

Central Europe and Stalin

# **The Tito-Stalin Split and its Consequences**

Final Paper  
Spring 2004  
Christoffer Andersen

The creation of Cominform in September 1947 and the following split between Tito and Stalin marked what was going to happen the next decade. Cominform was established as a tool to increase the influence of the Soviet Union in Eastern-Central European countries, and was followed with criticism which later led to huge purges, these were either planned before or after the split between Tito and Stalin, or was a response throughout the newly created Soviet satellites to secure loyal leadership. The Tito-Stalin split in 1948 might have contributed to the purges. Either way, the split changed the path of Communism and Yugoslavia, where the latter – in the hands of Tito – chose a non-alignment approach.

In the eve of World War II Tito's Partisan had alone won back all of Yugoslavia. By May 1, 1945, Partisan was fighting for its claims inside Trieste. Tito was pushing these claims in such a strong manner that the Soviet Union had no other choice than to back up his claims. This led to confrontations between Western powers (which wanted to settle the question later for the peace conference) and the Soviet Union. New Zealand troops were sent to Trieste, and on June 9, 1945, the Yugoslavs unwillingly withdrew the forces to the so-called Morgan Line. 'When Stalin complained to Churchill about the pressure on Tito, the British premier replied heatedly: "Our joint idea at Kremlin in October was that the Yugoslav business should work out around 50-50 Russian and

British influence. In fact, it is at present more like 90-10, and even that poor 10 [the British] have been subjugated to violent pressure by Marshall Tito” (Stavrianos 2000: 833). However, by then Stalin had experienced Tito’s independent line, but nevertheless no one knew what Tito was up to.

When Cominform was established in September 1947, Stalin chose the Yugoslavs to purge and discipline the weaker communist parties in Europe. The reason Tito was chosen to lead and host the Cominform was due to Yugoslavia’s superior advanced political and socio-economic situation in terms of development. Therefore, Yugoslavia was viewed as a model for other East-Central European countries. The main aim of Cominform, however not directly admitted by Kremlin, was to secure the faithfulness of its member states and the respective parties. The more the Soviet Union insisted on conformity, uniformity, radicalization, faithfulness and imitation of itself, the more obligated it came to intervene in domestic affairs of other communist countries. It is, therefore, not surprising that Moscow chose Tito as the first object of public criticism. It was mainly due to his nationalistic road to socialism and his ability to play his own game, he was an easy and good choice to teach a lesson to all other communist leaders. Even if Tito’s more independent and nationalistic policy and administration clashed with Stalin, the Yugoslavs were in many aspects Stalinists, and they had by best efforts build up Yugoslavia in many aspects after the Soviet model (Tomasevic 2001). However, Stalin was not impressed by voluntary imitation but rather concerned of the autonomy of the imitator (Rothschild 2000: 128). The split was not a question about Yugoslav admiration and faithfulness to the Soviet Union (especially in Serbia and Montenegro which have more historical connections to Russia), and therefore the Yugoslavs would never

apparently betray the Soviet Union. The clash came rather from the autonomy and cohesion of Tito's Yugoslavia; something that Tito would not see trespassed.

Yugoslav economy had been growing steadily after the World War II, and at the same time was heavily industrialized and had plans for further industrialization. The heavily war-damaged Soviet Union asked the Yugoslavs to change their policy and concentrate more on agriculture and raw materials, a request that Tito would not comply to. This was mainly because Tito was afraid that this would make Yugoslavia more dependent on Soviet imports, which they already had problems with due to Soviet military equipment and a following lack of spare parts. Some Yugoslavs thought this was a sabotage attempt from the Soviet side so they would be more dependent on the Red Army and weaker themselves.

Tito had been planning for a Balkan Federation of Yugoslavia, Albania and Bulgaria, but also these plans included Hungary, Romania and eventually communist Greece. Stalin saw this as an attempt to build a power bloc that would challenge Soviet hegemony (Rothschild 2000: 129). On February 10, 1948, a party delegation from Soviet, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria met in Kremlin and discussed instead plans for a mini federation consisting of only Yugoslavia and Bulgaria. Tito saw this as an attempt to gain greater control over Yugoslavia from the Soviet side, since Bulgaria was a highly dependent Soviet-controlled country. Therefore, these plans were dropped.

