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## YUGOSLAVIA, VIETNAM WAR AND ANTIWAR ACTIVISM\*

**ABSTRACT:** *Being a specific country between East and West, Yugoslavia had a specific policy regarding the war in Vietnam. On the one hand, it sympathized with the Vietnamese people and their National Liberation Struggle, but on the other it wanted to maintain good relations with the United States. Antiwar sentiment was present in political speeches, in media, popular culture, even on the streets, but when things started getting out of hand, as it did during antiwar demonstrations in 1966, the state used violence to stop them, in order to manifest good relations with the United States and retain monopoly on political activism.*

**Key words:** *Yugoslavia, Vietnam War, antiwar activism, antiwar demonstrations*

### Vietnam War, Anti-imperialism and Growing Antiwar Sentiment (Context of Rebellious Yugoslav 1960s)

The most far reaching transnational consequences of the Vietnam War were the protest movements it inspired. By the late 1960s politically significant peace movements had emerged throughout the world. Antiwar activism reached its peak in the period 1965–1968.<sup>1</sup> Yugoslavia participated in a network of transnational protest from the beginning of the Vietnam War. As elsewhere around the globe, Yugoslav students took part in this global anti-colonial and anti-imperialist sentiment and at large reacted to the Vietnam War with a strong antiwar agenda.

Certain symbolism was perceived in Yugoslavia in the fact that a big country attacked a small and undeveloped one, and a number of parallels were drawn between the struggles of the Vietnamese people and Yugoslav people for independence. Although these parallels were

\* The text is part of the project *Tradition and Transformation – Historical Heritage and National Identities in Serbia in 20<sup>th</sup> Century* (№ 47019), financed by the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Serbia.

1 More in: M. Klimke and J. Scharloth (eds), *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008); N. Frei, *1968: Jugendrevolte und globaler Protest* (Deutschen Taschenbuch Verlag 2008); M. Klimke, *The Other Alliance: student protest in West Germany and the United States in global sixties* (Princeton University Press 2010), etc.

often drawn in political speeches and newspapers articles, they were, actually, never explained, thus they became mere empty rhetoric, used for mobilizing people in the country which had a stronghold on the ideology of the World War II National Liberation Struggle.

The first antiwar protests in Yugoslavia started as early as February 1965, and from then on a number of activities were organized to show solidarity with the Vietnamese people.<sup>2</sup> However, all these protests and activity can only be understood in the context of Yugoslav foreign policy. After the split with the Soviet Union in 1948, Yugoslavia endeavored to find its own way being positioned between the East and West. The ideology remained a communist one, but cultural influences and significant financial aid came from the West (especially from the United States). Yugoslavia also initiated a new era in balancing between the blocks by playing an important part in the Non-Aligned Movement. This model often called the „third way“ or „Yugoslavia’s own way“ enabled Yugoslavia to have a very significant role on the international scene, where it often became a negotiator during the Cold War crises.

Third Worldism with a strong set-up anti-colonial and anti-imperialist agenda had started to play an important role in Yugoslav foreign policy since 1954/1955 (before and after the Bandung Conference).<sup>3</sup> Thus, approaching the Third World, a number of Tito’s visits to the countries of the Third World and the visits of Third World leaders to Tito, became an unavoidable part of the Yugoslav search for political identity. As far as relations with Vietnam was concerned, an important event was the visit of Ho Chi Minh to Yugoslavia in August 1957. The culmination of Yugoslavia’s new „third world policy“ was in September 1961, when Belgrade hosted the First Non-Aligned Conference.<sup>4</sup>

The connection between anti-imperialism and Third Worldism became more and more obvious in Yugoslavia from the beginning of the 1960s. The first massive anti-imperialist demonstrations, which were actually the first big public demonstrations in Yugoslavia after World War II, were connected with the execution of Patrice Lumumba in February 1961. After the „official“ part of the demonstrations, organized by the state on Marx-Engels Square, in which 150,000 people rallied, several thousand continued to demonstrate violently in front of the embassies and libraries of Western countries. They succeeded in breaking through the police line in front of the Belgian

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2 „Beogradski studenti osudili napade SAD na Vijetnam“, *Politika*, 18 February 1965, str. 5.

3 Bandung Conference was a meeting of Asian and African states which took place in Bandung, Indonesia, 18–24 April 1955.

4 More in: D. Bogetić, *Nova strategija spoljne politike Jugoslavije 1956–1961*, Beograd, 2006, str. 363–376; D. Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi 1961–1971*, Beograd, 2012, str. 30–34.

embassy, burned cars and wrecked the building.<sup>5</sup> Then, after the Bay of Pigs Invasion on April 18 1961, a group of students demonstrated in Belgrade against the invasion of Cuba, breaking the windows of the American Library, which brought about the official protest of the American Embassy. Next year, in 1962, anti-imperialism revived was seen once again on the streets of Belgrade, during the Cuban missile crisis, when windows of the American Library were smashed.<sup>6</sup>

Growing anti-imperialism at the beginning of the 1960s was part of the strained Yugoslav-American relations. Deterioration of these relations became apparent at the First Non-Aligned Conference in Belgrade 1961, where Josip Broz Tito sided with the Soviet line, and harshly criticized American stands on Berlin and Guantanamo Bay base.<sup>7</sup> However, throughout the 1960s, the Vietnam War provoked the culmination of the worsening of Yugoslav-American relations. In 1965, with the beginning of the bombing campaign, the Vietnam War became the most sensitive issue in Yugoslav-American relations.

