

# Chapter 6

## POLITICS, POWER AND PROTEST IN THE VIETNAM WAR ERA

### INTRODUCTION

*In 1962 the Australian government, led by Sir Robert Menzies, sent a group of 30 military advisers to Vietnam. The decision to become involved in a conflict in Vietnam began one of the most controversial eras in Australia's history. It came at a time when the world was divided between nations that were communist and those that were not; when communism was believed to be a real threat to capitalist societies such as the United States and Australia.*

*The Menzies government put great effort into linking Australia to United States foreign policy in the Asia-Pacific region. With the communist revolution in China in 1949, the invasion of South Korea by communist North Korea in 1950, and the conflict in Vietnam, Australia looked increasingly to the United States to contain communism in this part of the world. The war in Vietnam engulfed the Indochinese region and mobilised hundreds of thousands of people in a global protest against the horror of war.*

*This era was a time of great change for Australia. In a climate of political unrest and public protest, traditional values were called into question.*



Photograph showing an anti-war rally during the 1960s. Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War led to the largest protest movement we had ever experienced.

### INQUIRY questions

- How did the Australian government respond to the threat of communism after World War II?
- Why did Australia become involved in the Vietnam War?
- How did various groups respond to Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War?
- What was the impact of the war on Australia and/or neighbouring countries?

### OUTCOMES

*A student:*

- 5.1 explains social, political and cultural developments and events and evaluates their impact on Australian life
- 5.2 assesses the impact of international events and relationships on Australia's history
- 5.3 explains the changing rights and freedoms of Aboriginal peoples and other groups in Australia
- 5.4 sequences major historical events to show an understanding of continuity, change and causation
- 5.5 identifies, comprehends and evaluates historical sources
- 5.7 explains different contexts, perspectives and interpretations of the past.



## GLOSSARY

**acquit:** to find a person not guilty of a charge or crime

**arms race:** competition between nations in the building up of military resources

**capitalist:** describes a system in which the means of production, distribution and exchange are privately owned and organised

**editor:** to examine literature, film or news for the purpose of suppressing parts regarded as objectionable on moral, political or military grounds

**communist:** a person who believes in a political system based on controlling wealth in the belief that the state should provide everyone with an equal share

**conscription:** the compulsory enrolment of men for service in the armed forces

**defection:** changing allegiance or deserting from a duty

**defoliation:** the stripping of foliage on trees; used during the Vietnam War to deprive the Vietcong guerillas of cover that they could use for surprise attacks

**diplomatic relations:** the negotiations and agreements between officials and governments of different nations

**escalate:** to enlarge or intensify a war

**guerillas:** small bands of soldiers who harass the enemy by surprise attacks

**ideology:** the theories, ideas and beliefs associated with a particular political system

**monolithic:** a thing that is massive and uniform

**moratorium:** a general suspension or cessation of something

**multiculturalism:** the theory that it is good for a society to include more than one culture or ethnic group

**pacifist:** a person who opposes in principle all war or violence

**paranoia:** a psychological disorder characterised by delusions and unnecessary fears

**political asylum:** to provide refuge or a secure home for a person regarded as being at risk from the government of their own country

**stockpiling:** the holding in reserve of munitions or weapons for possible future use

**subjugation:** the act of bringing someone under complete control

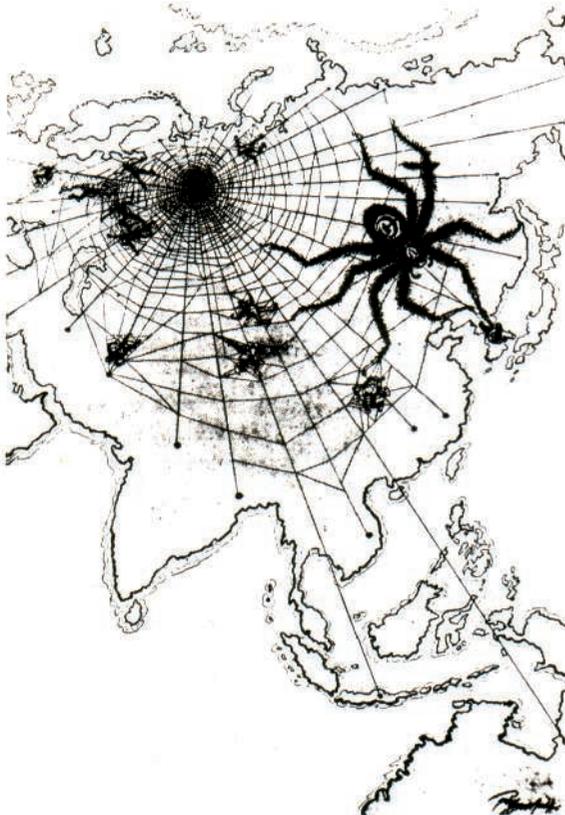
**subversive:** a person who attempts to cause the downfall of a government or particular way of life

**unconstitutional:** in violation of the laws of a nation or state

# WORLD COMMUNISM AND THE COLD WAR

In the aftermath of World War II, the conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union dominated the politics of the world. These two nations had become the new superpowers, with the **communist** Soviet Union heading an 'Eastern Bloc' of countries and the **capitalist** United States heading a 'Western Bloc'. In 1946 the British Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, described Soviet control of the Eastern Bloc as being like an 'Iron Curtain' around countries such as Poland, Rumania, Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and East Germany. In 1947, the United States declared that its policy was 'to support free peoples who are resisting attempted **subjugation** by armed minorities or by outside pressure'. The aim of this policy was to check the growing power of communism. The conflict between the Eastern and Western blocs became known as the Cold War. It centred on Europe but extended to the Asia-Pacific region.

## Source 6.1.1



'The Spreading Web'

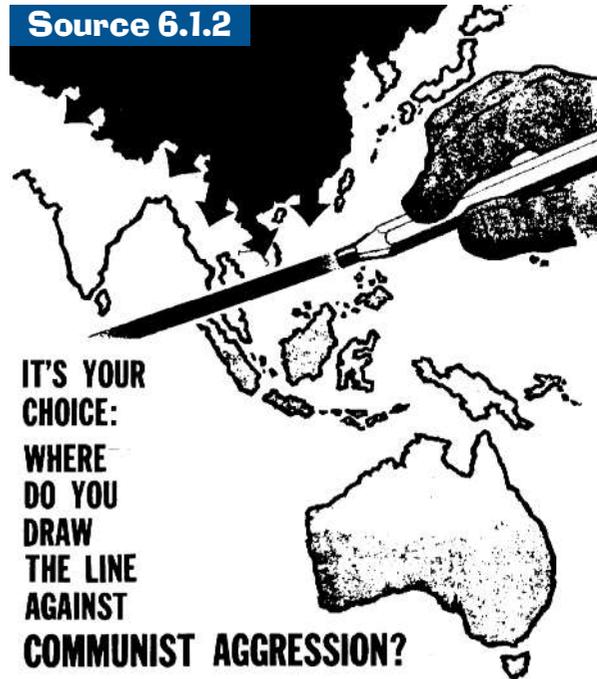
An image of the growing power of communism spreading across the world, from the *Bulletin*, July 1950

## RETROfile

In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), German philosopher Karl Marx had argued for a communist political system that would provide everyone with an equal share of their country's wealth. Marx believed that these communist societies would be formed after revolutions overthrew the capitalist world.

In 1949 the success of the Communist Party in winning control of China provoked an enormous reaction in the capitalist nations of the world. The capitalists' worst fears of a communist world revolution seemed to be coming true. It was believed that if one nation fell under communist domination, its neighbours would fall like a line of dominoes. This was the 'domino theory' and, in Australia, the fear of the 'yellow peril' from the north was replaced with an even greater fear of the Soviet Union's red flag sweeping a 'red tide' across the world. Australians saw communism as one single political movement with little difference between Soviet communism and Chinese communism.

## Source 6.1.2



Liberal Party poster c.1950s. Containing communism before it arrived on Australian shores became the foreign policy priority of the period.

In the decades that followed, a battle of conflicting **ideologies** raged. The Eastern and Western blocs clashed on every major issue, with world tension increasing on every point of disagreement. The political future of nations that were on the road to independence became a particular source of Cold War conflict. Each side accused the other of warlike intentions, so large standing armies were kept in a state of readiness for war. The world lived with the danger that the Cold War could **escalate** into full-scale warfare, with the superpowers **stockpiling** immensely destructive weapons. Huge defence budgets consumed money that could have been better spent on improving the quality of life of ordinary citizens.

The Cold War was a drawn-out conflict over issues that were often vague and confusing. In Australia, the fear of communism was kept alive by events beyond our shores and by the perception that communism had become a threat to our national security. In the United States, the infamous Senator McCarthy established a Senate Committee to investigate ‘un-American activities’. Many prominent intellectuals and artists were suspects in this atmosphere of **paranoia**, and it was alleged that the breeding grounds of communism existed at all levels of American society.

### Source 6.1.3



‘Nearer, clearer, deadlier ...’.

The fear of communism, as expressed in this Norman Lindsay cartoon from the *Bulletin* magazine in 1950

### Source 6.1.4

The need for security through strong alliances was a cornerstone of foreign policy in the 1950s, as expressed by Robert Menzies in this speech to Parliament in April 1955.

There was a time when we permitted ourselves to think ... that any great war would be thousands of miles away from us. But that day has gone ... I call upon all Australians to realise the basic truth ... that if there is to be war for our existence, it should be carried on by us as far from our soil as possible. It would be a sorry day for the security of Australia if we were driven to defend ourselves on our own soil, for that would connote the most disastrous defeats abroad and the most incredible difficulties for our friends and allies desiring to help us.

Two things are unbelievable. One is that any responsible Australian should think that we could be effectively defended either by our own efforts within our own borders or by resolution of the United Nations rendered impotent by the Communist veto. The simple English of this matter is that with our vast territory and our small population we cannot survive a surging Communist challenge from abroad except by the cooperation of powerful friends, including in particular the United Kingdom and the United States ...

Extract from Australian House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates*, 1955, vol. HR6.