Tito had survived the purges during the 1930's in Russia and was, therefore, aware of Stalin's techniques and way of thinking. Further, the Yugoslavian Partisans during World War II had driven out the Germans and succeeded in taking power over their country alone, and therefore they did not want to be in a half-colonial position under

Soviet dominance (Svanberg 1996: 207). Because of this the communists in Yugoslavia gained deeper support from the people; the party was cohesive, confident and comradely. Even if Tito was the only bloc leader who fully supported Stalin's and Zhdanov creation of Cominform, Tito's nationalism had never been questioned. "When Stalin demanded full Yugoslav adherence to the new economic and mutual assistance pacts, Tito balked. Enraged, Stalin claimed, 'I will shake my little finger – and there will be no more Tito'" (Lafeber 83 or 61).

A memorandum was sent to Belgrade on March 18, 1948, which concluded that certain leaders of the Yugoslav Communist Party sometimes had a nationalistic view without interest of other countries and communist parties. Further, it told the Yugoslavs that they have taken the wrong stand on the Trieste issue for a long time, ignoring the common interest in the communist bloc. The Yugoslavs was also accused of over estimating their achievements that had led them to take a leading role in the Balkans. This referred to the Belgrade's policy with regard to Bulgaria and Albania. Even when the plan of a federation of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria was dropped, Yugoslavia was still pursuing their interests in Albania and the Yugoslavs Army's presence there further provoked Stalin. On March 18 and 19 the Soviet Union withdrew all military and civilians from Yugoslavia, and all diplomatic relations were cut. Soviet explained and came with accusation behind the move in a letter dated March 27, stating that the Yugoslav Communist Party was concentrated around a multiple contradictory ideological theories, the party was full of Anglo-American spies, the members was held down by the state security service, the leadership of the party was self-chosen, illegitimate and not democratic and 'that these experts [Soviet advisers] had been treated

with hostility and abuse' (Rothschild 2000: 130). In a long and detailed reply from Yugoslavia dated April 13, drew four main points: (1) Stalin was a victim of false information from bad informed diplomats and other agents who relied their information on not so well informed party members and lower functionaries, (2) that the party members are not controlled by the security service, but is cohesive and comradely, and have greater control over the country than other neighboring states, (3) that the masses of the party admire, love and work to build Yugoslavia as close as possible after the Soviet model and ideology, which has not happened by itself, but nevertheless the Yugoslavs have to love their own country too and no less, and (4) that the Yugoslavs are building Socialism a little different than the Soviet Union, but is no less legitimate, and additionally the Yugoslav model also have international revolutionary validity for other countries. Further, Tito stated, that these misreportings and misunderstandings behind the decision should be corrected. It "is important, in this connection, to bear in mind that Stalin broke with Tito, not vice versa" (ibid.).

Criticism was not only launched at Yugoslavia, but also at Poland, Czechoslovakia (both in a letter dated April 5, 1948) and Hungary (March 24, 1948) was also accused (the latter only to some degree) of 'anti-Marxist precepts'. However, the choice of expelling Yugoslavia from Cominform might be understood as an example (which went badly wrong for Stalin) to the other east-bloc countries. Stalin was presumably planning to overthrow Tito and replace him with more pro-Soviet heads. This did, however, not succeed as Stalin was hoping for. Then Stalin, using the Soviet-Yugoslav split to locate, attack and purge other so-called Titoist in East-Central Europe. Some historians have emphasized that Yugoslavia was only the first country where

measures against ‘a national way to socialism’ was implemented, and in Moscow there were large-scale political action already being prepared to remove elements of national orientation in other countries and CPs under their supervision. Nevertheless, successful Yugoslav defiance created a problem for Kremlin, and some historians point out that one should not underestimate that Stalin wanted to prevent the spread of Titoism creating a domino effect in recently acquired East-Central Europe. Stalin had, therefore, no alternative than to purge and crack down any slightly challenge to Soviet hegemony (Pearson 2002: 40).

In the following months Stalin tried to make an internal coup inside the Yugoslav Communist Party, but failed mainly due to that the “Yugoslav secret police proved to superior to Stalin’s” (Lafaeber 83 or 61). Stalin’s loyalists in the party was easy located, isolated, expelled and arrested in May and June. Even an escape attempt of the officers over the Romanian border, which presumably would have organized a military invasion and a coup was prevented and turned down. Additionally, Stalin tried to overthrow Tito with a flow of propaganda in Yugoslavia, but Tito made it counterproductive while at the same time publishing the previous last spring’s correspondence between them two<sup>1</sup>. The really hard questions many historians have asked themselves is why Stalin did not order an outright invasion of Yugoslavia, albeit against fierce resistance, by the Soviet and other people’s democratic armies between 1948 and 1950, before the Americans rearmed in response to the outbreak of the Korean War (Rothschild 2000: 132). Outside the political ambit, a Red Army invasion to impose Kremlin authority would, in the light of the Partisan’s formidable reputation as masters of guerilla warfare, be a risky military