### Antiwar Demonstrations

The very first demonstrations took place immediately after the commencement of bombing of North Vietnam, on 8 February 1965. American policy was sharply criticized both by the press, which was quick to report on the problem, as well as by the general public, which was kept eagerly informed by that same press. Students of Belgrade University, „along with their colleagues from Asian, African, Latin American, and European countries studying in Belgrade“, held a protest on 17 February 1965, in which they condemned the US attacks on DR Vietnam, and „expressed their solidarity with the people of Vietnam in their struggle for freedom and independence“.<sup>8</sup> This meeting marked the language that was going to be used in the following years: „the USA aggression“, „imperialist intervention“, „reactionary regime“.<sup>9</sup> The writing in the Yugoslav press, together with the severe attacks on the American war policy made the American Ambassador to Yugoslavia, Charles Burke Elbrick protest that „the Yugoslav press places all the blame on the US“.<sup>10</sup> This was confirmed in the text of the Party daily *Borba* – in

5 P. J. Marković, „Najava bure: studentski nemiri u svetu i Jugoslaviji od Drugog svetskog rata do početka šezdesetih godina“, *Tokovi istorije*, 3-4 (2000), str. 59.

6 R. Vučetić, *Koka-kola socijalizam. Amerikanizacija jugoslovenske popularne kulture šezdesetih godina XX veka*, Beograd, 2012, str. 67-68.

7 *Ibid.*

8 „Beogradski studenti osudili napade SAD na Vijetnam“, *Politika*, 18 February 1965, str. 5.

9 Arhiv Jugoslavije (AJ), 145, F-73-318, Rezolucija.

10 Diplomatski arhiv Ministarstva spoljnih poslova (DASMIP), Politička arhiva (PA), Sjedinjene Američke Države (SAD), 1965, F-150, 46484, Zabeleška o razgovoru

March and April 1965 there were severe attacks on the USA, in which America was identified with the fascist powers,<sup>11</sup> and in August 1965 American soldiers were equalized with Hitler's.<sup>12</sup> Because of the writing in the Yugoslav press, the US diplomatic pressure did not subside, and in February of 1966, the United States Secretary, Dean Rusk, warned the Yugoslav ambassador in Washington of the negative consequences should the Yugoslav position regarding the Vietnam crisis be "entirely anti-American and identical to the viewpoints of other communist countries".<sup>13</sup>

A new wave of street antiwar protests continued in the second half of 1966. A series of demonstrations began with a rally of solidarity with the struggle of the Vietnamese people on 18 November 1966, at the Faculty of Technology in Belgrade, organized by the University Committee of the Yugoslav Student Association (itself tightly controlled by the state).<sup>14</sup> The League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) interpreted the global student revolt as a confirmation of its own policy, and therefore more than welcomed it. But, on the other hand, it did not want to lose any control over directing and channeling this revolt.

Most of the antiwar actions were organized by the state and various state-institutions, and, in contrast to the student protests of June 1968, were not a shock for the political elite, but a political balancing act between East and West.<sup>15</sup>

Events connected with the Vietnam War, including the protests against it, were directed from the highest positions in the party-state. Just like in the overall life of socialist Yugoslavia, the issue was given a democratic appearance. Judging by what can be found in the archives and the press of that time, all antiwar activities were obviously supported by the government on condition that the government could lead and direct the activities.

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Marka Nikežića i ambasadora SAD Elbrika, 19. februara 1965.

- 11 DASMIP, PA, SAD, 1965, F-148, 411945, Razgovor Zlatka Sinobada sa W. Robertsom, savetnikom Američke ambasade, 6. april 1965.
- 12 DASMIP, PA, SAD, 1965, F-148, 429368, Telegram, br. 1471, 21. avgust 1965.
- 13 DASMIP, PA, SAD, 1966, F-176, 46495, Vašington, 15. februar 1966.
- 14 AJ, Kabinet predsednika republike (KPR), II-4-a, Informacija o mitingu i demonstracijama održanim 23. decembra 1966. godine.
- 15 The 1968 student demonstrations were the greatest demonstrations in socialist Yugoslavia with strong anti-capitalist and anti-bureaucratic elements. For the first time, students openly criticized the Yugoslav system. As the 1968 demonstrations were not part of antiwar protests, and they did not have any connections with the Yugoslav foreign policy and the war in Vietnam, they are not considered in this article. On the 1968 student demonstrations more in: H. Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968* (Zagreb, 2012); B. Kanzleiter, *Die „Rote Universität“. Studentenbewegung und Liksoopposition in Belgrad 1964–1975* (Vsa Verlag, 2011); R. Radić (ed.), *1968 – četrdeset godina posle* (Beograd, 2008); M. Petrović, *Studentski pokreti 1968. Nedovršena revolucija u uporednoj perspektivi: skica političke filozofije* (Niš, 2010); N. Popov, *Društveni sukobi – izazov sociologiji: „Beogradski jun“ 1968* (Beograd, 2008), etc.

