

## **Vietnam War, Student Protests and State Violence in Yugoslavia**

The 1960s was a period of students' riots, civil disobedience, and Cold War crisis. Echo of the global student unrests and antiwar sentiment could be traced in various Yugoslav media of the time, but also on the streets. During that turbulent decade, Yugoslavia faced street violence and riots during the demonstrations against the Vietnam War, which were the first mass protests after the WWII, and the Trieste Crisis.

These protests can be understood only in the context of the Yugoslav foreign policy. They were organized by the regime, and they were not, unlike student protest in June 1968, a shock for the political elite, but a way of political balancing between East and West. In the domain of foreign policy, in that decade, Yugoslavia was one of the leaders of the Non-Aligned Movement, with communist ideology, but with strong political, economic and cultural ties with the West. On the other hand, after 1965, the most sensitive issue in Yugoslav-American relations became the Vietnam War.

The first student protest against the Vietnam War was organized already in February 1965, but this one was the peaceful one. The new wave of unrest and attacks on American foreign policy occurred in 1966, with the climax in November and December on the demonstrations in Belgrade, Zagreb, Novi Sad, Skopje and Sarajevo. These protests were organized by the state-controlled student and Party organizations, and then, when they became violent, they were violently suppressed by the state police. The culmination of the anti-war sentiment was in April 1968, when 300,000 people, again organized by the state, demonstrated in Belgrade against American policy in Vietnam, and were, again, violently interrupted by the police.

The same as in general Yugoslav policy, the case with the violence during antiwar demonstrations was one of the typical double games. The state sponsored and organized demonstrations against the war in Vietnam, with a strong anti-American sentiment, and on the other hand, the same state used violence to stop these demonstrations, in order to manifest good relations with the United States. Sympathizing with Vietnamese people, as well as being America's communist ally, was just another one demonstration of Yugoslav double political game that it had been playing since the break-up with the Soviet Union in 1948, till the disintegration of the country in 1991.