enterprise (Pearson 2002: 39). There exist many reasons for a non-Soviet invasion of Yugoslavia after the split, but, even if Yugoslavia was an undesired loss for Stalin, it has been pointed out that Moscow needed Tito as an enemy image, similar to Trotsky in the 1930's, to initiate purges in other communist countries to strengthen the Soviet bloc. (Radzinskii 1997: 559). [Further, after the closing of World War II it was difficult to inspire the Red Army to wage a new war, because people was sick of waging war. Therefore, the government and the soldiers was reluctant to do it. The war-damage Soviet Union was prepared to rebuild, they had already won the war, and therefore it would seem supicious to invade a friendly country as Yugoslavia.]

The expulsion of the Yugoslav party from Cominform, which was proof of the final split, was publicly announced on June 28, which ironically enough, if it was on purpose or not, one of Yugoslavia's national day (respectfully mainly Serbian) Vidovan, or St. Vitus Day. It is the day of the famous Kosovo battle against the Ottomans took place in 1389, it is the day when the Habsburg Archduke Franz Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo in 1914, also the day Yugoslavia got its first modern constitution in 1921 (and more recent happenings in the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) (Monnesland 1999; Stavrianos 2000; Rothschild 2000).

Even if criticism had been made between March and June 1948 to other countries it was not before after the expulsion criticism was increased to *all* the East-Central European communist parties. Based on the experience of the purges in the 1930's and 1940's, Soviets believed that similar purges, now for Titoists, would prove effective and strengthening for the future of strong communist regimes loyal to Kremlin. Stalin's

---

<sup>1</sup> See *Appendix* at the end for dialogue published in 1953 between Tito and Stalin.

reaction was “the ordering of bloody purges in Eastern Europe to exterminate nascent Titos. During the next two years probably one of every four communist member in the bloc fell from grace” (Lafaeber 83/61). One of the main proof during these purges was to establish proof of contacts with Tito, and consequently with the West. In the aftermaths of World War II, respectively in 1945 and 1946, Tito would go on tour to visit other East Central European capitals. He had then been Stalin’s chosen first man for the area. It would, therefore, prove to not be too difficult to find scapegoats among the Communist Party members throughout the Soviet satellites.

September 22, 1949, the Hungarian communist leader Rajk (arrested May 1949) was sentenced to death on allegations of being a Titoist and an Anglo-American spy. Around the same time aslo Kostov in Bulgaria had been sentenced (arrested June 1949, sentenced to death December 12, 1949) , but Rajk’s case got more publicly known and a hunt for more Rajks started. Campaigns were therefore launched to find Rajk’s supporters and Titoists, accused of “bourgeois nationalism” and as Anglo-American agents, throughout East-Central Europe. In the years to come victims of these purges was to become Gomulka in Poland (arrested August 1951, never sentenced, later released in 1956), Patrascanu (arrested in the summer of 1948) in Romania, and Klementis (arrested November 1949) and Slansky (sentenced to death November 27, 1952) in Czechoslovaokia, to only mention the top of the iceberg.

However, such bloody purges was going to be ordered from Tito himself in Yugoslavia. The split had resulted in an identity crisis inside the Yugoslav Communist Party, and many had difficult to accept that Tito had chosen national circumstances on the behalf of faithfulness to Stalin and the Soviet Union. Because this, thousands of

believed Stalinist and other people who just spoke a little too much without thinking (often quite innocent) ended in jail or were sent to the growing concentration camp *Goli otok* (the naked island) in the Adriatic, an island many knew about, but no one dared to talk about (Svanberg 1996: 205; Tomasevic 2001: 322-325).

The claims over Trieste had put Tito and Stalin on a collision course that would only grow due to Tito's nationalistic policies, plans for a Balkan Federation and his claims as an equal partner to Stalin. Stalin wanted therefore to replace Tito and his immediate subordinates with more reliable people, which led to the split between the two of them. Stalin's attempt to overthrow Tito and reinstate compliance from Yugoslavia through an economic blockade, sedition, border incidents, and a minor threat of military invasion served only to further unite the Yugoslav people together with Tito. This eventually led to the final break when the Yugoslav Communist Party was expelled from Cominform in June 1948.

