

On June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1948 the Cominform, the principle symbol of Stalin's control over Eastern Europe, issued a resolution that formally expelled Yugoslavia from the assembly, citing that Yugoslavia's ruler, Josep Broz-Tito, had deviated from the correct communist line of governance. Stalin contended that Tito was guilty of flouting the "unified communist front against imperialism"<sup>1</sup> and he also accused Tito of taking the road to nationalism.<sup>2</sup> According to Marxist-doctrine, Yugoslavia's break from the Soviet Union and the Communist world at large defied the "impossible." The split pronounced the fact that the dogmatic faith of Marxist-Leninism failed to acknowledge that different values inherent within state leaders cannot be simply reduced to a single common denominator advertently leading to a cohesive line of governance. It is therefore unnecessary to discern whether Stalin or Tito was a Marxist heretic, for it is apparent that the true essence of Marxist-Leninism doctrine is contentious. It is necessary, however, to understand why the Soviet Union branded Yugoslavia as a threatening reactionary, renegade, and nationalist force. For within the context of these three central notions it is possible to demystify the unthinkable split between the two communist powers and the consequences of the split within Yugoslavia in the immediate years that followed. In short, Tito's apparent deviance from Communist theory, as interpreted by the USSR, underscored the tensions that existed within socialist doctrine regarding the path of its implementation.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the realities of power in the political and social life of Russia and Yugoslavia revealed the fundamental tensions in communist doctrine and practice that led to the split between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia.

---

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955) p. XI

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. XI

<sup>3</sup> Bass and Marbury, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy, 1948-58: A Documentary Record*, (New York: Prospect Books, 1959) p. XII

Acting as General and Marshal of the Yugoslavian partisan movement during the war period, Josep Broz-Tito managed to successfully liberate the Slavic peoples from Nazi rule. The Soviets and the Yugoslavian guerilla fighters shared the same anti-fascist sentiments towards the Germans and the same skepticism towards the wartime Yugoslavian government in exile.<sup>4</sup> Tito's Marxist beliefs cemented a relatively strong relationship with Stalin. Despite certain disputes and misunderstandings, the two leaders supported each other both directly and indirectly during the war. Thus, between the period of 1945-48 it appeared to the outer world that Tito was one of Stalin's staunchest allies. Shortly after the conclusion of the war, however, Tito began to follow policies which were independent from Moscow's in order to consolidate his power within the Balkans. Initially, after the end of World War II Tito had modeled Yugoslavia's constitution after the Soviet Union's. The constitution encouraged direct control over all state activities by the Communist party, as well as the subjugation of a federal system of government in favor of a strong central order. Tito was quick to realize, however, that Yugoslavia's ethnic and nationalist diversity would threaten the stability and efficiency of a purely central system of government. Tito understood that in order to maintain control over the Balkans he had to amalgamate and consolidate the regions that made up Yugoslavia with the hope of holding the regions together under one distinct, sovereign nation. Refusing to allow Yugoslavia to become docile to Soviet dominance, Tito began to liberalize his interpretation of Marxist-Leninism and encouraged the formation of a communist federation of constituent republics made up of political entities that existed

---

<sup>4</sup> Stephen Clissold ed., *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1975) p. 20

within Yugoslavia. These republics were controlled by Tito's dictatorial powers. In short, Tito favored a federal system of communist government.

Tito was able to maintain a firm grip over his country through his strong police force and his tight political grip over the Yugoslavian Communist party. He was hostile towards Moscow's foreign policy that dominated the national, political, and economical agendas of its eastern satellite states. Tito contended that internal "power, rationality, and national interest held primacy"<sup>5</sup>, over aligning Yugoslavian communism directly with the Soviet Union. Stalin felt extremely threatened by Tito's failure to submit to Soviet rule and Soviet doctrine as prescribed by Stalin himself. Stalin realized that his control over the Eastern-Communist states and Russia herself relied heavily, if not totally, on the suppression of nationalist sentiments. There was no room for an equal federation of nationalities within Stalin's Soviet Union.

Historically, Stalin had always dictated Soviet foreign policy in a manner that placed Russia on a Communist pedestal. Stalinist national communism "went to great lengths in its chauvinistic fixation on great Russian originality and priority."<sup>6</sup> In light of this statement, the fact that Stalin vigorously refuted any nationalist sentiment amongst the territories of Eastern Europe that the Russians had "liberated" during the war appears to be contradictory, or at the very least problematic. Nevertheless, one may legitimately contend that this hypocrisy was the essence of Stalinist rule. Stalin understood Russia to be the father of communism; he believed that Russia was destined to provide the proper base that would see communism flourish as a worldwide government destroying the evil capitalist and bourgeois states. Consequently, Stalin did not tolerate anyone who wished

---

<sup>5</sup> R. Barry Farrell, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1948-1956*, (Yale: Shoe String Press, 1956) p. 1

<sup>6</sup> Bass and Marbury, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy, 1948-58*, p. XVI

to deviate from the line of communism prescribed by Russia. Yugoslavia's failure to submit to Moscow's policies ensured its expulsion from the Cominform.