### Check your understanding

1. What was the ‘domino theory’?
2. What was the Cold War and how was it fought?

### Using sources

1. What does source 6.1.1 indicate about what Australians thought about the communist system in the 1950s?
2. Which country is communism coming from and through which part of the world is the line against communism drawn in source 6.1.2?
3. Describe the figure in source 6.1.3 and find out what is painted on his shield. How does the source support the claim that there was an atmosphere of paranoia about communism in the 1950s?
4. Read source 6.1.4 carefully. Explain why Australians would need to continue the fight against communism ‘far from our soil’ and why we would need to enter into defence alliances.

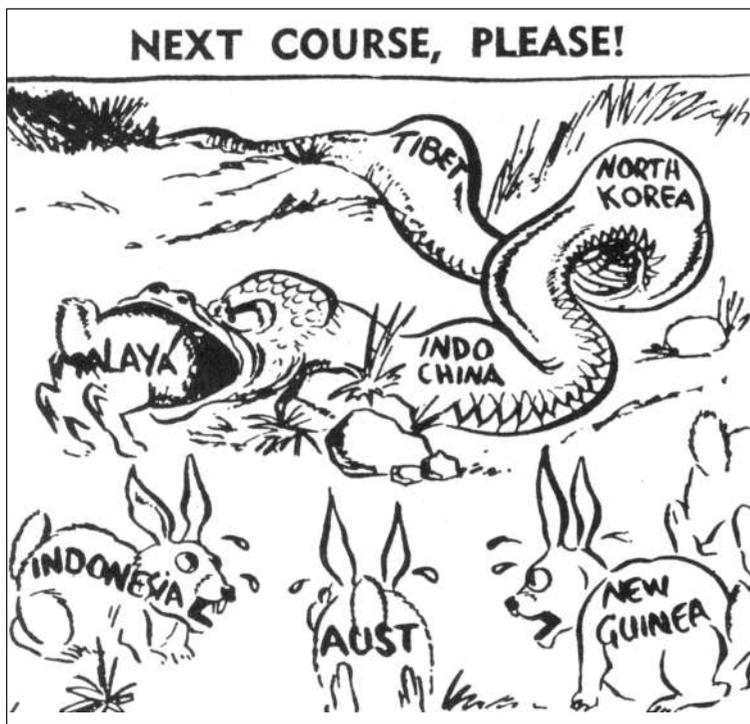
### Researching

From your library, find out more about the activities of the United States senator Joseph R. McCarthy and his investigations into un-American activities. Library websites are an excellent research tool, because they provide links to Internet resources. Links to dictionaries and encyclopaedias can be accessed through <http://link.bubl.ac.uk/reference>. Don’t forget to bookmark websites you have found useful.

# CRUSHING THE COMMUNISTS – ANTI-COMMUNISM IN AUSTRALIA

The fear of communism sweeping the world became an Australian election issue in 1949. As an election promise, the leader of the Liberal Party, Robert Menzies, pledged that he would introduce legislation to outlaw the Communist Party. Many Australians were convinced of the danger and believed that our economic prosperity was threatened by communists who had infiltrated our trade unions and political parties. In the Cinesound newsreels of the 1950s, anti-communist films explained that communism had subjugated 800 million people and that communists and their sympathisers were now regarded as un-Australian and potential **subversives**. In 1945 the Communist Party in Australia had boasted that it had 24 000 members. This was probably an exaggeration but communists had been active members of the waterfront, shipping, coal and heavy metal industry unions since the 1920s. During World War II, the Australian communists had cooperated with the war effort and increased their membership.

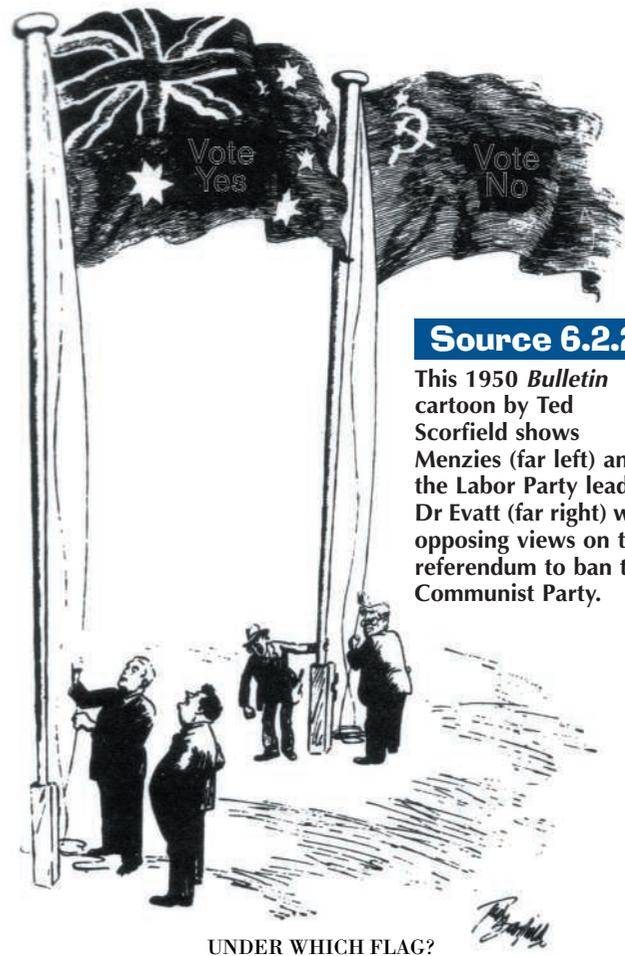
## Source 6.2.1



This cartoon from the *Catholic News-Weekly*, 21 July 1954, depicted the popular view of communism as a monolithic system ready to devour the defenceless democracies.

## GUILTY UNTIL PROVEN INNOCENT

In 1950, the Liberal Party government led by Menzies introduced the Communist Party Dissolution Bill into Federal Parliament. Menzies claimed that 'Australia must be placed on a semi-war footing which will involve restrictions on many civil liberties'. The legislation proposed to outlaw the Communist Party and prohibit anyone declared as a communist from holding a job in the trade union movement or in a government organisation. Once declared a communist, it was then up to the accused to prove his or her innocence. This clause in the legislation enraged many people, as it threatened individual freedoms and the rights of the individual. Ten trade unions and the Australian Communist Party challenged the Bill in the Australian High Court. They argued that only during wartime



## Source 6.2.2

This 1950 *Bulletin* cartoon by Ted Scorfield shows Menzies (far left) and the Labor Party leader Dr Evatt (far right) with opposing views on the referendum to ban the Communist Party.

## Source 6.2.3

The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, had made anti-communism one of the main election issues of 1949. This extract from a parliamentary debate in 1950 shows it was an issue that the government was determined to keep alive.

At the last general election, 87 958 persons, a small fraction of the total number of electors, voted for Communist candidates. The importance of the Australian Communist is therefore, not numerical, but positional; these Communists are not to be ignored as if they were a mere handful. They occupy key positions in key organisations in the industries upon which this country would have to depend if tomorrow it were fighting for its life. The choice before us is a grim but simple one. We can do nothing and let a traitorous minority destroy us, as they most assuredly intend to do; we can leave the Communist free to do his work so long as he is a union official, but deal with him in any other capacity; or — and this is the answer to the choice — we can fight him

wherever we find him, leaving him no immunity and no sanctuary at all.

The security and defence of Australia are dependent not only upon the valour of our troops in time of war and upon the industry with which they are supported in the factory and on the farm, but also in the continuity of these great industries that are vital to a national effort should war come ... In the considered opinion of His Majesty's government in Australia it would be an act of criminal folly to leave revolutionary Communists in key positions in those industries so that with all their smallness of numbers they may hope to achieve destructive results which five army corps could hardly hope to achieve.

Australia, House of Representatives, *Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates* 1950, vol. 207, pp. 1995–98, 2004–07.

should a democratic government have the power to control the rights of citizens. The High Court agreed and ruled that the Bill was **unconstitutional**. Menzies responded by announcing his intention to go to the people through a referendum to gain the power to crush the communists by outlawing the Communist Party in Australia.

The menace of communism was the major 1951 election issue. The referendum that came from it was one of the most bitterly fought in Australia's history. Many public forces had advocated the 'yes' vote, including the media and some groups within the Catholic Church. The Australian people cast 2 317 927 votes for and 2 370 009 against the proposal at the referendum on 22 September 1951. The 'no' majority in the referendum was not large, so the threat of communism remained alive as an issue within Australian politics.

## CENSORSHIP

The fear of communism in 1950s Australia was evident in government attempts to **cancel** the literature and art of the time. The author Frank Hardy was arrested and charged with criminal libel in 1950. His novel *Power Without Glory* told the story of a man who had risen to wealth and power through bribery, corruption and fear. It was a blend of fact, oral history, legend, rumour and fiction. It was a story loosely based on the career of John Wren, a millionaire figure in Victorian political history. The case against Frank Hardy rested on the claim that John Wren's reputation had been damaged by the novel. During Hardy's nine-month trial, he was labelled a communist agitator and troublemaker. He was attacked in the media and by members of parliament for his political beliefs. Freedom of

speech won when Hardy was eventually **acquitted** after a defence committee was organised to finance his legal costs and campaign to clear his name. After the trial, *Power Without Glory* became a bestseller and was made into a mini-series in the 1970s.



## Activities



### Check your understanding

1. What was one of the election promises made by Robert Menzies in 1949?
2. What did the Communist Party Dissolution Bill propose?
3. Why did the Prime Minister call a referendum in 1951 and what was its outcome?
4. Who was Frank Hardy and why was he attacked by politicians and the media?

### Using sources

1. What countries are depicted in source 6.2.1 as being in immediate danger from communism and what point is the cartoon making?
2. In source 6.2.2, what is the cartoonist suggesting by showing the Labor Party leader Dr Evatt under the Soviet flag? Explain the cartoon's message.
3. At the beginning of his speech in source 6.2.3, the Prime Minister pointed out that communists had only a small number of supporters. Why does he then argue that the government must move strongly against communism in Australia?