The first moment of open non-conformity to the Party line, followed by violence, took place in December 1966 in Zagreb and Belgrade. It is important to highlight that the Yugoslav media stoked the antiwar feelings with a number of extremely anti-American articles in the days of these demonstrations.<sup>16</sup>

The first violent demonstrations against the Vietnam War occurred in Zagreb, on 20 December 1966. On that day, the Yugoslav Student Association (SSJ) celebrated the sixth anniversary of the founding of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam, as a manifestation of solidarity with the Vietnamese people. Around 10,000 students gathered at the protest organized by the Zagreb University Committee (Student University Association) in front of the Students' Centre. Their dissatisfaction with American policy earned them the support of many more citizens of Zagreb, so that by the evening the number of protesters grew to 20,000 people, at which point the demonstrations turned violent. Protestors attacked the American Consulate throwing bricks and stones, breaking windows, pulling down the American coat of arms and trying to burn the American flag. The reaction of the state was violent in equal measure – strong police forces used truncheons, water cannons, and tear gas.<sup>17</sup>

Parallel with the events in Zagreb, a „rally to condemn the American aggression and to support the struggle of the Vietnamese people“ was organized on the same day at the students' campus in Belgrade. It was a kind of warming-up for the big protest at the Faculty of Philology, scheduled for 23 December, which was to end in riots and clashes of students with the police.<sup>18</sup>

The initial idea was a peaceful protest, after which a protest letter should be handed to the American ambassador. This idea was abandoned because demonstrations outside the University, subsequent to the gathering, were forbidden. However, the atmosphere at the rally was heated with the sharp anti-American agenda and slogans such as „We don't want American grain“, „All Americans out of Yugoslavia“, and ended up with the calls of „To the [American] library!“ and „To the [American] embassy!“ Since the police had forbidden the demonstrations outside the University, when the demonstrators came out of the University building, the police assaulted them using truncheons, cavalry, water cannons, and tear gas.<sup>19</sup>

The wave of street protests in December 1966 continued in Novi Sad, where the demonstrators broke the windows of the Ameri-

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16 On the day of the scheduled protest, 23 December, in Belgrade, the Party daily *Borba* published an article „Horrible Vietnam War – 250,000 Children are Killed“ on the front page (*Borba*, 23 December 1966, str. 1).

17 AJ, KPR, II-4-a, Informacija o demonstracijama u Zagrebu, 23. decembar 1966.

18 AJ, KPR, II-4-a, Informacija o mitingu i demonstracijama održanim 23. decembra 1966. godine

19 Istorijski arhiv Beograda (IAB), UK SKS Beograda, F-84, Hronologija događaja.

can Library.<sup>20</sup> Skopje saw „spontaneous outpouring of solidarity with the Vietnamese people and protests against the American aggression“ starting in October and culminating on 20 December, the declared Day of Solidarity with the Vietnamese People.<sup>21</sup> The demonstrations were also held in Sarajevo and were led by the University Committee of the League of Communists of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>22</sup>

On the one hand the Party participated in creating the antiwar and anti-American hysteria (mostly through the media), but on the other, it did not allow it to cross the line that might jeopardize Yugoslav-American relations. However, strong antiwar sentiment was not always in accordance with Yugoslav foreign policy. Fostered antiwar sentiments and anti-imperial agenda, turned Yugoslavia away from the West, and oriented it more towards the East and the Third World. This balancing between East and West appeared to be frustrating for the young people, who did not know what to think and how to behave. Permanent press coverage of American crimes in Vietnam, with strong anti-imperialist agenda, created the situation that the majority of young people identified with the Vietnamese and their struggle against imperialism. Moreover, in that period, young people were fascinated with Mao, which was contrary to the Yugoslav foreign policy and its bad relations with China. The public antiwar campaign resulted in the number of young people who wanted to volunteer and go to fight on the side of the Vietnamese people. Because of the inconsistent Yugoslav foreign policy, these confused young people would usually go to the Chinese Embassy to volunteer, where they were politely turned down.<sup>23</sup>

With this heated atmosphere and growing number of young people who wanted a radicalization of Yugoslav foreign policy, it was hard to neglect these feelings, so it seemed that the state was anxious to find a way to channel this energy. It is clear that being large, organized, and announced well in advance, the December demonstrations could not have been „spontaneous“, nor was there any effort to hide who was behind them.<sup>24</sup> In Zagreb, it was the University Committee of the League of Communists and the University Committee of the Student Association. In Belgrade, it was the local branches of the same organizations, with the support of the Association of Professors and the Literary Association.<sup>25</sup>

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20 DASMIP, PA, SAD, 1966, F-176, 444349.

21 AJ, KPR, II-4-a, Informacija o protestnim mitinzima protiv rata u Vijetnamu (Zagreb, Skoplje, Sarajevo).

22 B. Kanzleiter, „Die Rote Universität“. *Studentenbewegung und Linksoption in Belgrad 1964-1975*, (Dissertation, 2009), 179.