The spirit of Yugoslavian nationalism threatened to encourage nationalism throughout the whole communist empire. While Tito expected to be treated as an "equal" Stalin refused to offer such equality to any Communist states. Stalin had hoped that by expelling Yugoslavia from the Cominform Tito would be forced out of power by his fellow Slavs. Stalin, however, had underestimated Tito's power within Yugoslavia. By the time of his expulsion, Tito had already managed to build Yugoslavia into an effective military entity, with a very strong and ruthless secret police. Tito's police force was, unlike other Eastern Communist states, not dominated by Moscow but controlled by Belgrade. During the war and the several years that followed Tito had managed to purge most, if not all, dissident elements within the Communist party and Yugoslavia itself. Yugoslavia, in the post war period, had also managed to maintain its own foreign policy. Tito's independent victory over the Nazis and the failure of Stalin to send troops into Yugoslavia during the latter stages of the war helped Tito to consolidate his power. Tito began to flex a political line that was distinct and separate from Stalin's political doctrine.

One of the most pronounced consequences of the Cominform's decision to expel Yugoslavia from its assembly resulted in the re-alignment of Yugoslavia's Marxist-Leninist values. Without the massive external support the Soviet Union had once offered, Tito was forced to refocus his domestic policies by restructuring his internal political support. Tito also had to re-negotiate Yugoslavia's foreign policy in a manner that would gain him internal support from Yugoslavia's constituent republics and bolster his legitimacy as Yugoslavia's undisputed national leader. The ultimate result of Tito's

expulsion was an extremely successful foreign policy that is best summarized by the word “nonalignment.”<sup>7</sup> After June 28<sup>th</sup> 1948, Yugoslavia became a non-aligned country. Tito’s policy of nonalignment must be judged as a colossal triumph. From the viewpoint of a nation made up of a variety of ethnic and national groups, Tito’s decision that Yugoslavia follow a foreign policy primarily based on nonalignment was a domestically and internationally beneficial decision, “it gave the Yugoslav state and Tito immense international stature... it appealed to a broad coalition of groups within Yugoslavia. Indeed it [was] probably... ‘The only foreign policy acceptable to all factions of the [communist party], to the different republics within the Yugoslav federation and the main strata of the population.’”<sup>8</sup> Yugoslavia’s policy of nonalignment in the years following 1948 lead it towards political ties with third world nations (often socialist in nature), as well as linkages to developed Western economies.

The impact of the rift between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia resulted in a variety of occurrences and events in the immediate years following 1948. One of the first, and perhaps most significant consequences of the split, was that Tito’s defying attitude towards Stalin proved to be a major personal blow for the Russian leader and Russia at large. It was the first serious external challenge that the supreme ruler of the Soviet Union had ever faced, until 1948 Stalin has been considered to be the undisputed leader of world communism.<sup>9</sup> One might also legitimately argue that Stalin’s failure to eliminate the threat of Tito and the cult of Titoism, referring to Tito’s reactionary policies

---

<sup>7</sup> William Zimmerman, “Yugoslav Strategies of Survival 1948-1980,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 26

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 26

<sup>9</sup> Andrzej Korbonski, “The Impact of the Soviet-Yugoslav Rift on World Communism,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 2

as interpreted by Stalin, might have incidentally contributed, “to the downfall of Stalinism as a creed and a model not only in the USSR, but, above all, in the smallest East European countries...hence, Tito’s physical survival proved to be a key element in the contest between him and successive Soviet leaders.”<sup>10</sup> Kremlin officials feared that Tito’s renegade nature would enhance the chances of revolts in both Hungary and Poland. These two countries had significant portions of their populations who were inspired and encouraged by Tito’s style of governance. In essence, Tito managed to set up a communist blueprint for action for Eastern European countries who wished to reassert their political control and recover power from their Soviet counterparts.