### Communicating

Organise a class debate on the topic 'Censorship is a necessary evil'.

### Worksheets

- 6.1 Communism explored

# THE PETROV AFFAIR – AN AUSTRALIAN SPY STORY

A modern spy thriller was played out in Canberra in 1954. On 13 April 1954, the three-year term of the Menzies government was drawing to a close and Federal Parliament was sitting for its final session. Public opinion polls of the time indicated that voters were now more concerned about issues related to the performance of the Australian economy than they were about communism. A few short hours before the close of Parliament, the Prime Minister made the startling announcement that a Soviet diplomat in Canberra, Vladimir Petrov, had been granted **political asylum** and that a royal commission would be established to investigate allegations of a Soviet spy ring operating in Australia.

Vladimir Petrov's **defection** raised questions about Australian security and revived the fears that had been aroused by the 1951 anti-communist legislation. The 'Petrov Affair' soon dominated the newspapers. There were detailed accounts of documents that had reportedly been handed over to the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) proving the existence of the spy ring. The leader of the Labor Opposition, Dr Herbert Vere Evatt, was completely unaware of the allegations before they were made public by the Prime Minister. Dr Evatt claimed that the Petrov Affair, and the royal commission called to investigate it, were part of a Liberal Party conspiracy aimed at keeping the Labor Party out of government. In the lead-up to the 1954 election, Labor Party members were portrayed as communist sympathisers.

Menzies won the election and Dr Evatt suffered irreparable damage to his career and reputation. In the following year the Labor Party split, with a number of members forming the Democratic Labor Party (DLP). The DLP pledged to take a much firmer stand against communist infiltration of the trade unions.

The sense of the Petrov Affair being an exciting spy story increased as the days went by. Two weeks after Petrov was granted permission to stay in Australia, his wife was taken by car to Sydney airport by two burly Soviet officials. Three thousand people at the airport witnessed Mrs Petrov being dragged onto an aeroplane (source 6.3.2). In the melodramatic flight which followed, a distressed Mrs Petrov managed to tell a stewardess that her companions were carrying guns. When the aeroplane stopped to refuel in Darwin, the Australian police arrested the two Soviet guards. Mrs Petrov remained in Australia.

The much-publicised Petrov Affair was a sensational event in Australian history. The Royal Commission on Espionage opened on 17 May amid newspaper headlines. Members of the Communist Party were forced to testify at the royal commission and Dr Evatt appeared to defend his staff. At its conclusion in March 1955, the three royal commissioners had heard from 119 witnesses. They reported that the Soviet Union had used its embassy for spying. Allegations of a communist influence within the Labor Party, and Australian accomplices in the spy ring, could not be supported.

## Source 6.3.1

The newspapers quickly reacted to the Petrov announcement and provided the Australian public with detailed accounts of the story as it unfolded.

The sensation of Vladimir Petrov's escape from the Iron Curtain will be exceeded by the sensations affecting Australia's internal security. Federal Ministers hinted this after a cabinet meeting tonight.

Today Petrov, who handed over vital documents when he asked for political asylum, was questioned for several hours by officials seeking his help in translating the documents.

The documents seem likely to link espionage in Australia with the suspected overall spy system organised for the South Pacific and South-East Asia.

- The Petrov spy-ring affair developed rapidly today.
- The Prime Minister, Mr Menzies, conferred with Cabinet until last night on the timing, terms of reference and location of the Royal Commission.

- Soviet Ambassador Mr Generalov told newspapermen that the Australian story that the Third Secretary had voluntarily sought political asylum was 'nonsense'.

- Madame Petrov, at the Soviet Embassy, said she believed that her husband had been kidnapped. She will return to Russia soon.

Other developments were:

Passports for Communist delegates to Peking, China, were refused and current passports cancelled. The bill authorising the Royal Commission and empowering it to compel witnesses to give evidence passed both Houses of Parliament in record time, without opposition.

*Sun*, 15 April 1954.

In 1950s Australia, Vladimir Petrov was portrayed as a Cold War ally, a Russian communist who had been converted to the values of a free society like Australia. In truth, the Petrov case failed to prove that any Australian communists were Soviet spies. The main effect of the Menzies government's anti-communist activities was to reduce the Labor Party's chance of winning an election in 1954 (see source 6.3.3).

The fear of communism remained a political issue that gripped Australia and lay at the heart of a series of Cold War conflicts. The war in Korea, which began on 25 June 1950, was portrayed as another fight against communist attempts to dominate the world. As the anti-communist campaign unfolded, politicians committed Australian troops to fight in Korea. Members of the peace movements opposing

### Source 6.3.2



Photograph showing a distressed Mrs Petrov being escorted to an aeroplane at Sydney airport by two Soviet officials

Australia's involvement were labelled as 'dangerous' communists. In 1950s Australia, the fear of the 'red tide' of communism reached hysterical levels.

### Source 6.3.3

The damage of the Petrov Affair to the Labor Party and its leader, Dr Evatt, is clear in this newspaper report.

Accusations by Dr Evatt and rejoinders by Mr Menzies make it clear that unless a halt is called, the Petrov Affair is certain to be bandied about in the election. Short of agreement to abstain from further controversy, the best thing would be to remove as soon as possible the doubts and misgivings beginning to arise in the public mind. It would be desirable that the Royal Commission sat before the campaign starts . . . There is already a tangle of assertion, denial, mystification and conjecture . . .

Age, 19 April 1954.



### Check your understanding

1. Why was the Labor Party damaged so much by the Petrov Affair?
2. What was the finding of the Royal Commission on Espionage in 1955?
3. Why did Australia send troops to Korea?

### Using sources

1. Read source 6.3.1.
  - (a) Explain why the *Sun* newspaper described the Petrov Affair as a 'sensation'.
  - (b) What does source 6.3.1 state had happened to Australian communists intending to travel to China?
  - (c) According to the report, what has the royal commission been given the power to do? Why is this power significant in a democracy like Australia?
2. Source 6.3.2 was splashed all over Australian newspapers in 1954. How would this photograph have reinforced the government's strong stand against communism?
3. Why does the *Age* (source 6.3.3) suggest a royal commission should be held into the Petrov Affair?

### Researching and communicating

Find out more about the life and achievements of Dr H. V. Evatt. Imagine you are a film-maker and you have been given the chance to produce a documentary on his life and achievements. Write some promotional material, to be included in a television guide, which will catch the public's interest and introduce them to this extraordinary man. Desktop-publish your writing using a newspaper television guide as a model for layout and style. Note how the printed words vary in type, size, style and position. Use clip art to add the graphics required as part of your promotional material.

# WHY DID AUSTRALIANS FIGHT IN VIETNAM?

From 1962 until 1972 Australia was involved in the war in Vietnam. Approximately 47 000 Australian men and a large number of women served there. The decision to commit troops to the conflict centred on the fear of communism. The North Korean invasion of South Korea in 1950 had been viewed as a communist threat to democracy. Australia's commitment of troops to the United States and United Nations forces fighting in Korea was a stand against another domino falling to Chinese communism as it thrust southwards. The United States was also a powerful ally, providing Australia with protection in case of attack. Led by Prime Minister Robert Menzies, the conservative politicians built a more secure position for Australia in the world 'under the US wing'. The two main alliance agreements establishing Australian security (see also page 234) were:

- *the ANZUS Agreement of 1951*. Australia, New Zealand and the United States agreed to come to one another's aid in the event of attack.

## Source 6.4.1



'At the Quartermaster's Store'.

Opposition to Australian involvement in Korea was expressed in cartoons like this one by Norman Hetherington ('Heth') in the *Bulletin*, 1950. The Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, is depicted as having given all our supplies to the United States.

- *the SEATO Treaty of 1954*. The South-East Asia Collective Defence Treaty provided for defensive action to be taken in the event of an attack on the United States, Britain, France, Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, the Philippines or Pakistan. South Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos were also guaranteed protection under the treaty's security arrangements.

The Korean War had reinforced the sense of a **monolithic** communist system but had also been a big step in securing a firm alliance for Australia with the United States.

## Source 6.4.2

Menzies explains the government's position on Australia's involvement in the Korean conflict.

We are for peace. We do not understand aggression, but we will resist it with all we have and are. We are, with all our imperfections, a Christian nation, believing in man's brotherhood, anxious to live at peace with our neighbours ... We do not seek to tell another country how to live or how it shall govern itself. We intervene in no domestic dispute. But just as we seek the deep still waters of universal peace, so we know from bitter experience that the waves of war sweep right around the world.

R. G. Menzies quoted in P. Joske, *Sir Robert Menzies 1894–1978; A New Informal Memoir*, Angus & Robertson, Sydney, 1978, p. 27.

In 1951, Menzies had warned Australians to be prepared for a war against Soviet communists within three years. In August of that year, compulsory military training and universal **conscription** were introduced. The possibility of communism spreading to Australia from Asia was regarded with increasing seriousness as political change came to the region. In 1955, Australian troops were sent to Malaya to assist the British against communist guerilla forces. In March 1960, the Indonesian President, Sukarno, claimed the Dutch-controlled territory of western Papua New Guinea for an independent Indonesia. Strong communist influences in the Indonesian government gave rise to a sense of threat and communist aggression close to Australian territory.

The outbreak of war in Vietnam was seen as further communist aggression. It was a conflict similar to that in Korea from 1950 to 1953. A country divided between communist north and capitalist south had been brought to civil war. Australia feared the domino effect, so the decision

to send Australian troops to fight in Vietnam was not surprising given the belief that 'the takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia'.

**Source 6.4.3**



'Anyway, MY daddy's bigger'n YOUR daddy!'

In this 1964 Paul Rigby cartoon, Australia and Indonesia have face-to-face conflict over Malaysia. The US and communist China are depicted as powerful 'backers'.