23 Interview with Borislav Stanojević (who was high school pupil at the time), Belgrade 2 November 2012.

24 The protest rally of 23 December in Belgrade was announced in all the leading dailies, including the Party's own *Borba*.

25 AJ, KPR, II-4-a, Informacija o demonstracijama u Zagrebu, 23. decembar 1966;

Violence at the antiwar demonstrations apparently showed that there was huge dissatisfaction with the Yugoslav foreign policy. The Party analysis after the demonstrations noted that the clash of police and students was a kind of materialization of the general feelings in Yugoslavia about its foreign policy and that criticism of Yugoslav non-radical policy against the situation in Vietnam was growing.<sup>26</sup>

The public outcry was a logical consequence, since the general public was being „bombarded“ with information on American crimes in Vietnam, followed by the strong antiwar campaign in all the media. However, good relations with the United States, an important aspect of Yugoslav foreign policy, led to the situation in which antiwar demonstrations could be supported, but the strong anti-American agenda had to be suppressed, even violently if necessary. This policy also had its economic side. As in many cases in the complicated relations between Belgrade and Washington, on one side there was Yugoslav (communist) ideology, and on the other – American dollars. The American side used this situation to put pressure on Yugoslavia. Due to Yugoslav officials' harsh criticism of American policy in Vietnam, their American counterparts pointed out that such a Yugoslav anti-American attitude would influence the economic sphere. As soon as the Yugoslav officials faced this kind of financial threats, they would instantly change and soften both the anti-American rhetoric and stands.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, when Yugoslavia was heating up its antiwar campaign, some radical measures were imposed from the American side, such as stopping the grain trade on the Public Law (PL)-480 bases.<sup>28</sup>

As a result of this consistent ambivalent foreign policy the Party while supporting anti-American feelings on the Vietnam War, did not allow any serious attacks on America to be made, as it had demonstrated by using violence against the December 1966 demonstrations. Yugoslavia's „double game“ policy resulted in a feeling of profound confusion felt by ordinary people who did not know what to think and do. However this was a common situation in the history of socialist Yugoslavia.

The biggest demonstrations against the war in Vietnam were held in April 1968 when 300,000 people protested against American imperialism in the Belgrade city center. This Rally of Solidarity with the Vietnamese people was organized by the state and the list of speakers included high-ranking members of the state and the Party,

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Informacija o mitingu i demonstracijama održanim 23. decembra 1966. godine.

26 IAB, UK SKS, F-84, Razgovor komisije sa grupom studenata istorije.

27 *FRUS*, 1964–1968, Vol. XVII, Eastern Europe, 178, Memorandum From the Under Secretary of State for Economic Affairs (Mann) to the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Washington, July 22, 1965, [http://state.gov/www/about\\_state/history/vol\\_xvii/v.html](http://state.gov/www/about_state/history/vol_xvii/v.html) (accessed on 13 January 2009)

28 AJ, KPR, IV-7, Pregled spoljnopolitičkih informacija 3/67.



implying that the government was behind its organization. The speakers condemned „the brutal and dirty war that America was leading against the heroic people of Vietnam“. Their speeches focused on the American president Johnson, who, „as the organizer of the aggression, was responsible for crimes against peace and humanity“.<sup>29</sup> The mass revolt, encouraged by fiery showmanship from the leading figures in the Party, quickly spread through the streets of Belgrade: the demonstrators chanted „the whole world admires you, Vietnam“, „Johnson, America needs a president, not a sheriff“, and „America, we do not want a new Hitler“. But cordons of policemen, protecting the American Library, and the American embassy, staved off any serious rioting.<sup>30</sup>

### Behind Diplomacy

Although it seemed that the press and „socio-political organizations“ strongly opposed American policy in Vietnam, the US Government showed a high level of understanding for Yugoslav peace initiatives that went on parallel with the „street diplomacy“. Behind the street-demonstrations and severe attacks on American policy in the press, a series of diplomatic actions was undertaken by Tito. His role as a peace negotiator in the Vietnam conflict was mostly visible in 1965. On 2 March 1965, Tito sent a message to the American president Lyndon Johnson, where he insisted on a peaceful solution through direct negotiations. On this occasion, he did not condemn the American military intervention, and he did not ask for American troop withdrawal from Vietnam.<sup>31</sup> As part of his diplomatic initiative, Tito organized the non-aligned conference in Belgrade, on 15 March 1965. Two days earlier (on 13 March), Johnson sent a message to Tito, asking him to endorse that not all blame for the war be put on the USA at the Belgrade non-aligned meeting. Despite this message, Belgrade hardened its position towards the USA, and Yugoslavia asked the conference to „condemn American aggression“, but since the majority of the present states were against it, a compromise was found. The verdict in the Appeal of the 17 non-aligned countries was condemnation of the „foreign military intervention“.<sup>32</sup>

During the second half of 1965, besides the writing of the press, official criticism of American policy was a generally intensified. This led to two visits of president Johnson's Ambassador at Large Avarrell Harriman to Yugoslavia (in July 1965, and on 1 January 1966,

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29 „Vijetnamci zadužili celo čovečanstvo“, *Politika*, 7 April 1968, str. 2.

