gets under way, with all its social consequences. These include the shifts of workers due to change, the growth of new techniques and new types of workers to operate these, with the emergence of a new type militant whitecollar unionism which finds it not so easy to fit in with the old type reformism of the ACTU.

New dimensions of industrial unionism required by this social change are completely outside the experience and thinking of this
reformism, all the more as its main practitioners are old and set in their thinking about the type of demands, the forms of action (largely restricted to arbitration advocacy and backroom bargaining), the scope of unionism, the combination of political and industrial action. Psychologically, the old reformism is unable even to comprehend the problems, bound as they are to the old ideas and empirical concepts, suspicious of any theoretical conceptions or revolutionary innovations.

The crisis of the old reformism is closely linked with the crisis of arbitration, which has deepened so sharply with the total wage and other decisions, the use of penal powers, and strategic coordination of economic planning by arbitration, government and the big corporations. This crisis of arbitration and of the reformism that depends upon this system calls for new solutions.

The NEW RIGHT would like to impose its solution, drawing inspiration from the Santamaria ideology. This “new” right is contemptuous of the old reformism, because it is not consistent enough in its arbitrationism, its anti-communism, its acceptance of capitalism and rejection of socialism. This grouping, usually younger, more energetic and better educated than its predecessors, often advocates modernisation of unionism. Its modernisation would streamline unionism — to obviate union democracy, rank and file control; it would “reform” arbitration — and abandon strikes and militant action while supporting the penal powers; it would institute a power monopoly to exclude all left and centre elements. Newsweekly, organ of the National Civic Council, which regularly makes clear the policy of the new right, sees its main hope in the rightwing power monopoly in the NSW, Victorian and Tasmanian Labor Councils, whose leading lights it praises loudly and often.

However, this new force can scarcely take over from the old reformism, mainly because its policies are even further removed from those demanded by the changing working class. The marked upsurge of industrial action, which is certain to continue and to widen its front as new and diverse groups enter with their demands, is one sign that conditions do not favor the extreme right today, no matter how well they organise or how powerful their backers from outside may be. Its dependence upon anti-communism for mobilising support can succeed only temporarily even in rightwing circles, since this is essentially a sterile and negative position which lacks any constructive dynamism. Extreme right support for Mr. Souter, and his apparent acceptance of its negative propaganda line, can scarcely guarantee success.
THE LEFT CHALLENGE is the decisive one in unionism today. This left is by no means confined to Communists; it includes many Labor Party members and supporters, and also many militant unionists with no strong party affiliations. As the whitecollar and professional unions grow, a new-left influence is likely to develop in the union movement. Whatever its components, the left is an identifiable and recognised force, which supplies most of the dynamism and new thinking in modern unionism. The left itself also faces a challenge, whether it can break from old conceptions and old thinking, making a leap forward into the new conditions. This requires a deeper understanding of the technological revolution, its significance, direction and speed, the new types of demands and new forms of action it makes possible, even mandatory.

A great deal of work — research, education, organisation and action — has to be done in meeting this challenge. Some of the more important and urgent issues are:

a new perspective of trade union action for bolder social demands that correspond to the new social potentialities; a living wage, more leisure (shorter week or shorter working year), taxation reform, education, social services.

confrontation of the repressive penal power and other methods of state control and limitation of the unions.

an active policy aimed to break the shackles of arbitrationism upon union procedures and thinking, by giving greater weight to union action, direct negotiation and collective bargaining.

the democratic demands that begin to project themselves out of modern life — workers' control in industry, the rights of unions to entry and supervision, consumer protection and price control, protection of the individual from computerised supervision by Big Business (collection and centralisation of information in blacklists, credit ratings and other personal data).

programs of action for women workers (equal pay; solution for child care; career rights, demanding a radical change in official union thinking); for young workers and for immigrants.

modernising and streamlining unionism itself, by amalgamations aimed at industrial unionism, creation of union education and research departments and organisations (like the newly-formed Trade Union Education and Research Centre in NSW), and building a thoroughly democratic structure in the unions, based upon workplace organisation (shop and office committee, union stewards and delegates) and going right up to the Labor Councils and ACTU.
A LEFT TURN by the union movement would be decisive for the Australian left, for unionism is the biggest potential force for radical social change. If the union movement has not yet realised its full potential the left has to blame itself, whether they be those who have always recognised its potential and have worked within the movement, even if not always successfully, or those who have stayed outside as critics or concluded that the unions and the working class have lost their revolutionary potential.

The Conference for Left Action, to be held this Easter, is an opportunity for all sections of the left to clarify their views about unionism, the part that workers' industrial and political action plays in the struggle for socialism, and the left's ideas for modernising unionism for a still more active role. The Left Action Conference can be an historic occasion, bringing together militant industrial and white collar workers, radical students and academics, and left activists from the diverse people's movements. It provides a unique opportunity for all political trends on the left to advance their strategies for action, examine and debate the different ideas and stimulate thinking about the way forward for the left.