**Source 6.4.4**

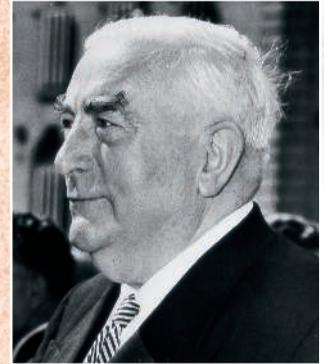


The front page of the *Australian*, 30 April 1965

**Source 6.4.5**

On 29 April 1965 Prime Minister Robert Menzies announced Australian involvement in Vietnam.

There can be no doubt of the gravity of the situation in South Vietnam. There is ample evidence to show that with the support of the North Vietnamese and other Communist powers, the Viet Cong has been preparing on a more substantial scale than hitherto insurgency action to destroy South Vietnamese Government control, and to disrupt by violence the life of the local people ... We have not, of course, come to this decision without the closest attention to the question of defence priorities. We do not and must not overlook the point that our alliances, as well as providing guarantees and assurances for our security, make demands upon us ... Assessing all this, it is our judgement that the decision to commit a battalion in South Vietnam represents the most useful additional contribution which we can make to the defence of the region at this time. The takeover of South Vietnam would be a direct military threat to Australia ...



*Commonwealth Parliamentary Debates, House of Representatives, 29 April 1965, vol. 45, pp. 1060-1.*

**Activities**



**Check your understanding**

1. When was Australia involved in the war in Vietnam?
2. What were the two main alliance agreements that established Australian security?
3. What did Menzies believe Australia would have to face in the 1950s?
4. Why was Australia concerned about developments in Indonesia?
5. What was the similarity between the conflict in Vietnam and the conflict in Korea?

**Using sources**

1. A quartermaster is an army officer in charge of rations, clothes etc. What does source 6.4.1 suggest about our relationship with America?
2. How does the Prime Minister's speech in source 6.4.2 seek to justify Australian troops being sent to Korea?
3. How does source 6.4.3 contrast the Australian military presence in Malaysia with that of Indonesia?
4. In 1965, the Prime Minister had to convince Australians that troops should be sent overseas. Using sources 6.4.4 and 6.4.5, explain the argument presented by Menzies for sending Australian troops to Vietnam.

**Researching and communicating**

Using information from the text, sources and your own library research, write an essay that answers the question: How did Australia respond to the Cold War?

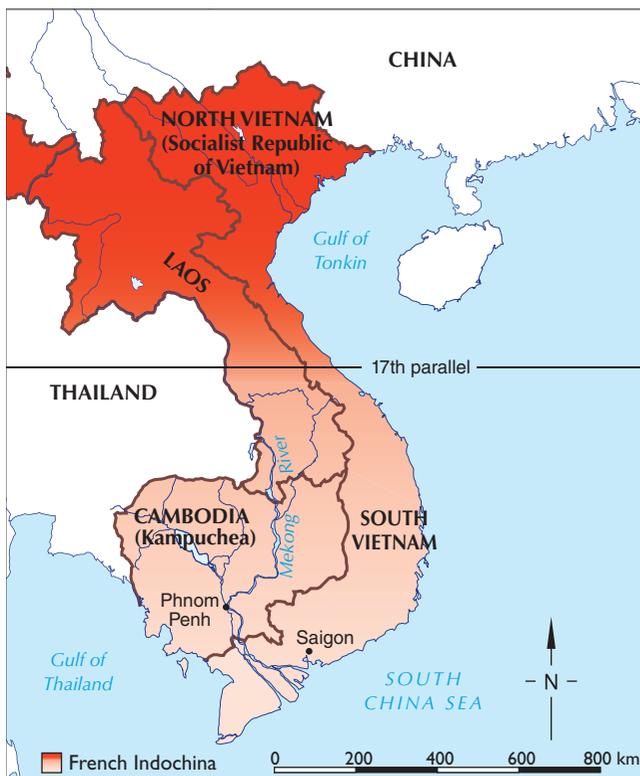
# AUSTRALIA GOES 'ALL THE WAY'

Vietnam lies to the north-west of Australia and is part of a region that Europeans called French Indochina. For nearly 100 years, control over Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia gave France a foothold in Asia. France administered this area and gained trading and business advantages in East Asia. At the end of World War II, a Vietnamese communist leader named Ho Chi Minh claimed Vietnamese independence from the French. It was to take another 30 years before a unified and independent Vietnam was established.

In an Australia still gripped by the fear of communism, the government's defence policy was dominated by the idea that sending troops overseas to fight against potential enemies was the best way to prevent a war being fought on our soil. So it was that the war accompanying this Vietnamese struggle for independence involved Australians.

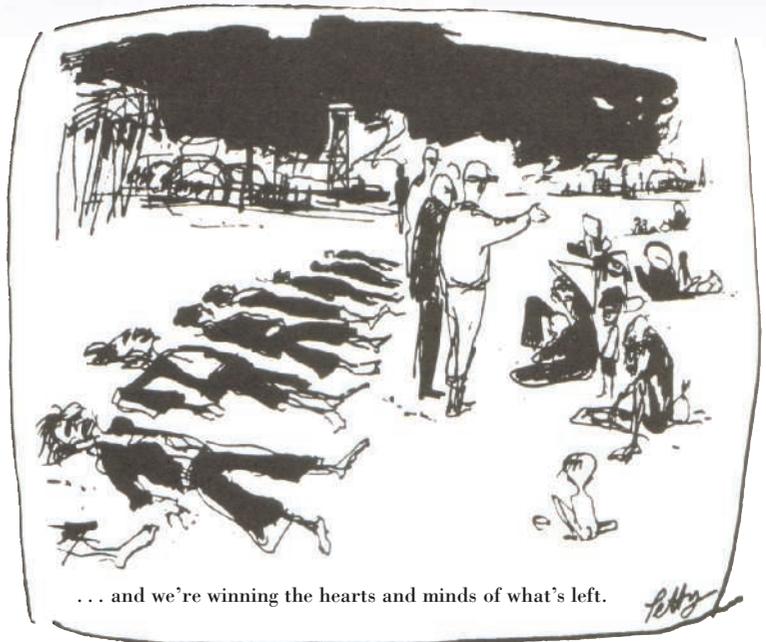
The Australian government agreed to the United States' requests for military advisers to support their presence in the region. Thirty Australian army advisers were sent to South Vietnam in 1962.

## Source 6.5.1



Map showing the area once known as French Indochina. It remained divided by the Vietnam War.

## Source 6.5.2



In this 1966 cartoon from the *Australian*, Bruce Petty reflects on the destruction of lives caused by the bombing in Vietnam.

## TWO VIETNAMS

In February 1954 Britain, France, Russia and the United States held a conference in Geneva to deal with the wars in Korea and Vietnam. The French had lost control of Indochina when Vietnamese communist forces defeated them at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. At the conference, a ceasefire agreement was signed. Vietnam was divided at the 17th parallel (see source 6.5.1). The communist Viet Minh were to control the North. A government friendly to the United States was to control the South. In a world divided by the Cold War, the emergence of communism in China and a communist state in North Vietnam was of great concern in the West.

## TOTAL WAR

At the time of the Vietnam conflict, the United States called on its allies — particularly the members of SEATO — to provide active support to contain the communist threat. South Vietnam was

presented as an independent state standing against the advance of communism in South-East Asia. Seven allied nations followed the United States into Vietnam: Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, the Philippines, Thailand, Spain and Taiwan. In August 1964, the United States claimed that the North Vietnamese had torpedoed its ships in the Gulf of Tonkin, so American bombing raids began in the North. Australia's Prime Minister Menzies committed Australian troops to fight by sending our 1st Infantry Battalion and HMAS *Sydney* to Vietnam in 1965. In April 1966, Australia's military commitment to Vietnam was trebled. Total war descended on Vietnam as American troops poured into the South and bombs rained down on the North.

### Source 6.5.3



Photograph of Australian soldiers, 26 August 1967, about to be flown out by US helicopters after a cordon and search of a Vietnamese village. This image is etched on the Vietnam memorial on Anzac Parade, Canberra. AWM EKN/67/0130/VN

US President Lyndon Baines Johnson, popularly known as L.B.J., arrived in Australia in October 1966. As the first American head of state to visit Australia, he was given a welcome usually reserved for royalty. The United States was facing international criticism for the escalation of war in Vietnam and looked to Australia for gestures of support. The new Prime Minister, Harold Holt, who had replaced Menzies when he retired, declared on behalf of Australia 'you have an admiring friend, a staunch friend that will be all

the way with L.B.J.' A huge crowd of enthusiastic Sydneysiders turned out to greet L.B.J. with tickertape and welcome posters. Thousands of Australians opposed to the war were also out in the streets with placards and banners demanding an end to the war in Vietnam.

Later in 1966, the Australian people returned the Liberal Party/Country Party coalition government to power with a massive majority at the federal election. The majority of Australians were seen to support the war, so the number of troops sent to South Vietnam was again increased.



### Check your understanding

1. Why were Australian army advisers sent to South Vietnam in 1962?
2. Where and why did Vietnam become divided in 1954?
3. When were Australian combat troops first sent to Vietnam?
4. Why did L.B.J. come to Australia in 1966 and how was he received by the Australian public?
5. Draw a timeline of events leading up to the visit of L.B.J. to Australia, beginning with the invasion of South Korea by the communist North in 1950 (see section 6.4).

### Using sources

1. Using source 6.5.1, list the countries of the Indochina region. What impact do you think war would have on the people of this region?
2. What comment does the source 6.5.2 cartoon make about the claim that war in Vietnam was a fight against communism?
3. Source 6.5.3 is the image of Australians in Vietnam that has

become a part of our history and our identity. Write a dedication that will be featured on the base of the Canberra memorial. Remember that this image is the centrepiece of the memorial and so your words must express the heroism, hardship and sacrifice of the Vietnam experience.

### Researching and communicating

Imagine you are a member of the Australian public in 1966. Write a letter to your daily newspaper in which you put forward your argument either for or against Australia's involvement in Vietnam.

### Worksheets

- 6.2 Once upon a time in a Kingdom called Funan ...