Throughout the crisis of 1948 until Stalin’s death in 1953, Moscow continuously implemented a hostile diplomatic stance towards Tito and Yugoslavia with the hope of conveying to the Communist world, more specifically to the Eastern European communist states, that only through complete subordination to Moscow’s rule and advice could political power be maintained and socio-economic success achieved. Communist countries throughout Europe were encouraged to rely exclusively on the Soviet Union and strongly discouraged to follow independent revolutionary action. In short, “it was not a matter of [simply] humiliating [the Yugoslavian Communist Party] that had fallen into disgrace, but the far graver matter of securing the monopoly of a leadership in the Communist world movement, the monopoly which Tito was endangering.”<sup>11</sup> Tito was lucky that his challenge towards Stalin’s rule on ideological grounds did not lead him to a similar fate shared by both Trotsky and Bukharin. The issue of national sovereignty was the only ground on which Tito believed that he could legitimately, while still maintaining

---

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2

<sup>11</sup> Ernst Halperin, *The Triumphant Heretic: Tito’s Struggle Against Stalin*, (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1958), p. 67

support within the Balkans, resist Stalin.<sup>12</sup> By disregarding Soviet policy and embarking on a separate program of foreign policy without the support of Stalin, Tito broke a common unspoken rule of the Soviet Union's alignment structure, which proclaimed, "that a free hand in domestic affairs depended on an acceptance of Stalin's pre-eminence in international affairs."<sup>13</sup> Although the reasons as to why Tito believed that he could implement and export a far-reaching ideological change in communist polices throughout Europe are unclear, the consequences of his action were severe. Tito's expulsion from the Cominform signaled the beginning of Stalin's campaign to smash 'Titoism', and "whip the communist parties of Eastern Europe into line and establish there a series of identical dictatorships,"<sup>14</sup> dictatorships that Stalin could control, manipulate, and exploit in order to maintain Moscow's firm grip over the communist bloc.

At the end of the day, Stalin's hope that Tito could be disgraced and ruined by propaganda and economic pressure failed. The temptation to get rid of him, however, still existed.<sup>15</sup> Barring economic trade and amassing Soviet troops on Yugoslavia's border did little but strengthen Tito's resolute stance. It was during this stand off, that Yugoslavia realized they faced the world alone and without any friends. Therefore Tito began to follow a path of reconciliation with the Western Powers. Beginning in 1951, he started to accept western economic aid and negotiated loans and trade agreements with Britain, France, and the United States. Yugoslavia's bettering of relations with the West won her a seat on the United Nations Security Council. This honor added more stature and legitimacy to Tito's Yugoslavia. Tito defended Yugoslavia's "acceptance of Western

---

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Swain, "The Cominform: Tito's International" in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (GB: Cambridge University Press, Sep., 1992) p. 642

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 652

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 663

<sup>15</sup> Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, p. 3

aid – including military aid – as being necessary not only to keep Yugoslavia independent, but also as important for world defense against Soviet aggression.”<sup>16</sup> In reality, Yugoslavia’s reorientation towards new successful internal socialist policies may have never taken place had Western aid not been given.<sup>17</sup> 1949 proved to be a watershed year in Yugoslavian – Western relations. What followed from Tito’s conciliation with the capitalist West was several years of mutual hostility between the Soviet and Yugoslav relations. Envisioning the Soviet Union as an enemy state, Tito looked in the direction of the West for economic assistance. Tito expertly negotiated relations with Western powers without compromising Yugoslavian internal affairs.<sup>18</sup> The Belgrade government, “was faced with an apparently insoluble problem: how to have its army equipped by a foreign power, free of charge, without conceding any bases, without even admitting a military mission to the country, and without brining itself to that Power by a treaty... the feat must [have] been unique to world history... it was reckless audacity to try it, and incredible that it succeeded.”<sup>19</sup> This accomplishment was the key to Tito’s successful implementation of his foreign policy of non-alignment .

It has been historically established that the initial split occurred over nationalist considerations and doctrinal differences.<sup>20</sup> It is interesting to note that Yugoslavia’s immediate reaction to their expulsion from the Cominform was to radicalize, and not liberalize, their Marxist policies. Tito and his communist cadres wanted to prove to the communist world at large that they were staunch Marxist Leninists and that any

---

<sup>16</sup> Phyllis Auty, “Yugoslavia and the Cominform: Realignment of Foreign Policy,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace* p. 68

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 68

<sup>18</sup> Farrell, *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union*, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> Ernst Halperin, *The Triumphant Heretic*, p. 147

<sup>20</sup> Armstrong, *Tito and Goliath*, p. 2

proposition to the contrary was false.<sup>21</sup> Gradually, however, Tito began to relax his radical programs of nationalization and collectivization of Yugoslavia's industrial and agrarian sectors. Tito realized that Yugoslavia could not bear the full brunt of the Soviet economic embargo that had followed the Cominform's decision in 1948. Thus, Tito began to implement socio-economic programs distinct from the Soviet Union. A new constitution that recognized Yugoslavia's national diversity was just the beginning of sweeping political and economical reforms. After leaving the Cominform and the benefits of its membership, Tito realized that many of his party's' repressive measures, both politically and economically, were counter-productive and anachronistic. Mass collectivization of agriculture began to subside while decentralization and wider self-government followed. The government also, "relaxed its anti-church measures, permitted a degree of public criticism, limited the abuses of party officials' privileges, and took the first step towards curbing the absolute powers of the secret police by introduction a new criminal code."<sup>22</sup> None of these measures could have been carried out if Yugoslavia had remained in the politically restrictive and domineering coalition of the Cominform. Marxism was the ideological framework in which Tito's polices were legitimized.

