

1969: the year of protest

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11 July 1969: The Year of Protest I have always felt anxious about the social problems unfolding around us. When the Vietnam War began in earnest, I was only 13 year old, but even then I used to read diligently on the proceedings of that war in the newspapers and journals alike. While these outlets usually focused on bestiality of the Communist guerillas from the North and the courage displayed by our soldiers in action, gradually I started to suspect that there was something amiss in their perspective. The first protest against the war that I became interested in was organized by the Students for Democratic Society on 27 October 1965. The speech by Carl Oglesby, the SDS president, impressed me, as he almost openly alluded that the USA was an Imperialist state, trying to dominate Vietnam and the region in general. From then on, I started to pay more attention to these 'New Left' developments, as they were clearly different both from old and boring liberals, as well as the openly pro-Soviet Commies I have heard from my parents. However, this was only one of my interests and affections at this time, as I was simultaneously drawn to The Beatles and Elvis Presley, whom I viewed as the real spokesmen of the new word in the music. By the end of 1968, as I started pondering my college choice, I returned to the interests in protest activities that I had felt for the first time at such a young age. At that moment, the Students for Democratic Society became far larger and influential than ever; yet, at the same time, the organization was now rife with internal disputes and lack of consistent direction. The leadership of the SDS virtually passed in the hands of uncouth radicals that were much more open to cooperation with pro-Maoist Communist radicals than their predecessors. The appearance of such extreme factions as the one led by Maoists from "Progressive Labor Party" and the other that proclaimed itself

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“ the Revolutionary Youth Movement” turned me away from the SDS’s appeal. Now I thought that the SDS was unable to become the inclusive anti-war student movement that I initially thought them to be. Their turn towards eccentric and extreme-leftist politics, as well as their growing penchant for the often nonsensical violence turned me off from them. As of now, I hear that the SDS is gripped by yet another factional struggle between the supporters of the RYM and the PL groupings. The Black Panthers are reported to have attacked the PL members due to the latter’s ‘ anti-nationalist’ stance. Well, good luck to them all. These groups are clearly out of touch with reality, imagining themselves to be the glorious Leninist vanguards – and this is in the country that has apparently entered a technotronic age! How pathetic, indeed. Having rejected the ideological pretenses of the “ New Left” that has now become almost indistinguishable from the “ Old” one, I began dabbling in the world of counterculture that had become so pervasive in the hot atmosphere of the 1960s. I have become a great fan of The Beatles, of Elvis, of some other groups and artists that are less known to mainstream circles. Many of my friends became hippies, but I have always been very skeptical to the idea of ‘ escaping this world’, while effectively living off resources of the affluent society. These alleged ‘ rebels’ are even less seriously taken by me than the SDS Marxist sectarians fighting each other over a Party line. Anyway, I suspect that the bulk of the both groups will soon return to the fold, as soon as the current fashion of ‘ returning to nature’ or chanting the Maoist Little Red Book (both extreme lunacies, in my opinion) will be outdated. The protests we see now are the symptoms of larger discontent in American society, though. Despite them sometimes taking clownish forms, so distant from, for example, 1930s labor militancy

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my grandfather participated in, they genuinely reflect the people's outrage at the costly and cruel war in Vietnam, the patronizing attitude of the . Personally I believe that the beginning of the war has been a great mistake by the Johnson administration. Of course, the Ho Chi Minh-led North Vietnam is far from a workers' paradise pictured by naive or cynical leftists at the university campuses; however, the military dictatorships in the South are none the better. The photographs of the bombed villages and napalmed forests that are often leaked in the press just re-enforce my sense of moral abhorrence at the action of the Army in Vietnam. It is clear, though, that in case of the troops' withdrawal, the whole of Vietnam shall fall to Viet Cong guerillas. This, in itself, a visible sign of the fragility of the South Vietnamese regime that our nation purports to prop up. My parents are of the same opinion with respect to the Vietnamese War. My father compares it with the previous war in Korea, remarking that at that time the U. S. faced conventional, WW II-style enemy, while nowadays it has to operate in mosquito-infested jungles against scattered but fanatical guerillas. Now we have a new President, Robert Nixon. Unlike Johnson, he seems more open to unconventional ways, and, despite his alleged conservatism, he may make something out of this Vietnamese quagmire. I sincerely hope that our troops may return home by the beginning of the next decade.