30 „Demonstracije posle mitinga“, *Politika*, 7 April 1968, str. 2.

31 D. Bogetić, „Početak Vijetnamskog rata ijugoslovensko-američki odnosi“, *Istorija 20. veka* (1/2007), str. 95–98.

32 *Ibid.*



after Harriman's talk with Wladyslaw Gomulka) where Tito's role as the peace negotiator was expressed fully. Tito's new round of diplomacy came to an end in 1966, after Johnson's letter from January 31<sup>st</sup>, where he thanked him for his peace efforts, but expressed regret that America was to intervene in Vietnam again, after which there was an escalation of Vietnam War.<sup>33</sup>

While the year 1965 was marked with the exchange of messages between Tito-Johnson, Tito-Harriman talks, and permanent contacts of ambassadors and ministers of foreign affairs from both sides, 1966 brought worsening of Yugoslav-American relations.<sup>34</sup> However, the general ambivalent policy – on one side criticizing American policy, on the other negotiating, created confusion in the minds of the people.

### **Institutionalizing the Antiwar Campaigns**

The first student protest against the Vietnam War was organized as early as February 1965. From that point on, a number of mass solidarity campaigns took place in Yugoslavia, reaching their height of activity in the period of 1966–1968.

Yugoslavia was one of the countries that drew up the Appeal by 17 non-aligned countries for peace talks in Vietnam, which was delivered on 1 April 1965, urging negotiations to start „as soon as possible, without any preconditions“. Since October 1965, different kind of aid was collected, and the Yugoslav Red Cross sent the first aid to the Red Cross of the DR Vietnam at the end of 1965.<sup>35</sup> The most important date in institutionalizing the antiwar campaign was the establishment of the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Assistance to the People of Vietnam in February 1966.

It is very hard to make a clear distinction between official and unofficial activism, concerning the war in Vietnam in the case of Yugoslavia. The state seemed to encourage different kinds of solidarity manifestations with Vietnam. Every year saw the marking of the „Day of Solidarity“ with the Struggle of the Vietnamese people (October 21<sup>st</sup>), the „Solidarity Week with the Struggle of the Vietnamese people“ (in November or December), and Anniversary of the Founding of the National Liberation Front for South Vietnam.

Most of the protests were organized by the state-controlled student and party organizations, but it was often disguised under the name „socio-political organizations“. As for the relations with Vietnam, this meant that the issue was taken up not only by the League

33 D. Bogetić, *op. cit.*, 111, 114.

34 D. Bogetić, *Jugoslovensko-američki odnosi 1961–1971* (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2012), str. 209.

35 AJ, 142, A470, Izveštaj Jugoslovenskog koordinacionog odbora za pomoć narodu Vijetnama od formiranja 28. februara 1966. god. do 1. oktobra 1967. god.

of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY), but also by the organizations such as the Socialist Alliance of Yugoslav Working People (SSRNJ), Yugoslav Student Association (SSJ), Youth League of Yugoslavia (SOJ), Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Assistance to the People of Vietnam, as well as a number of artists and intellectuals. Judging by what can be found in the archives and the press at the time, all antiwar activities were obviously supported by the government on condition that the government led and directed the activities.

On the one hand, it seems that the state absolutely encouraged activism and actually organized a number of actions, but on the other it violently reacted when this activism slipped out of its hands. The state wanted monopoly on this activism, but youth activism became stronger, violent and with clear demands for the regime to define its foreign policy.

The most important organization for activities regarding the war in Vietnam was the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Aid to the People of Vietnam, formed in February 1966, which, among various activities, organized „Solidarity Week“ from 1966 up to 1973.<sup>36</sup> General Secretary of the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee the Assistance to the People of Vietnam stated that all their actions „have been characterized by continuity and massiveness“ and that „assistance to the people of Vietnam has been both political and material“.<sup>37</sup> It seems that during „Solidarity Weeks“ the whole of Yugoslavia took part in supporting the Vietnamese People. It seemed as if the „whole nation“ was giving support to the people of Vietnam – workers, pupils, students, university professors, artists, intellectuals.

Apart from the „Solidarity Weeks“, public rallies, demonstrations and meetings in the working collectives were being constantly held throughout Yugoslavia with the participation of hundreds of thousands of citizens. Furthermore, in factories, at the meetings of trade union organizations, in primary and secondary schools, and at the universities, lectures were given and films shown on the struggle of the Vietnamese people. Special exhibitions were organized in major towns all over Yugoslavia; the Program of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam was translated into the languages of all Yugoslav nationalities and printed in a large number of copies; special publications (e.g. „The Truth about Vietnam“), commemorative stamps, posters, etc. were published and distributed. Even Women’s Day (8 March) in 1968 was strongly marked by manifestations of solidarity of all citizens of Yugoslavia with the struggle of women and people of Vietnam.<sup>38</sup>

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36 AJ, 142, F-A470, Izveštaj Jugoslovenskog nacionalnog odbora za pomoć narodu Vijetnama.