Nevertheless, the fifth congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party in the end of July, 1948, still orchestrated applause screaming "Stalin, Tito, Party", and pictures of Stalin was not taken down until Mayday 1949. Tito was going to make his own kind of Socialism, build on a new interpretation of Marx-Leninism. The following years Tito would stand without great friends in Europe. However, in 1951 he was granted money from the Marshall plan, and up to his death Yugoslavia would work as a bridge between East and West, with one foot in Marxist Communism and another in Social Democratic Capitalism.

## APPENDIX:

On September 21, 1944, Tito suddenly departed by plane to Moscow, among many subjects discussed, was how to coordinate the operations of the Red Army and the Partisans. Tito later published conversations with Stalin, and on this meeting following took place (one have to keep in mind that this is Tito's version of the story, and there is no way of checking that version):

...tension arose at the first meeting with Stalin. We were more or less at cross purpose on all the matters we discussed. I noticed then that Stalin could not bear being contradicted. In conversation with the men around him he is coarse and touchy. Of all the members of the Politburo of the Soviet Central Committee it is only Molotov to whom he turns occasionally to ask for his opinion, but he never listen to him to the end, but goes on with his own line of thought.

I was not used to such conversation, which led only to uncomfortable scenes. For instance Stalin said to me:

"Walter, [Tito's prewar party name in Moscow] be careful, the bourgeoisie in Serbia is very strong!"

I answered calmly:

"Comrade Stalin, I do not agree with your view. The bourgeoisie in Serbia is very weak."

He was silent and frowned and the others at the table, Molotov, Zhdanov, Malenkov, Beria, gaped. Stalin then began to inquire after different bourgeois politicians in Yugoslavia, where they were, what they were doing, and I replied, "He is a scoundrel, a traitor, he worked with the Germans."

Stalin asked about another one. I gave the same answer. Stalin flared up: "Walter," he said, "to you they are all scoundrels!"

I replied, "Exactly, Comrade Stalin: anyone who betrays his country is a scoundrel."

Stalin frowned again, while Malenkov, Zhdanov, and the others looked at me askance.

The talk proceeded in a very painful atmosphere. Stalin began to assure me of the reinstate King Peter. The blood rushed to my head that he could advise us to do such thing. I composed myself and told him it was impossible, that the people would rebel, that in Yugoslavia the king personified treason, that he had fled and left his people in the midst of their struggle, that the Karageorgic dynasty was hated among the people for corruption and terror.

Stalin was silent, and the said briefly:

"You need not to restore him forever. Take him back temporarily, and then you can slip a knife into his back at a suitable moment."

At this moment Molotov returned to the room, which he had left a moment back. He carried a telegram from Western news agency reporting that the British had landed in Yugoslavia.

I leaped to my feet: "That is impossible!"

Stalin, angrily: "Why impossible! It is a fact!"

I repeated that it was impossible and probably the agency was mistaken; that we had asked General Alexander to send us three batteries of heavy artillery to help our Fourth Army in its operations towards Mostar and Sarajevo, and the arrival of this artillery had probably been mistaken for an invasion of Yugoslavia by the British.

Stalin was silent, and then asked the direct question: "Tell me, Walter, what would you do if the British really forced a landing in Yugoslavia?"

"We would offer determined resistance."

(Stavrianos, 2000, 815: original cited from V. Dedijer. 1953. *Tito Speaks*. New York: Simon & Schuster, pp. 233-235)

## **BIBLIOGRAPHY:**

**DOWLING, MARIA** (2002) *Czechoslovakia*. London: Arnold.

**LAFABER, DAN** (2001)?????????

**MØNNESLAND, SVEIN** (1999) *Før og etter Jugoslavia [Before and after Yugoslavia]*. Oslo: Sypress Forlag.

**PEARSON, RAYMOND** (2002) *The Rise and the Fall of the Soviet Empire*. New York Palgrave

**RADZINSKII, EDVARD** (1997) *Stalin*. Moscow.

**ROTHSCHILD, JOSEPH & NANCY M. WINGFIELD** (2000) *Return to diversity: a political history of East Central Europe since World War II*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**STAVRIANOS, L.S.** (2000, 1958) *The Balkans since 1453*. London: C. Hurst & Co. Ltd.

**SVANBERG, INGVAR & INGMAR SÖHRMAN** (ed.) (1996) *Balkan, folk och länder i krig och fred [Balkan, people and countries in war and peace]*. Sweden: Arena.

**TOMASEVIC, BATO** (2001) *Ufred, en slektshistorie fra Balkan [Unpeace, a family history from Balkan]*. Oslo: Aschehoug.