This week saw the fall of Saigon and the end of the existence of South Vietnam as an independent nation. The news came as I was completing my series of visits as leader of the opposition to the different Australian states.

At the beginning of the week I visited Perth, and I also met graziers and vegetable growers in Carnarvon to talk with them about the problems of rural industry in a time of inflation.

In South Australia I spoke to audiences in Adelaide and in Murray Bridge, the centre of a mixed farming district.

In the meantime, north of Australia, tanks were rolling towards Saigon, and the city finally fell on Wednesday.

I feel strongly that in the present world state of uncertainty, and with the United States congress increasingly isolationist in mood, there is need for Australia to be more self reliant in defence.

The end of the South Vietnamese government dramatises this.
However, there are two circumstances of special relevance to Australia in this affair.

The first is the Government's handling of the problem of refugees from South Vietnam and the second and connected point concerns the links being developed by the Australian Government with the Government of North Vietnam.

 Enough has come to light to show that the Australian Government was wearing two faces in its relations with the two Vietnams.

For the south, the tone was a cold one - one of reproof.

The Government of President Thieu was taken to task over its attempts to obtain from the Americans sufficient ammunition and equipment to replace what it was losing.

By implication it was also blamed for the breakdown, when the Viet Cong walked out, of the talks to set up a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord.

In contrast, North Vietnam was offered understanding and encouragement, even advice on how best to handle its foreign relations while the military campaign against the South was going on.
But what had actually happened was that the Prime Minister had fallen for a typical communist tactic.

He had been led on, and then the North Vietnamese had shifted ground and demanded more.

There should have been no reason for surprise, because this is what happened during the negotiations which began more than two years ago for a settlement in Vietnam.

When agreement was finally reached, the North Vietnamese changed ground again, walking out of talks with the South and then demanding, first the withdrawal of all Americans from Vietnam, and then the resignation of the Thieu Government.

They had at least the support of the Deputy Prime Minister for in February, Dr. Cairns wrote to the North Vietnamese embassy in Canberra promising a sympathetic ear for these new conditions.

When they were eventually met, Saigon fell and became Ho Chi Minh City.