37 AJ, 142, A470, „Over a Million Yugoslav Donors“.

38 AJ, 142-457, Informacija o akcijama podrške i pomoći naroda Jugoslavije borbi vijetnamskog naroda; AJ, 142, A470, „Over a Million Yugoslav Donors“.

It appeared, according to the reports of the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Aid to the People of Vietnam, that the wish to support Vietnam in different ways was quite overwhelming and that people did not hesitate in giving different kind of aid. For example, during the 1967 „Solidarity Week“, over a million Yugoslavs made donations – many workers decided to donate 2 percent of their earnings to the „Vietnam Fund“. Others renounced their earnings for one or more days. Some working organizations donated clothes and footwear; children sold commemorative stamps in schools.<sup>39</sup>

Children were given a prominent role in supporting the Vietnamese people. Numerous contests for the best pupils' literary works and drawings with the topic „Vietnamese People's Fight“ were organized, and during „Solidarity Week“ one lesson in all schools was dedicated to the „heroic fight of the Vietnamese people“. One of the activities was writing letters to the children in Vietnam that pupils from schools all over Yugoslavia wrote and sent during the Solidarity Weeks.<sup>40</sup> Valuable support to the people of Vietnam was also given through medical aid (donations of blood plasma, medications, and concentrated food, even one completely equipped field hospital).<sup>41</sup>

When analyzing all antiwar activities, it is obvious that they had a transnational dimension and that they were in accordance with the Resolutions of the 9th IUS Congress which was held in Ulan Bator 26 March–8 April 1967. This Resolution called on all student organizations to protest, organize meetings, marches, demonstrations, send petitions, organize press, exhibitions (photos, paintings, posters), film screenings (e.g. films „Mekong on Fire“, „Children Accuse“ ...) that would help Vietnamese people in their „heroic fight“.<sup>42</sup>

### Role Models in Antiwar Activism

According to specific Yugoslav foreign policy („between East and West“), it is interesting to follow the role models and paths that the Yugoslav youth movement followed in the 1960s. It was clear, not only according to the media of the time but also according to archival sources, that the sympathy of Yugoslav youth, and Yugoslav public as well was on the side of the antiwar movement that was developed in the West. For example, on Youth Day in 1968, the party daily *Borba* published Jean-Paul Sartre's interview with an „anarchist

39 AJ, 142-457, Informacija o političkoj aktivnosti u SR Srbiji u toku „Nedelje solidarnosti sa borbom naroda Vijetnama“, januar 1968.

40 AJ, 142-457, Informacija o nedelji solidarnosti sa borbom naroda Vijetnama održanoj od 13. do 20. decembra 1967.

41 AJ, 142, A470, „Over a Million Yugoslav Donors“.

42 AJ, 145-12, 1967, Važnije rezolucije IX Kongresa Međunarodnog saveza studenata koje su donesene prilikom održavanja Kongresa u Ulan Batoru.

leader of the student movement Daniel Cohn-Bendit".<sup>43</sup> Generally, students in Yugoslavia were well informed about the international development of protests and ideological debates in the West. Prominent world „new leftists“ used to come to the Croatian island Korčula as guests at the famous „Korčula Summer School“ (Herbert Marcuse, Agnes Heller, Erich Fromm, Leszek Kolakowski, etc). Slovenian sociologist and political activist Rastko Močnik stated that the Slovenian magazine *Tribuna* permanently debated on student movements taking place throughout the world – in Prague, Berlin, Athens, Amsterdam, Madrid, Egypt, Great Britain, Poland. Italy, Algeria, Belgium... According to him, each issue published articles on the Vietnam War as well as on anti-Americanism.<sup>44</sup>

According to Boris Kanzleiter, Yugoslav student activists identified with the youth protest in both East and West, but in an unexpected way – protesting explicitly against both political systems (Stalinist and capitalist), following the internationalist line.<sup>45</sup> Following internationalist politics, inclining towards the „new left“ from the West was the reflection of the Yugoslav general position. Yugoslavia had a number of conflicts with the Eastern Block, and in the Non-Aligned Movement there was no consensus concerning Vietnam. In March 1965 the non-aligned countries<sup>46</sup> had consultations on Vietnam with the idea of issuing an appeal to all warring powers in the Vietnam conflict. The dilemma being if the appeal should mention the USA and the bombing of North Vietnam, or not (India, Ceylon, Afghanistan, Tunisia, Ghana and Ethiopia did not support mentioning the USA while Yugoslavia, Mali, Guinea, Algeria and the UAR supported condemning the USA).<sup>47</sup>

Generally, the Soviet line in Yugoslavia was not followed, and the Soviet Union, as a role model concerning the Vietnam War issue, was never mentioned. Yugoslavia was trying to show that its policy toward Vietnam is connected with leftist movements from the West, with Non-Aligned countries, and with the international peace organizations (taking part in the Stockholm Conference was a big issue).

As far as the Yugoslav Student Association (SSJ) is concerned, it was usually emphasized that it had good relations with similar organizations from western countries. As for cooperation with socialist

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43 B. Kanzleiter, K. Stojaković (Hrsg.), „1968 in Jugoslawien – Studentenproteste zwischen Ost und West“, in: *1968 in Jugoslawien. Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975* (Bonn: Dietz, 2008), p. 15.

