

# Revolutionary Totalitarianism, Pragmatic Socialism, Transition



Gorana Ognjenović • Jasna Jozelić  
Editors

# Revolutionary Totalitarianism, Pragmatic Socialism, Transition

Volume One, Tito's Yugoslavia, Stories Untold

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*In dedication to my grandma, Anka Balaško Špoljar, who might have lost a battle but won the war.*



# THE UNIQUENESS AND NON-UNIQUENESS OF JOSIP BROZ TITO: A FOREWORD

This volume, ably assembled by Gorana Ognjenović and Jasna Jozelić, tells the story of the man who led socialist Yugoslavia for more than three decades and constructed a system that was not entirely “of the East”, while clearly not “of the West” either. The range of topics covered in this volume is impressive, ranging from the Tito regime’s controlling the destinies of the internees from Yugoslavia in Nazi camps in Norway after World War II, to the annual Tito birthday celebrations, Partisan films, and more traditional but no less interesting subjects such as non-alignment, brotherhood and unity, and the suppression of the multiparty system immediately after World War II. And, as these chapters show, socialist Yugoslavia had some unique features.

Josip Broz Tito was and remains unique in some politically telling ways. First, he is the only Eastern European communist leader of the immediate post-World War II generation who continues to command a certain amount of adulation in parts of what once was socialist Yugoslavia. Whether one thinks of Hungary’s Mátyás Rákosi or Poland’s Bolesław Bierut or Albania’s Enver Hoxha, or any of the other communists who came to power in Central and South Eastern Europe at the end of World War II, none of them attracts particular interest, let alone a following. Yet in Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Serbia, Tito is still remembered with respect—at least in some circles. Croatia’s capital city even boasts a public square named after the long-time Yugoslav president, while in Serbia in late 2009, Tito’s grandson, Josip Joška Broz, was elected head of a newly forming communist party. In Bosnia, one may find Café Tito in

downtown Sarajevo, and Tito mugs, adorned with his likeness, continue to be on sale, alongside other Tito paraphernalia.

Tito was unique in a second respect. Where the communists holding leadership positions in the Soviet bloc based their claim to legitimacy on the promise of economic equality and full employment, commitment to a full welfare state (anti-capitalism), and proletarian internationalism (translated as subservience to the Soviet Union), Tito and his immediate successors based their claims on an entirely different triad. Two of the elements of this triad—self-management and non-alignment—were devised specifically to legitimise Yugoslavia’s independent path, eventually accepted by the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in 1955. Self-management, or so the Yugoslav communists proclaimed at their Seventh Congress in 1958, was no less than a higher stage of socialism that the Soviets had achieved, while non-alignment provided a rationale for the repudiation of proletarian internationalism. To these, the Yugoslavs added the concept of brotherhood and unity, in effect a claim to inter-ethnic harmony. Tito himself would claim, in 1979, that the Yugoslav “national question” had been solved *in principle*, and, by “in principle” he meant that it had not yet been solved *in practice*.

What is striking about the legitimising schemes of both the Soviet bloc states and socialist Yugoslavia is that neither scheme referred to political succession as such and, as Guglielmo Ferrero noted more than 70 years ago,<sup>1</sup> agreement on the rules and procedures of political succession is central to achieving political legitimacy. Thus, dynastic monarchies, whether absolute or constitutional, have justified succession by the rule of primogeniture, or some variation thereof. Systems of representative government have justified political succession by professing to honour the rule that the candidate or political party that gains the greatest number of votes is entitled to take the reins of government. Both of these schemes are open to subversion—by imposters (such as the two False Dimitrys in early seventeenth-century Russia) in the case of dynastic succession and by electoral fraud in the case of representative systems. But what they have in common—the justification and the disqualification of voters of incumbency according to a rule of succession—distinguishes both of them from communist systems. The latter, whether explicitly (as in the case of Iosif Vissarionovich Stalin or Romania’s Nicolae Ceaușescu) or implicitly, ultimately laid claim to office on the basis of their superior understanding of the principles of governance—*de facto* appealing to a principle reminiscent, up to a point, of Plato’s *Republic*.