The Australian Left Review, which has supported the Left Conference since it was first announced, publishes in this issue the above comments on the industrial scene, a symposium on workers' control, a view of student strategy, and a section on education from a new and important book which it has produced. These and other features may help to stimulate thinking at and beyond the Conference.

The book Civilisation at the Crossroads, is we believe the most comprehensive and perceptive marxist analysis of the scientific and technological revolution yet published. Written by a team of Czechoslovakian specialists under the editorship of Radovan Richta, this book is intended as a contribution to the whole process of creative Left analysis of Australian society and of the potentials for revolutionary change within it.

The Conference for Left Action, not aimed at any organisational attempts to unify the Left, should nevertheless assist the trend to co-operation and united action around specific issues. This is certainly an urgent need today, as big issues are up for decision.

AUSTRALIAN FOREIGN POLICY and its siamese-twin monstrosity, "defence", are central to these issues. Just at the very moment when the second Tet offensive in Vietnam is demonstrating that an Asian liberation war can meet and defeat the world's strongest imperialism, plus its satellites like Australia, the Gorton Government has decided to "stay in Asia" to play the policeman's
role. Consequences of this policy are even less thought out than was the outcome of the Menzies' decision to intervene in Vietnam, though that decision at least had the excuse that it should be successful by all orthodox calculations of relative industrial and military power.

It is already history that the Vietnamese people have humbled US imperialist military might, even if its military and propaganda apologists still try to brazen it out with their claims of improvement in the military position. The obvious strategic passivity of the US and puppet forces, the NLF's ability to take the initiative on all fronts, and its continued ability to strike directly at the main US bases and Saigon, are signs of continued deterioration of the US military position. US complaints about the NLF offensive would be pathetic were they not so hypocritical in the light of their previous boasts of large scale "clearing" offensives.

Not so pathetic are the threats of retaliatory escalation, although their bluster is somewhat hollow and long drawn out. It is not so much that they cannot retaliate, but more that there is no retaliation that can salvage a military position already lost. Resume bombing the North? After all, the first Tet offensive was launched when bombing was at its height. And any escalation would unleash a world-wide anti-US storm, cause collapse of the Paris talks for which the Americans are clearly culpable, without any hope of compensatory military success.

Now it has become obvious that orthodox military calculations simply do not apply to a people's guerrilla war — and this should have been clear from the bitter lessons for imperialism in China's war of liberation and Korea — surely the lessons will be learnt? The answer is, of course, negative; this does not arise solely from crusty obstinacy to learn or from incompetence, though both are present. The present policies, however hedged or hesitant, are dictated by clear ideological aims and cold calculations of capitalist interest. Asian liberation must be contained; Australia has a special right to a special role in deciding what Asian nations should do. Behind all this lurks the self-interest of Australian monopoly capital, which translates the special role into calculations of markets, profits and capital investment. Even if these are a little unrealistic in face of Japanese expansionism in Asia and the Pacific, and the increasing control by foreign capital over the Australian economy, they are still the motive force in explosive amalgam with ideological urges, a racist fear of Asia and a rabid anti-communism.

THE COLLISION COURSE WITH ASIA is no communist invention. From Korea to Vietnam, and beyond, Australia has a
past, present and future of intervention in Asia. Besides this, enough evidence has filtered out to expose the sinister significance of “defence planning and cooperation with the United States” that has already placed a US-controlled missile communications base at North West Cape, another base that is part of an anti-China missile system at Pine Gap, a chemical and biological warfare research centre at Innisfail (with special relevance for tropical war), and is now preparing to cede another part of Australia for an American base in the Omega network.

They are urgent issues of foreign policy requiring left action that challenges the whole basis of Australian foreign policy, a challenge founded on considerations of internationalism, morality and national interest alike.

THREE MONTHS JAIL for painting the letters R and B on a wall! A Melbourne magistrate imposed this savage penalty on a South Australian student, after two other young men had been fined $200 each for painting one and a half words: FREE ZA.

Thus the trend towards repression snowballs, from jailing of Townsend, Zarb, Jones and other conscripts, through violence against demonstrators, Crimes Act prosecutions for distributing leaflets and other harassments of protestors. These attacks upon civil liberties flow inevitably from the policy of aggressive war, conscription and militarism. Whereas governments have tried to ignore and contain the protests, they are now forced into the repression which faithfully reflects their outlook and temperament. Defence of civil liberties, in particular the rights of protest, free speech and strike action, is a vital front of the whole struggle against monopoly capitalism and its war program.