44 R. Močnik, „1968 in Slovenien - ... eine ziemlich erfolgreiche Episode“, in: *1968 in Jugoslawien. Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975* (Bonn: Dietz, 2008), p. 83.

45 B. Kanzleiter, „Yugoslavia“, in: M. Klimke and J. Scharloth (eds.), *1968 in Europe. A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Palgrave Macmillan 2008), p. 222.

46 Afghanistan, Algeria, Ceylon, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Iraq, Cyprus, Cuba, Mali, Syria, Tunisia, UAR and Yugoslavia took part on these consultations.

47 AJ, 142-453, Zabeleška o konsultacijama nesvrstanih zemalja u vezi Vijetnama, 18. March 1965.

and communist countries it was said that „the cooperation with these organizations had faded in last few years“ and that the best cooperation with student organizations from the Eastern block was with the Polish one, while the worst relations were with Albanian and Chinese ones.<sup>48</sup> It was also emphasized that few organizations from the Eastern Block took an unfriendly stand toward the Yugoslav Student Association, as well as some student organizations from Asia (from China, North Korea and North Vietnam).<sup>49</sup>

The relations with Vietnam, which was characterized as a victim in the Yugoslav public discourse of the time, were not good. The relations of the Youth League of Yugoslavia (SOJ) with Vietnam Youth Federation were not „as they should be because of the situation in the international workers' movement and in the Far East“. The material of the SOJ, stated that the Yugoslav „aid to Vietnam has nothing to do with the Vietnamese policy towards Yugoslavia, but is an expression of our internationalist consciousness“, and that the only contacts with Vietnam youth organizations were „informal“ ones that took place at a number of international gatherings.<sup>50</sup> As it was perceived by one high school student at that time, who at the age of 17 wanted to volunteer as fighter on Vietnamese side, „it was not a question of Vietnam, we wanted world revolution“.<sup>51</sup>

It seems that, the Party wanted to show a positive attitude towards youth movements both in the East and West as it did in its general foreign policy. On the one hand, the Party wanted to show sympathies with the people of Vietnam, but on the other to use the anti-imperialism of the Vietnamese struggle to politicize youth's sentiments against capitalism and show that Yugoslavia was part of global trends.

## Vietnam War in Popular Culture

All antiwar actions in Yugoslavia had significant media coverage (TV, radio, and newspapers). In all newspapers „political, moral and material support to the brave Vietnamese people and its righteous fight“ was underlined.<sup>52</sup>

Anti-imperialism and antiwar sentiments were presented in the media not only through youth movements all over the world, and through their activism, but also as a mass cultural phenom-

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48 AJ, 145-12-31, Plenarne sednice 1966–1968.

49 *Ibid.*

50 AJ, 142-457, Akcije solidarnosti sa omladinom i narodom Vijetnama u 1968. godini, 3 May 1968.

51 Interview with Borislav Stanojević (who was high school pupil at the time), Belgrade 2 November 2012.

52 AJ, 142-457, Informacija o nedelji solidarnosti sa borbom naroda Vijetnama održanoj od 13. do 20. decembra 1967.

enon. The Vietnam War inspired links with artists and intellectuals from the West, who criticized the war. Antiwar mass-culture became part of Yugoslavia's cultural life in the 1960s, and this could be seen on TV, in the theatre, at various exhibitions, and could be heard as music of protest. Not only did foreign artists come to Yugoslavia to promote their antiwar feelings through art, but Yugoslav artist started contributing to transnational counterculture of the time, as well.

Protest songs and pacifism came to Yugoslavia through the music of Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, Donovan and other beatniks and members of the hippie movement.<sup>53</sup> Joan Baez was described in Yugoslav press as the „Madonna of Beatniks“ and Dylan was named as „Homer of Our Century“.<sup>54</sup> Famous antiwar protestor and singer, Joan Baez visited Belgrade on her European tour in 1966, with the support of the Yugoslav ambassador to the United States, Veljko Mićunović.<sup>55</sup> She got huge coverage in all the media, including the most powerful one – television.<sup>56</sup> Her and Bob Dylan's songs influenced Yugoslav musicians. Croatian singer Ivica Percl performed a number of antiwar and protest songs, among which the most famous was „1966“.<sup>57</sup> Moreover, idol of the hippie movement, Ravi Shankar, visited Yugoslavia in September 1967.<sup>58</sup> Antiwar songs were also part of the most famous Yugoslav TV show dedicated to rock'n'roll, „Koncert za ludi mladi svet“. One of the songs in this show was sung by one Yugoslav and one African singer, it was against the war in Vietnam and against American soldier Bobby Smith who kills mothers with their children.<sup>59</sup>

The most famous American avant-garde theatres (La Mama, Living Theatre, Bread and Puppet Theatre) had been performing their antiwar performances on International Belgrade Theatre Festival (BITEF) since 1967.<sup>60</sup> Antiwar sentiment expressed in the foreign theatrical plays influenced Yugoslav theatre as well. In January 1968 the Student Experimental Theatre from Zagreb had a premiere of *Viet Rock*, a rock musical by Megan Terry.<sup>61</sup> The culmination of the antiwar sentiment was staging the musical *Hair* in Belgrade that was the fifth world premiere (it was on 19 May 1969), after New York, London, Paris and Munich.<sup>62</sup>

53 A. Raković, *Rokenrol u Jugoslaviji 1956–1968. Izazov socijalističkom društvu*, Beograd, 2011, str. 535–536.

54 *Ibid.*, str. 536.