# 'SAVE OUR SONS' – CONSCRIPTION AND ANTI-WAR PROTESTS

Debate about the wisdom of our involvement in Vietnam raged from the day the government announced Australia's commitment to the war effort. As the years passed, the nation grew more divided between the anti-war movement and government supporters. Australia's anti-war movement was strongly connected to protests against conscription, or 'National Service' as it was called. In the years since Australia's Federation, conscription had existed in some form for 42 years.

Conscription was a controversial issue during World War I and continued to arouse passions during the height of the Vietnam War. In 1950, Menzies had introduced a limited form of conscription requiring three months of full-time training and home service. This system was abandoned in 1958, only to be reintroduced in 1964. When they reached their 20th birthday, all males had to register for National Service. Conscripts were chosen by a birth date lottery to serve for a period of two years. Men in this age bracket had approximately a one in ten chance of being selected.

In 1966, Prime Minister Harold Holt announced that conscripts would be sent to fight in Vietnam. This was the first time conscripts had been sent to

fight overseas during peacetime. In May 1966, the first conscripted soldier was killed in action. Early protests against conscription had come from religious groups and members of the Australian Communist Party. Conscription soon became a focus of the anti-war movement, with protest organisations urging men to not register and to resist the call-up, or 'draft'. Under particular conditions, exemptions from National Service could be granted. If a person could prove he was a **pacifist**, he could lodge a conscientious objection to service. The consequence for others who refused to be conscripted was a two-year jail sentence.

Over the period of the Vietnam War, a wide range of groups organised protests against the continuation of the conflict. Youth Against Conscription and Save Our Sons were formed in 1964. While still a minority movement, the protest against the war in Vietnam became more extreme and widespread after the 1966 election and the return of the Liberal Party/Country Party coalition to power. The Labor leader, Arthur Calwell, continued to voice his party's opposition to Australia's involvement in Vietnam. By 1967, the Monash University Labor Club was collecting money for the North Vietnamese war effort, and burning

## Source 6.6.1

An interview with one of the founding members of Save Our Sons, Jean McLean, shows how and why the protest movement grew in Australia.

I convened the first meeting of SOS ... The issue of being against the war came later. These [women] were mainly against conscription as such ... Our aims were that we were against conscription for overseas service ... SOS was mainly a women's group ... at its height we had 500 people on our mailing list in Victoria and we had many more supporters ... Some joined because they were politically aware, some because they were worried about their sons, and there were some like me with very young children but who objected to the whole idea of conscription ... Every month we were at the barracks. We had to get there at some ungodly hour like 5 a.m. for the intakes, and then we'd march around with our flag and wearing 'Save Our Sons' sashes. We got continuous coverage in the media for eight years for doing that.

Our first arrest was under By-law 418. This was at the Richmond barracks and occurred because we were becoming effective ... By-law 418 was a Melbourne City Council by-law which said you weren't allowed to hand

out printed information on the street. It had been on the statute books for a hundred years and nobody had ever been arrested under it. They started with us. We used to stand in protest at the City Square after our monthly meetings, and they started arresting us there for handing out leaflets in the street. Of my twenty-seven arrests altogether, about seventeen of them were for breaking By-law 418. We just kept on and on making our protest, and they kept on arresting us.

My other ten arrests were for things like filling in false registration forms which we would do outside the post office every intake when people had to register. We even had a 'Fill a Falsi' party here one night which Channel 7 and Channel 9 covered while we all sat here filling in false forms. By-law 418 was in the end repealed. This was a campaign that we stuck to, refusing to budge on, and we won it.

Interview with Jean McLean, in Gloria Frydman, *Protesters*, Collins Dove, Melbourne, 1987, pp. 17–20.

draft registration cards had become common. The government took a tough stand on people avoiding the draft, which increased popular protest. Draft resister support groups were established and a lively 'Don't register' campaign was begun. Anger over conscription was rapidly turning into disillusionment with the nature of the war in Vietnam and Australia's continued commitment to it.

## Source 6.6.2



'Mum!! Where did you spring from?!'

This Rigby cartoon in the *Daily Mirror*, 1966, supported the view that National Service was a valuable and character-building experience for young Australian men.

## Activities



### Check your understanding

1. What was National Service and how was it connected to the anti-war movement?
2. How were conscripts chosen?
3. What happened to those who refused conscription?
4. What sort of protest groups emerged in the 1960s?

### Using sources

1. (a) Using source 6.6.1, identify the activities in which the Save Our Sons group participated.  
(b) What would have been the aim of their protest and how effective do you think it would have been?
2. (a) How has the Rigby cartoon (source 6.6.2) portrayed the young Australian servicemen?  
(b) Using source 6.6.2 as evidence, explain what you think the cartoonist's attitude to conscription and the SOS would have been.
3. What does source 6.6.3 indicate about the membership of the anti-war and anti-conscription groups of the 1960s? (Comment on the sex, age group and dress of the protesters.)

### Researching and communicating

Cartoons were widely used by both pro- and anti-war groups during the Vietnam War. Imagine you have been appointed as a newspaper cartoonist. Design a series of cartoons expressing how different groups of Australians felt about our involvement in Vietnam. You will need to use the library or Internet to find a broader range of such cartoons to help you with your ideas.

## Source 6.6.3



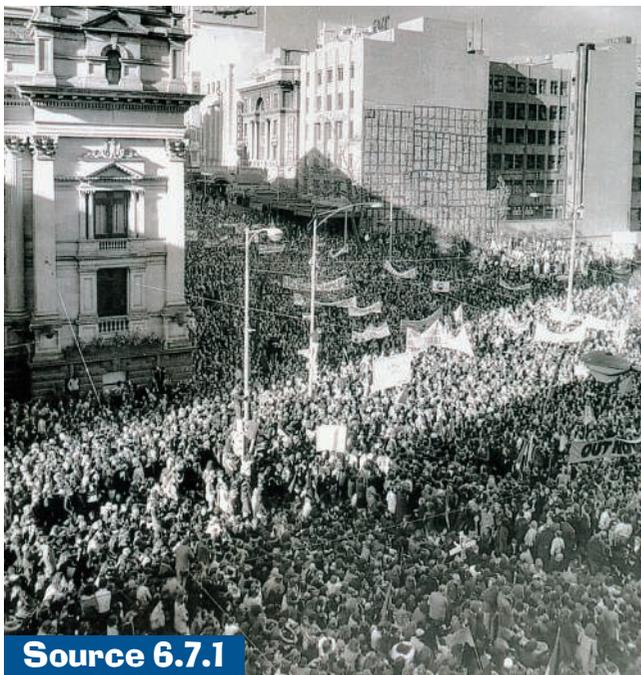
Photograph showing a Save Our Sons protest. This early protest group represented a broad section of the Australian public.

# THE MORATORIUM MOVEMENT

Every evening, television brought the horror of Vietnam into Australian homes. By 1970, the anti-war sentiment had rapidly grown into huge rallies, marches, church services, sit-ins and candlelight processions. These united protest movements represented a great range of opinion from political radicals to people who would not normally protest or challenge the government's actions. The headmaster of a Methodist College in Sydney expressed the depth of the challenge to the government when he encouraged young men to defy National Service in an open letter to the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

The Vietnam War **moratorium** rallies of 1970 appealed to people as a way of displaying their support for the end of the war. The first Moratorium Day was held in the United States with hundreds of thousands of people stopping work in a mass protest demanding that the United States government withdraw from Vietnam immediately. In Australia, the prominent Labor politician Jim Cairns was joined by academics, writers, artists and church leaders in moratorium marches across the nation. The two demands of the moratorium movement were:

- the immediate, total and unconditional withdrawal of Australian and allied troops from Indochina
- the immediate abolition of conscription.



**Source 6.7.1**

Photograph of the streets of Melbourne, showing the strength of protest against the war in Vietnam during the first moratorium march in May 1970

## Source 6.7.2

Memories of Australians who were involved in the moratorium campaigns of protest against the war in Vietnam

I went on the three Moratoriums [moratorium rallies], and took kids from Balwyn High. We made banners in the woodwork room which infuriated other teachers, but some parents hopped in and said it was not a bad thing. The first Moratorium was like coming in out of the cold and ended a sense of isolation. A lot of the time you were the only person in your family, workplace or street who opposed the war. (*Gary Guest*)

I had no contact with the wider peace movement ... By marching I was going against my family, my husband, and just about everyone I met in day-to-day life ... I attended because I felt I had to finally stand up and be counted ... I dressed in clothes that were not identifiable with me. I tied up my blonde hair and hid it under a hat ... I was scared stiff I would be shown in the crowds on the news but I wasn't. (*Louise*)

A lot of the police were very supportive. On the day of the Moratorium, there were police who flipped their lapels when we walked past to show they were wearing anti-conscription badges. (*Jean McLean*)

I marched with my mother and some staff from *Nation Review*; I remember thinking what a difference it was to when sixteen of us had stood outside the first ballot.

Even to this day, when thinking about that Moratorium, I feel a certain sadness about that. I was glad everyone was there, but I wondered where they were in 1965.

By 1970 ... it had become Australia's longest war and so many lives had been lost. I remember thinking, 'It's too late ... It's already over because the troops are being withdrawn anyway.' (*Michael Leunig*)

G. Langley, *A Decade of Dissent — Vietnam and the Conflict on the Australian Homefront*, Allen and Unwin, Sydney, 1992, pp. 133–47.

The intensity of the conflict in Australia over our involvement in Vietnam, and the issue of conscription, contributed to the election of a Labor government in December 1972. Twenty-three years of conservative Liberal government had ended. The new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, immediately abolished National Service and recalled the Australian army. Australia's military involvement in Vietnam was over. In 1974, the United States government reduced its level of support to the South Vietnamese government and ceased all

bombing throughout Indochina. In March 1975, the communists launched their Spring Offensive and, in an overwhelming victory, took control of South Vietnam on 30 April 1975. The longest war of the twentieth century had come to an end.

## RETROfile

In all, 496 Australians were killed in Vietnam and 2398 were wounded.