Tito was unique in yet a third respect, namely in erecting a system of collective leadership that was supposed to take charge after his death. The widespread slogan in summer 1980—“after Tito, Tito”—already suggested that the system hung on the symbolic power of a leader who was no longer among the living. The brief era of collective leadership in the post-Stalin USSR is not comparable for two reasons. First, the eight members of the Yugoslav collective presidency represented the eight federal units comprising the Socialist Federated Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) and were organized as a formal body. The post-Stalin collective leadership in the Soviet Union was not a formal body, even though it was made up of the strongest members of the Politburo, and, with the exception of Anastas Mikoyan, consisted entirely of Russians. And second, the chairmanship of the Yugoslav collective presidency rotated each year—in a system that lasted for a decade. In the Soviet case, by contrast, Khrushchev immediately took the post of First Secretary for himself, while Georgi Malenkov occupied the post of chairman of the Council of Ministers until he was replaced in 1955 by Nikolai Bulganin, who, in turn, had to surrender the post three years later to Khrushchev. And finally, Tito was more generous than other communist leaders in allowing various associations to function outside party control. These included a music guild for young people, a technical council, film clubs, and mountain-climbing associations.

To be sure, there are also ways in which Tito was *not* unique. To begin with, in Yugoslavia as elsewhere in the communist world, the Communist Party exercised a monopoly of power and did not permit other parties to compete in the political arena. Second, as elsewhere, the system that Tito and his associates set up involved systematic efforts to penetrate or influence the churches—whether (as in the early days) through the establishment of regime-friendly priests’ associations or through the recruitment of clergy as informers.<sup>2</sup> Third, one may recall the brutal way in which Tito dealt with political opposition in the early years, first driving non-communist politicians such as Milan Grol and Dragoljub Jovanović from power and then rounding up pro-Stalin communists after June 1948, and sending them to Goli Otok (Bare Island), the notorious prison camp. Fourth, Tito established a system of control over and censorship of the media and publishing, which was typical of communist countries. And fifth, the cult of the leadership was itself a typical feature in the communist world, even if the details differed from country to country.<sup>3</sup>

Many commentators have commented that Tito was larger than life. Thus, in her chapter for this two-volume book, Latinka Perović quotes

Serb novelist Dobrica Ćosić, describing Tito as having “an unusual, impressive personality” and of exuding “strength, health, manly beauty, simplicity, and superiority.” Fitzroy Maclean, who met Tito during the Partisan War (or, the People’s Liberation War, as it was officially termed), would later recall the Yugoslav leader’s “never-failing sense of humor; his unashamed delight in minor pleasures of life; a natural diffidence in human relationships, giving way to a natural friendliness...; a violent temper...; a considerateness and generosity constantly made manifest in small ways; [and] a surprising readiness to see both sides of a question.”<sup>4</sup> Above all, there was the strength of his personality, so that David Binder could comment, in the film *Tito and the Power of Resistance* (1978), that, upon entering a room, Tito’s presence would fill the entire space.

Tito displayed a firm determination to win at politics, and a readiness to resort to ruthless means to do so. This ruthlessness was clearly shown in the speedy suppression of the re-emergent multiparty system at the end of World War II, as Zdenko Radelić shows, as well as in the treatment of suspected Soviet sympathizers—Cominformists as recorded in Tvrtko Jakovina’s contribution to this set. And when Fidel Castro tried to divert the non-aligned movement into a “progressive”, i.e., pro-Soviet direction, Tito travelled to Havana, at the age of 88, in order to do battle with the Cuban leader and keep the movement equidistant between the blocs. Although as Zachary Irwin notes, “the aspirations of the [non-aligned] movement could not prevent serious conflict among its members,” it remained symbolically and perhaps also politically important for more than two decades—until the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 demonstrated the impotence of that movement in the face of military muscle.

Tito and his coterie had come to power as a result of their victory in 1944–1945, and they made the most of the Partisan myth in an effort to legitimate their rule. This entailed silence about Partisan atrocities, as well as about atrocities committed by Chetniks who crossed over to Partisan ranks. But the Partisan myth also involved active propaganda and here, as Jurica Pavičić’s chapter shows, the genre of Partisan films played a vital role, even spawning subgenres such as Partisan thrillers, Partisan comedies, Partisan spy films, and of course Partisan epics, such as the 1973 film, *Sutjeska*, in which Richard Burton, who had played the role of Leon Trotsky in a film released just the previous year, was cast as Tito.