55 R. Vučetić, *op. cit.*, str. 217.

56 A. Raković, *op. cit.*, str. 555–556.

57 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh-YtioKU00> (accessed on 7 October 2012)

58 A. Raković, *Rokenrol u Jugoslaviji 1956–1968...*, str. 556.

59 [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mz9\\_UFfJcpQ](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mz9_UFfJcpQ) (accessed on 7 October 2012)

60 For more, see: R. Vučetić, *op. cit.*, str. 268–291.

61 „Zagreb: Vijetnam na pozorišnoj sceni“, *Politika*, 20 January 1968, str. 8.

62 R. Vučetić, *op. cit.*, str. 270; A. Raković, *op. cit.*, str. 562–564.

In 1968 antiwar lyrics were published in the Anthology of Vietnamese poetry (*Druže tvoja kuća gori*),<sup>63</sup> as well as numerous Vietnamese songs on the records.<sup>64</sup> The hippie culture got prominent coverage in all the media, including influential daily newspapers, where hippies, also the Yugoslav ones, were presented as fierce freedom fighters.<sup>65</sup>

### The End of Interest for Vietnam War

Antiwar protests and the violence connected with them showed that dissatisfaction in Yugoslavia was getting more serious, and that it was not only focused on Yugoslav foreign policy, but even more on its internal policy. The number of unsatisfied opponents to the system was constantly growing, their public outcry became louder, which was an important indication that the „socio-political organizations“ could not channel and direct activities of the people in the desired direction anymore.<sup>66</sup> The huge dissatisfaction that had obviously existed in Yugoslavia, manifested at street demonstrations in 1966, paved the way for the largest protest in Yugoslavia to come – the student demonstrations of June 1968. After the student demonstrations of June 1968 and the Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia in August 1968, the Party did not organize any more antiwar street demonstrations on a larger scale.

What remained as antiwar activism was left to smaller „socio-political organizations“ and to the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Assistance to the People of Vietnam. The last „Solidarity Week“ was organized in 1973. Generally, since 1970, it seemed that enthusiasm for support was declining, as was said at the meeting of the Yugoslav Coordinating Committee for Assistance to the People of Vietnam in July 1970.<sup>67</sup>

Although antiwar protest declined at the beginning of the 1970s, generations of protestors may have not changed the world policy, or the Yugoslav policy towards the Vietnam War and the United States, but they sowed seeds of democratic changes in Yugoslavia that began at the same time as the global youth anti-war protest of the 1960s.

63 Vietnamese poetry „From 15th Century to Ho Chi Minh“ was translated and adapted by most famous Yugoslav poets and writers. In: „Poezija Vijetnama na našem jeziku“, *Politika*, 21 July 1968, str. 19.

64 AJ, 142-465, Nedelja solidarnosti sa borbom vijetnamskog naroda (15–22. novembra 1969).

65 On hippies and Party in Yugoslavia more in: R. Vučetić, *op. cit.*, str. 344–350.

66 H. Klasić, *Jugoslavija i svijet 1968*, (Zagreb, 2012), str. 105.

67 AJ, 142, A470, Potsetnik za sednicu Koordinacionog odbora za pomoć narodu Vijetnama.



## Резиме

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### Југославија, рат у Вијетнаму и антиратни активизам

**Кључне речи:** Југославија, Вијетнамски рат, антиратни активизам, антиратне демонстрације

Од почетка ратних сукоба у Вијетнаму, Југославија се укључила у глобални антиратни покрет. Већ у фебруару 1965. почели су први протести студената Београдског универзитета. Од те године, са врхунцем 1966–1968, у Југославији је одржан низ кампања и масовних протеста против рата у Вијетнаму. Кроз политичке говоре, медије, бројне друштвено-политичке организације, популарну културу и студентски активизам, слате су антиратне поруке, а кроз све ове акције Југославија је постала део транснационалног и глобалног антиратног покрета. Од 1966. до 1973. су одржаване „недеље солидарности“ са народом Вијетнама, а кулминација антиратних протеста је била у децембру 1966. и априлу 1968. године. Рат у Вијетнаму је повезао Југославију са бројним међународним организацијама, уметницима и интелектуалцима са Запада који су критиковали рат (припадници „нове левице“ на Корчуланској летњој школи, Џоан Баез, америчке авангардне позоришне трупе на БИТЕФ-у...). И у самој Југославији је дошло до појаве антиратне уметничке продукције (мјузикли *Viet-Rock* и *Коса*, забавна музика). Иако је антиратни покрет почео да опада 1970, он је посејао семе демократских промена у Југославији које су започеле шездесетих година, а које су се појавиле паралелно са глобалним антиратним протестима шездесетих.