The Vietnam War had great political impact and led to deep division within Australian society. The Australian people were forced to think very seriously about the Cold War, Vietnam, the **arms race** and a range of social issues. Ordinary Australians became politically active and questioned authority and many long-held beliefs. Our involvement in Vietnam was the result of a fear of communism and of Asia. Australia believed that Chinese communism was the driving force behind the North Vietnamese war effort. By 1973, we had established **diplomatic relations** with communist China and, in 1979, we were reminded of our error in seeing communism as 'monolithic' when war broke out between China and Vietnam.

It was a bitter experience for the Australians who went to Vietnam. After experiencing the full tragedy of war, they returned home to anti-war demonstrations and hostility. Because the war had become increasingly unpopular, they found little support or understanding from the Australian public. It was nearly 30 years before they were given the official 'welcome home' parade traditionally accorded to troops upon their return to Australia.

### Source 6.7.3

This letter sent to the *Sydney Morning Herald* in 1966, and addressing President Lyndon Johnson, clearly expressed the anti-war sentiments that were eventually shared by many thousands of Australians.

Dear Mr. President:

It is unfortunate that your welcome in Australia has been clouded by the deep disagreements in this country as to our part in the Vietnamese War. I am concerned that the thought, comment and actions of our Government have reflected very little of this disagreement, nor indeed much awareness of what is involved. The fact that out of a population of eleven million we have had to depend on conscripts to make up two battalions to send to Vietnam is a sufficient indication that enthusiasm for this war is very largely confined to our politicians and their military advisers ...

Just as you Americans feel threatened by world communism, so do we Australians feel threatened by the prospect of a strong militant and unfriendly Asia. As one member of our Government put it to me, 'We've got to stop these —s before they get here'.

Our immediate objective is to halt the progress of communism in Vietnam. Yet by our own military policies of 'kill and destroy' we are creating the very conditions of social and economic chaos which communists need for their success ...

Whatever your military advisers say, Mr. President, the burning of crops, the bombing of villages, the killing of men, women and children are no way to improve a political situation ...

People all over the world are tired of military solutions and power politics. They are tired of anti-communism as a substitute for commonsense. And above all they are tired of the killing. As one of these people, and as a person having no connection or influence with any political party or organisation whatsoever, I have written this letter as a matter of personal conscience.

*Sydney Morning Herald*, 22 October 1966.

## Activities



### Check your understanding

1. What were the Vietnam War moratorium rallies?
2. What did the movement demand?
3. What did the new Labor Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam, do when he came to power in 1972?
4. Why was the Vietnam War of such significance to Australians?

### Using sources

1. Imagine you are a newspaper reporter. Write a brief description of the first moratorium march, using sources 6.7.1 and 6.7.2 as the basis of your report.
2. Use source 6.7.3 to write your own half-page explanation of why the anti-war movement gained such wide support in Australia.

### Researching and communicating

1. Hundreds of thousands of Australians attended the moratorium protest demonstrations. Invite a guest speaker to your class to share their first-hand experience of those years. You will need to prepare questions to help you understand the issues. If you are unable to have a speaker attend your school, conduct an interview on tape and report what you have learnt to the other members of your class.
2. Posters, badges and slogans were widely used by both the pro- and anti-war movements. Imaginative slogans from the moratorium years were 'Draft Beer, not Boys', 'Stop Work to Stop the War' and 'Drop Holt on Hanoi'. Design your own range of badges and slogans.

### Worksheets

- 6.3 Compose a protest song

# THE VOICE OF THE VIETNAM VETERAN

On 3 October 1987, the 'Welcome Home' parade for Vietnam veterans took place in Sydney. The welfare of the veterans had been ignored after 1972, so the parade was a long overdue recognition of their service to Australia. Many of the soldiers who fought in Vietnam had experienced difficulties settling back into civilian life, for a range of reasons:

- Vietnam veterans had come home to contempt and hostility rather than to expressions of gratitude.
- Many veterans were left untreated for post-traumatic stress disorder (known as 'battle fatigue' in previous wars).
- Drugs had been widely available in Vietnam, so some veterans had developed drug-related illnesses.
- Many veterans were exposed to dangerous chemicals in the **defoliation** campaign, leading to serious medical problems.

## Source 6.8.1

Vietnam veterans had reported a wide range of well-documented illnesses by the 1970s.

I've got rashes under the arms, groin. I get headaches all the time. They get bad. Flashes of temper. It's like a boiler without a pressure-release valve. It builds up and builds up until it explodes ... I explode. I can't mix with people. I've got no sex drive ... I was married twice. My first wife had quite a few miscarriages ... I used to pick on the kids, isolate myself from their lives, behave irrationally until it got to a stage where they just couldn't take anymore. Unfortunately I realised the problem just a little too late.

Ron Witty, quoted in S. Rintoul, *Ashes of Vietnam: Australian Voices*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1987, p. 208.

Australia had been unwilling to deal with the problems of these returned soldiers of an unpopular war. In 1980, the Vietnam Veterans' Association of Australia was established to lobby governments for financial compensation and political recognition for its members. Veterans were reporting various disabilities but were still receiving no government support from the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Agent Orange was the most commonly used chemical mixture in Vietnam for defoliation. It was absorbed by the leaves of plants and would enter the water system. By 1967, an estimated 20 per cent of jungles, 36 per cent of mangroves and 42 per cent of food crops had been destroyed in Vietnam. The main

aim of this defoliation was to deprive the Vietcong **guerillas** of cover. The RAAF had also sprayed the Australian bases three times every week with various insecticides. In the late 1970s, Agent Orange was linked with three possible health problems:

- cancer
- birth abnormalities
- toxic brain dysfunction.

The Vietnam Veterans' Association put pressure on the Commonwealth Government to establish an inquiry into Agent Orange. In 1983, the Hawke Labor government appointed a royal commission to investigate the effects of the chemical agents used in Vietnam. After hearing from the veterans, the government, the chemical companies and the scientists, the commission released its findings. It reported that there was insufficient evidence to prove that the veterans' disabilities were caused by chemical defoliation. The commission did, however, find that the war had left veterans with significant psychological problems entitling them to government financial assistance.

## Source 6.8.2



Photograph taken in 1966 of Australian soldiers helping their wounded comrade during the Vietnam War

AWM COA/66/0877/VN

For the following nine years, the veterans lobbied to have the findings of the Evatt Commission overturned. In October 1994, the Labor government finally acknowledged Agent Orange as the direct cause of cancer and other illness suffered by the

**Source 6.8.3**

A 1994 newspaper article on the McLennan Report. The report cited medical evidence supporting the veterans' claim that Agent Orange was responsible for the serious health problems they suffered.

## Vietnam vets hail cancer decision

by Ebru Yaman and Cameron Stewart

Vietnam veterans yesterday applauded the Federal Government's landmark decision to accept a link between Agent Orange and cancer but said more needed to be done to recognise other war-related cancers.

The Government has announced it will accept the findings of an independent medical study which found clear links between a range of cancers and exposure to herbicides such as Agent Orange.

The decision, revealed exclusively in *The Australian* yesterday, is a key breakthrough in the 25-year battle by the Vietnam veterans to obtain government recognition of the cancer-producing effects of Agent Orange.

The move means more than 600 cancer-stricken Vietnam veterans will be eligible for disability payments within twelve months at an estimated cost to the government of about \$4 million.

The president of the Vietnam Veterans Association of Australia, Mr John Printz, described the decision as a major victory.

'It is a very positive development for veterans, many of whom have had to suffer the turmoil, the strain and the stress of trying to obtain compensation for their disabilities . . . they were kicked in the guts for years about (Agent Orange),' Mr Printz said . . .

The Minister for Veterans Affairs, Mr Sciacca, said veterans would be able to lodge compensation claims within months for the effects of exposure to herbicides.

He did not expect a flood of claims but would not care if 'thousands' of people sought compensation because it was important that all veterans received a fair deal.

A spokeswoman for Mr Sciacca said widows of Vietnam veterans who died of the nominated cancers would be eligible for a widow's pension if their former spouse had been exposed to herbicides in Vietnam.

The government's decision to recognise the link between cancer and Agent Orange overturns the findings of the 1985 royal commission which concluded that Agent Orange was not a reason for the unusually high cancer rates among veterans.

The decision to recognise a link follows the government's acceptance of the findings of an independent Australian report written by Professor Robert MacLennan, of the Queensland Institute for Medical Research, and Professor Peter Smith, of the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne . . .

'This is not only a matter for justice. It is and has been a matter of life and death for these "forgotten veterans"', the RSL's acting president, Mr John Bailey, said.

A Melbourne solicitor and Vietnam veteran who specialises in veterans' compensation claims, Mr Geoffrey Tobin, said the Federal Government's admission of the cancer link was like 'the end of the war'.

'In the 70s everyone said we were looking for an excuse to answer our own inadequacies. The government denied there was an increase of cancer in Vietnam veterans,' Mr Tobin said . . .

'If we had had this admission 10 years ago, the pain and anger some of these blokes feel would have been a lot less,' he said.

'If it had been earlier I really believe we would have saved the lives of some of the 2000 Australian Vietnam veterans who have committed suicide.'

*Weekend Australian*, 8–9 October 1994, p. 4.

Vietnam veterans. American veterans were also successful in their legal action against seven chemical companies. A multimillion-dollar American fund was then established to help veterans and their families.

The work of the Vietnam Veterans' Association in gaining recognition for returned soldiers is an example of how citizens of a democracy can directly influence government. Veterans felt their particular needs and wishes were being ignored by successive Australian governments. The Veterans' Association is an 'interest group' established to influence government decisions, not to form a government.



## Activities



### Check your understanding

1. Why has the experience of many Vietnam veterans been so difficult?
2. Why was the Vietnam Veterans' Association established?
3. What is Agent Orange?
4. How successful has the association been in securing recognition for the plight of its members?

### Using sources

1. In what ways would the medical problems described in source 6.8.1 have an impact on a veteran's family life?
2. Look at the photograph of Australian servicemen in action in Vietnam (source 6.8.2). What qualities can you see in these men and what difficulties do you think they would have faced?
3. Read the source 6.8.3 account of the McLennan Report. In what way did this report establish the success of the Vietnam Veterans' Association as an 'interest group'.