Thus, it is apparent that after the split with the Soviet Union, Yugoslavia began to develop its own type of Communist society. Disagreement arose among Yugoslav Communist leaders, since some sided with the Soviet Union in the 1948 split. These dissident elements were purged from the government and imprisoned. After Tito had allowed the republics and provinces to receive greater control over local matters, a system of self-management in the working sector of society commenced in 1950. In basic

---

<sup>21</sup> Stephen Glissold ed., *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973*, p. 61

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61

terms, this system of self-management decentralized government planning in the agricultural and industrial sectors. The central committee turned over economic responsibility to the communes and workers councils. The central authorities only outlined general economic policies rather than forcefully imposing a status quo upon all localities. This system could be interpreted as a combination of capitalist and socialist ideals. Tito, on the other hand, considered this policy to be pragmatic Marxism. The success of Yugoslavia's economic reforms reinforced the legitimacy of Tito's political program. His successes depended on his ability to be pragmatic and willing to adapt to different circumstances and popular demand, "the Yugoslav's people's desire for more personal and political freedom, more regional autonomy for the constituent Republics, and more scope for Private ownership and economic enterprise had to be taken into account and harnessed for social and national ends."<sup>23</sup> To Tito, Marxism was not dogma, but a guide to action. In this context, Marxism was a framework that had to be adjusted and tweaked according to specific circumstances and local necessities.

After Stalin's death in 1953 tension between Tito and the Soviet Union became a bit more relaxed. In 1955 Khrushchev took the initiative and traveled to Belgrade to mend the relationship between the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. Tito still maintained his policy of non-alignment and continued to be the leading speaker for the uncommitted nations of the world. Furthermore, he refused to take sides on Cold War issues. Tito's death in 1980 was considered by some to be a relief and by others to be a tragedy. There is not too much room to debate the fact that Tito successfully managed to consolidate the regions of Yugoslavia under one legitimate totalitarian government. Compared with the status of other Eastern states suppressed by Soviet rule, Yugoslavia fared extremely well

---

<sup>23</sup> Stephen Glissold ed., *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973*, p. 62

both socially and economically. Although aspects of Tito's rule were quite brutal, he managed to transform the assumption that the Balkans was a region of confusion lacking proper leadership. The split that occurred in 1948 due to Yugoslavia's reactionary and nationalistic interpretation of Marxism allowed Tito to implement liberal reforms that would not have been possible while maintaining their membership in the Cominform. Tito's flexible and pragmatic nature allowed him to stay in power, survive the Soviet threat, and resist Western dominance until his death in 1980. He was a key pillar in maintaining Yugoslavian unity and economical progress.

Works Cited

- 1) Armstrong, Hamilton, *Tito and Goliath*, (New York: Macmillan Co., 1955)
- 2) Auty, Phyllis , “Yugoslavia and the Cominform: Realignment of Foreign Policy,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
- 3) Bass and Marbury, *The Soviet-Yugoslav Controversy, 1948-58: A Documentary Record*, (New York: Prospect Books, 1959)
- 4) Clissold, Stephan ed., *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1939-1973*, (London: Oxford University Pres, 1975)
- 5) Farrell, R. Barry *Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union 1948-1956*, (Yale: Shoe String Press, 1956)
- 6) Halperin, Ernst, *The Triumphant Heretic: Tito’s Struggle Against Stalin*, (London: Heinemann Ltd., 1958)
- 7) Korbonski, Andrzej, “The Impact of the Soviet-Yugoslav Rift on World Communism,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)
- 8) Swain, Geoffrey, “The Cominform: Tito’s International” in *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (GB: Cambridge University Press, Sep., 1992) p. 642
- 9) Zimmerman, William, “Yugoslav Strategies of Survival 1948-1980,” in Wayne S. Vucinich, ed., *At the Brink of War and Peace: The Tito Stalin Split in a Historic Perspective*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982)

The Pragmatic Marxist:  
An analysis of the 1948 Tito-Stalin Dispute

Lawrence Schouten  
78898012  
History 463  
Dr. David J Gossen