Elected eventually as “president without termination of mandate”—rather than merely “president for life”—Tito seemed larger than life even in death. After lingering for four months between life and death in the

Ljubljana Medical Centre, Tito succumbed on 4 May 1980. His funeral, rehearsed and re-rehearsed for weeks on end, was staged as a mass spectacle, with representatives from 128 countries, including 31 presidents, 22 prime ministers, 4 kings, 6 princes, and 47 foreign ministers. Hundreds of thousands of Yugoslavs lined the streets of Belgrade to watch the funeral procession, while Yugoslavs in Dubrovnik, Split, and elsewhere huddled wherever there was a television, in order to witness the end of an era. For weeks after the funeral, Yugoslavs gathered at railway stations and other public places to sing the patriotic song “Jugoslavijo” and the old Partisan song “Comrade Tito, we pledge to you that we shall not deviate from your path”. As time would tell, it took less than a decade for certain Yugoslavs in high places to deviate from Tito’s path and to set the country on the road to fragmentation, collapse, and war.

Sabrina P. Ramet



## TITO'S YUGOSLAVIA, *STORIES UNTOLD* PREFACE

As the disintegration of Tito's Yugoslavia into its successor states proceeded, the power also decentralized and therefore much previously unknown information became available to the public. Today, it is possible to search in archives for documents and earlier unknown information that can result in further development of knowledge about Tito's Yugoslavia. As a result, a more detailed and nuanced picture of what Yugoslavia was all about is slowly emerging throughout the academic research literature. After reading most of the literature published on the theme, we came to a conclusion that this volume needs to be organised in order to meet some mishaps and flaws in already existing descriptions, followed by a serious lack of detail and nuance in certain aspects of the descriptions already made. For example, some important details were still untold, some aspects of the narrative were selectively told, and some descriptions of what we knew about who we were and what happened in the end were simply wrong. Our aim by producing this volume is to challenge decades of some superficial and selective rhetoric that came from different sides/political interests, foreign as well as domestic. In other words, our contributions are meant to fill in some of those black holes that unfortunately got to see daylight and lived long and prosperous lives determining the idea of what Tito's Yugoslavia was, for longer than should have been the case. What we are hoping to achieve is a more detailed picture, which might surprise those who thought they knew it all, and we are hoping to inspire others to read more about this historically social experiment that, against all odds, actually did exist and prospered for a while, in the midst of the spiderwebs

of the global political chaos that even today does not seem to be on its way to reach the equilibrium of global peace that is actually practically possible.

Why is the study of *Tito's Yugoslavia* relevant today?

Neither the rise nor the fall of Tito's Yugoslavia occurred in a political vacuum.

In the end, for various reasons, it vanished more or less overnight in one of the worst bloodsheds ever seen in Europe, a bloodshed that, despite all international expectations and demands, seems not to be easy to forget or forgive, especially in those areas of the formal Republic devastated by the conflict. All reconciliation studies show that the process of healing needs honesty about crimes committed and systematic positive action, which would provide conditions necessary for wounds to heal, of which, unfortunately, there is not much to be seen as yet.

Since Tito's Yugoslavia physically no longer exists, one would think that the task of retrospectively reflecting on it as a phenomenon would be easier, but, as we all know, appearances can be deceiving.

In these two volumes we take up a series of questions that deeply affected the politics, which belonged to the core definition of the political dialectics between the former Yugoslav republics. These questions and answers we present have a key role in understanding the art of fine balancing between the communist (revolutionary) totalitarian regime and socialist republic as its antidote, the result of which was pulling a great number of the population as active participators into Tito's idealist project. The fact that "we" as (citizens of Yugoslavia) at some point actually surpassed the republic borders. This is why repeating some of these questions in the light of the newly gained information based on documented facts are of great importance for the Yugoslav successor states in their current state of political independence from one another.

In these two volumes, by *Tito's Yugoslavia* we mean the time period of that country's existence (1945–1990); therefore, essays will not in the same degree refer to Tito's person as a key answer to the countries rule as such. In various degrees, the essays refer to Tito's persona as the key ruler of the country in its totalitarian and the consequent socialist edition.

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