### Researching and communicating

This unit of study should have you thinking about how Australian citizens can influence government. There are many occasions when ordinary people feel that direct involvement and action is necessary to influence or change government decisions. The work of the Vietnam Veterans' Association is a clear example of this.

Research and write a report of 600–800 words about the work and achievements of the Vietnam Veterans' Association. Your report should discuss what the objectives of the association were, how the association gathered support and used the media, and what the outcome of the work of this interest group has been.

# REFUGEES FROM A WAR-TORN WORLD

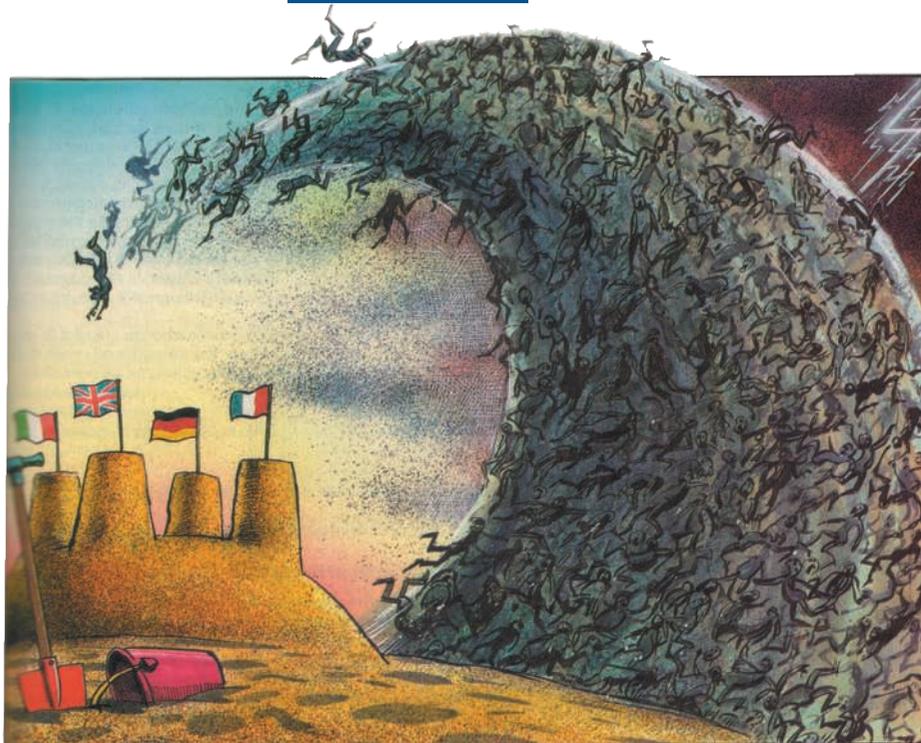
About two million people became refugees as a result of the conflict in Indochina. A decade after the 1975 change of government in Saigon, almost 700 000 Indochinese refugees had arrived in Thailand alone. People took enormous risks to escape the communist governments of Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam. The refugee camps established in the neighbouring countries of Thailand, Malaysia and Hong Kong were desperately overcrowded. Thousands of Indochinese requiring shelter and food placed a heavy burden on these nations of first asylum. The Indochinese were being left stranded in these 'transit camps', waiting years to lodge applications and be given consideration as migrants in resettlement countries. Thousands more risked everything by sailing long distances in overcrowded and unseaworthy boats, facing storms, pirate attacks and starvation in an attempt to start life again in a country like Australia. At the end of 1978, Malaysia was supporting over 46 000 boat people in camps. The refugee problem had become so serious that the Malaysian government began towing boatloads of Indochinese refugees back out to sea in an attempt to stop the flow. As the number of refugees continued to increase, the problem became a major political and humanitarian issue, and so a matter of international concern. In 1979 the Secretary-General of the United Nations convened a meeting in Geneva aimed at finding permanent homes for the refugees of Indochina.

There were many reasons why such large numbers of Indochinese fled their countries. Refugees were often of ethnic Chinese descent and feared being persecuted for their religious or political beliefs. Some feared the new communist government, while others who were associated with the defeated forces feared persecution because of that association. In Cambodia, power went in 1975 to the guerilla forces known as the Khmer Rouge. Their leader, Pol Pot, turned his country into a huge

labour camp. Estimates vary, but between one and three million Cambodians were killed by the Khmer Rouge. Thousands more became refugees when they tried to escape the horror. All refugees hoped for the chance of a better life away from the tragedy of Indochina.

Resettlement programs began under agreements made through the United Nations. In 1979 a program of orderly departure from Vietnam was established for entry to Australia; it was primarily intended to deter the 'boat people'. The Indochinese refugees arrived in Australia in much the same way that refugees from previous wars had. Most were forced to leave all their possessions behind, and many left their families. Thousands of families were torn apart during the conflict in Indochina and in the following long years of refugee life. Survivors of the war in Indochina are often part of a global immigrant community, with close relatives scattered through the resettlement areas of Europe, America, Australia and Asia.

## Source 6.9.1



This 1990s cartoon graphically illustrates the impact of economic ruin, war and population growth. Movements of massive numbers of people around the world have never been greater than in the period since World War II.



### Source 6.9.2

Refugees from Indochina made life-threatening sea voyages in overcrowded and flimsy boats like this one, photographed in 1975. Countless numbers perished in their efforts to find refuge in countries like Australia.

### Source 6.9.3

Nguyen Van Te was one of the 50 000 boat people existing in the harsh conditions of a Hong Kong refugee camp. Journalist Geoff Sims wrote the story of Te's long journey to Australia and his experience of life as a refugee.

Three hundred people were crammed into a stone building about three times the size of an average home's living room in most Western countries. They slept four to a single bunk with a board for a mattress and the bunks were stacked four high. They not only slept on them, they spent the day sitting on them. The only other space was the gap between the rows of bunks. There was nowhere to wash. There was little light or ventilation. The heat and humidity were stifling.

The building was just one of several. For ten minutes each afternoon the people held in this and the other buildings were allowed out into an exercise cage topped with barbed wire.

Green Island, just a stone's throw off the western tip of Hong Kong Island, was the official point of entry to the boat people, a 'restricted area' inaccessible to the media. It was here that the rudimentary processing was done — a basic sausage-machine approach, one might say in Hong Kong's defence, by necessity. Hundreds more boat people were arriving in Hong Kong waters every day. People talked about the 'record day' when 2000 made the run into Hong Kong territorial waters after grouping and sheltering from a typhoon along the China coast.

G. Sims, *The Moving Story of Nguyen Van Te and Jim Ellis*, ABC books, 1991.

### Source 6.9.4

Journalist John Masanauskas looks at Australia's migrant and refugee intake in 1990 in a global context.

... Consider ... a request by the Soviet Union to resettle in Western Europe two million people living in radiation-contaminated land around Chernobyl — site of the world's worst nuclear power accident.

Suddenly, the prospect of dealing with a couple of hundred Cambodians is looking good. And even 20 000 Chinese students, many of whom are already integrated into Australian life, seem a drop in the ocean compared with the millions of people displaced around the world.

It is the view of Alan Matheson, ethnic liaison officer with the ACTU, that Australia can no longer make immigration and refugee decisions without heeding developments in the rest of the world. According to the latest data, the world has 15 million official refugees, six million people in refugee-like situations and another 18 million displaced within their own countries.

'I think one thing that Europe and North America have discovered is that no country can make isolated decisions,' said Mr Matheson, 'that no country is an island any longer and that it doesn't really matter whether you're a physical island or not.'

Age, 2 July 1990.

## LE THANH NHON: REFUGEE AND ARTIST

Le Thanh Nhon was born in Binh Duong, Vietnam, on 17 November 1940. In 1964 he graduated from Saigon University and became a lecturer in fine arts. Le Thanh Nhon spoke many languages and was one of Saigon's most highly regarded sculptors. His art combined an Eastern and Western cultural heritage. When the government changed in Saigon in 1975, Le Thanh Nhon became another Indochinese refugee. He gathered his family and fled the burning city. They left Vietnam by boat and became one of the first Vietnamese refugee families to arrive in Australia.

Le Thanh Nhon became a tram driver in Melbourne and also worked as a spray painter to support his wife and four children. In Australia Le Thanh Nhon continued with his art, winning a prize in 1976 at the Asian Arts Exhibition in Victoria. Like the refugees who arrived in Australia after World War II, Le Thanh Nhon made a unique contribution to our Australian multi-cultural society. During the 25 years of his life in Australia, he became an active member of Australia's artistic community, working as a sculptor, painter, book illustrator and lecturer at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. Le Thanh Nhon died on 4 November 2002 at the Royal Melbourne Hospital. Since 1975 more than 150 000 Indochinese have settled in Australia and taken their place in our pluralist society.

### Source 6.9.5



Photograph taken in 1977 of the artist Le Thanh Nhon with his painting *The Music Players*

### Source 6.9.6



Photograph of the comedian Hung Le, who is Le Thanh Nhon's son. In his standup routines, he plays on stereotypes and uses racial humour to break down barriers.

## MULTICULTURALISM

By the 1970s, Australia no longer saw itself as white and British. With post-World War II migration policies and the influx of refugees from Indochina, thousands of people had come to Australia from Europe, the Middle East, South America and Asia. A new image for the nation was recognised in the government policy of **multiculturalism**. Australia was now a culturally diverse society in which more than a third of its inhabitants were born overseas or were the children of those born overseas. Australians living in the major cities could enjoy films and entertainment from different parts of the world, join in festivals of other cultures and eat styles of food from many nations. Australians from different cultural backgrounds also took part in traditional Australian events like the Melbourne Cup and football grand finals.

In 1977 a charter was drawn up to identify basic principles necessary to multiculturalism:

- economic efficiency — the need to maintain and develop the skills and talents of all Australians regardless of their background
- cultural identity — the right of all to express and share their cultural heritage, language and religion
- equality of opportunity — the right of all to equality of treatment and the removal of barriers of race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, gender or place of birth.

In 1988, Prime Minister Bob Hawke launched the Year of Citizenship. At the launching ceremony, two people were granted the two millionth Australian citizenship. They were Nigel Stoker, a Scotsman who had arrived in Australia in 1984, and Ngoc Anh Nguyen, a Vietnamese medical science student who had arrived as a refugee in 1981 — both symbols of our successful and multicultural Australia.

### Source 6.9.7



In 1987 the Australian government established a committee, headed by Stephen Fitzgerald, to look at how future immigration programs could best strengthen our economy and cultural life.

## Activities



### Check your understanding

1. How many people are estimated to have become refugees after the 1975 change of government in Saigon?
2. Why was a United Nations meeting convened in Geneva in 1979?
3. List the reasons why such large numbers of Indochinese fled from their countries.
4. Who was Le Thanh Nhon and how do you think it could be said that his story represents the experience of many others?

### Using sources

1. What impression of immigration does source 6.9.1 provide?
2. Write a caption to accompany source 6.9.2 that would help create an appreciation of the humanitarian issues that relate to immigration.
3. Using source 6.9.3 and information from the text as evidence, write a newspaper report on the plight of the Indochinese boat people.
4. Read source 6.9.4, then briefly explain why decisions about refugees must take into account global problems.
5. Explain the message of source 6.9.7 in your own words.

### Researching and communicating

1. An oral account of events from a witness is one of the most useful forms of evidence a historian can have. Make contact with a person who has migrated to Australia during the last 30 years. Compose a series of questions to establish your interviewee's family background, immigration story and experience of living in Australia. Conduct your interview and compare your findings with the story of Le Thanh Nhon. Present your interview and additional research in a class publication entitled 'Migrants in multicultural Australia'. Support your oral accounts with statistical information on patterns of migration in Australia. The Australian Bureau of Statistics is the agency for the collection and analysis of national statistics: for useful data from their website, go to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and click on the ABS weblink. Undertake some additional research on the current government, economy and geography of the country of birth of your interviewee. A useful site for this information can be found by going to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and clicking on the Country Reports weblink.
2. As a class, debate the statement: 'Multiculturalism has made Australia a truly democratic nation'.

### Worksheets

- 6.4 Crossword of the Vietnam War era

# Review & exam practice

## SCHOOL CERTIFICATE PRACTICE

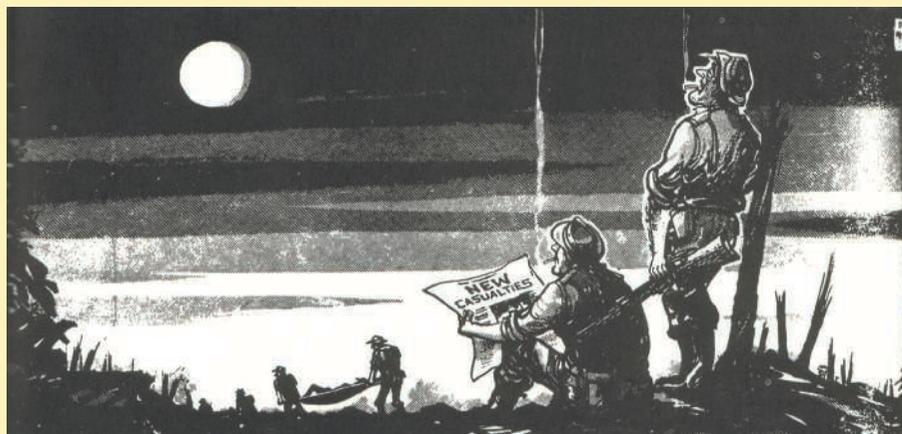


The Vietnam War era

### Multiple choice

- The conflict between the Eastern and Western power blocs that developed at the end of World War II became known as:  
(A) the Hot War  
(B) the Cold War  
(C) the Red War  
(D) the Yellow Peril.
- The Communist Party Dissolution Bill was introduced into Federal Parliament in:  
(A) 1940  
(B) 1945  
(C) 1950  
(D) 1955.
- The Communist Party Dissolution Bill enraged many Australians because it:  
(A) promoted communism as an alternative system of government for Australia  
(B) attacked the trade union movement  
(C) threatened individual freedoms and rights  
(D) took Australia back to a war-time style government.
- Consider the following statements about the Petrov Affair.  
Statement X: The Petrov Affair raised questions about Australia's security.  
Statement Y: The Petrov Affair failed to prove that any Australian communists were spies.  
(A) Both statements are false.  
(B) Both statements are true.  
(C) Statement X is false and statement Y is true.  
(D) Statement X is true and statement Y is false.
- The two main alliance agreements establishing Australian security after World War II were:  
(A) the ANZUS Agreement of 1951 and the ASEAN Agreement of 1967  
(B) the ANZUS Agreement of 1951 and the SEATO Treaty of 1954  
(C) the SEATO Treaty of 1954 and ASEAN Agreement of 1967  
(D) the SEATO Treaty of 1954 and the NATO Agreement of 1949.
- The region known as Indochina is composed of the nations of:  
(A) Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia  
(B) Vietnam, Laos and China  
(C) Vietnam, Thailand and China  
(D) Vietnam, China and Cambodia.
- The American President who arrived in Australia in 1966 was:  
(A) John F. Kennedy  
(B) Richard Nixon  
(C) George Bush  
(D) Lyndon Baines Johnson.
- Conscription was a particularly controversial issue in Australia in the Vietnam War era because:  
(A) The Australian government had never introduced conscription before.  
(B) Conscripts were being sent to fight in Vietnam.  
(C) Australians believed all young men should be conscripted at 20 years of age.  
(D) It was very easy to avoid being conscripted.
- In December 1972, a federal Labor government was elected in Australia. The new Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam:  
(A) immediately withdrew the Australian troops from service in Vietnam  
(B) immediately increased the number of Australians serving in Vietnam  
(C) immediately began peace talks with the Chinese  
(D) immediately prohibited moratorium marches in Australia.
- Newspapers often featured cartoons during the Vietnam War era. According to source 6.10.1, the purpose of the cartoon was to provide:  
(A) a humorous view of events in Vietnam  
(B) visual images of the Vietnam War  
(C) a political and social comment on the Vietnam War  
(D) an alternative to the television images of the Vietnam War.

### Source 6.10.1



'The step's the same, on the moon or a mine ...'

The cartoonist Paul Rigby summed up a decade of conflict and change when he commented in the *Daily Mirror*, 1969, on Neil Armstrong becoming the first man to walk on the moon.

## Extended response

1. Explain your chosen answer to question 10. What in the cartoon led you to think this? Explain how valuable this source is for learning about the Vietnam War era. Consider whether the cartoon contains any bias or personal opinion and how this affects its usefulness.
2. Explain the impact the Cold War had on Australia's relationship with Asia during the decades after World War II.
3. Read the following statement and discuss it: 'Australia had been unwilling to deal with the problems of these returned soldiers of an unpopular war.' Support your answer by using your knowledge of Australia in the Vietnam War era.
4. Explain the impact of the Vietnam War on the people of Indochina.

## CIVICS AND CITIZENSHIP

Research in more detail the way communist governments were supposed to work according to the model established by Karl Marx. Research Karl Marx and communism by going to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and clicking on the Biographical Dictionary weblink.

- (a) Organise your findings into point or diagram form.
- (b) From your notes, make a poster to illustrate how communist systems were supposed to govern.
- (c) Once you understand the communist system, think about our own system of government. For useful information on our political system, go to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and click on the Australian Politics weblink. Write a list of principles upon which our democratic system is based.
- (d) Imagine you have the chance to create the ideal government. Present the principles of your ideal government to your class in a short speech.

## INVESTIGATE FURTHER

1. Research the role of two of these world leaders in the Cold War: Joseph Stalin, Nikita Khrushchev, Mao Zedong, John F. Kennedy. Or, research one of these individuals and assess his impact on the war in Vietnam: Ho Chi Minh, Vo Nguyen Giap, General William Westmoreland, Brigadier General Edward Lansdale, Dr Jim Cairns. To research important historical personalities, go to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and click on the Rulers weblink.
2. Research the anti-war movements that swept the United States and Australia. Compile a folder of primary source material as part of your task. This could include newspaper or magazine articles, student articles, songs and poems, speeches, posters and cartoons.

3. There are many issues related to the war in Indochina that can be areas of further research. You might like to consider the impact of war on Cambodia and the Pol Pot regime, the war in Laos and the Pathet Lao, or the ongoing human tragedy of the refugee problem. Choose an issue or area of further study to research and present to the class as a PowerPoint presentation, wall poster or written report.
4. Investigate the role of women in the Vietnam War. You may particularly like to consider the activities of Australian nurses as recorded in source 6.10.2.
5. Australian soldiers were involved in a number of well-known military activities in Vietnam such as the Battle of Long Tan in 1966 and the Tet Offensive in 1968. Research and write a report on one of these battles, explaining the role of Australian troops and the outcome of the conflict.
6. Create a class timeline detailing all the main events of the Vietnam War as they affected Australia. Provide a global perspective on events in Vietnam by researching other events that were happening at this time in world history. To establish a calendar of world events, go to [www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2](http://www.jaconline.com.au/retroactive/retroactive2) and click on the This Day in History weblink or the This Day in Life weblink. Compare and contrast the events taking place in Indochina and around the world during this era, then construct your timeline as a wall frieze around your classroom. Complete it with illustrations, graphics or photographs.
7. *The Odd Angry Shot* is an Australian film about the war in Vietnam. There are also many American movies such as *The Deer Hunter*, *Good Morning Vietnam* and *Born on the Fourth of July* that provide an insight into the Vietnam experience. Watch one of these films (after checking its censorship rating). Then write an appreciation of the film in which you evaluate its historical accuracy and how effectively you believe the movie has been able to contribute to an understanding of the tragedy of the conflict in Vietnam.

### Source 6.10.2



Photograph of Australian nurses at work in Vietnam in 1967  
AWM GIL/67/0484/VN