

## Defending Tito's Legacy is an Anti-Fascist Duty

Autor Administrator  
Saturday, 26 August 2017

The nationalist assault on Tito and on the Partisan legacy is directly linked to the very identity of nationalists &ndash; and to their reconciliation with fascism. The recent call from Sarajevo to rename Tito's Street in the Bosnian capital is just the latest assault on the anti-fascist legacy in the region. A few weeks ago, it was Zagreb's turn: the city's supposedly leftist mayor said he had no choice but to capitulate to the demands of the city council and rename Tito's square.

The efforts to remove Tito from the collective memory of the now former Yugoslavia go back decades. Before they attacked the body of Yugoslavia, nationalists began to attack the body of its founder. In the 1990s, Serbian nationalists called for Tito's grave to be moved from Belgrade to Croatia &ldquo;where he belonged.&rdquo; To this, Croat nationalists reacted in horror and denied Tito the privilege of coming home, accusing him of committing genocide against the Croat nation to which he had nominally belonged. Back then, it was the Bosnians, and specifically those in the city of Tuzla, who stepped up and offered their city as the new resting place for Tito. It seems that even this time, it was the Bosnians who were most vociferous in resisting the removal of Tito from collective memory: after the outpouring of protests against the latest call in Sarajevo to rename Tito's Street, the city's leadership was forced to issue a statement denying that any such plans were in the works. More than 20 years later, Tito remains in his grave in the House of Flowers in Belgrade, while his Yugoslavia lies buried underneath hundreds of thousands of bodies. The nationalist assault on Tito&mdash;and the Partisan legacy&mdash;is directly linked to the very identity of nationalists. The revival of nation-states post-Yugoslavia has necessarily included reconciliation with the fascist legacies of these new nation-states. In Serbia, Slobodan Milosevic wedded his formerly Communist party to the Chetnik and outright Fascist traditions of the Serbian Right. The rehabilitations of the Nazi/Fascist collaborator Milan Nedic, the Fascist Dimitrije Ljotic, as well as the Chetnik leader, and another Nazi/Fascist collaborator, Draza Mihailovic, have been the logical culmination of the Milosevic regime even in the aftermath of its demise. These efforts have continued, if not even escalated, under Aleksandar Vucic. In Croatia, Franjo Tudjman's government was explicit in its efforts to bring back the legacy of the Ustasha-style Nazism into the fabric of the Croat nation. The presence of the unrepentant Ustasha apologist Gojko Susak, Tudjman's main confidant and Croatia's Minister of Defence during the breakup of Yugoslavia, as the face of the HDZ-led state, was an obvious maneuver to achieve this. The clean scrub of history textbooks in the post-Yugoslav Croatia strove to minimize, and often erase, the horrifying genocidal actions of the Ustasha-run Independent State of Croatia NDH has continued in EU-member Croatia. The former Minister of Culture, Zlatko Hasanbegovic, has been at the forefront of the efforts to sanitize the bloody legacy of the NDH. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Bosniak elites have been most hesitant in tinkering with the memory of Tito. This has to do with the link between Tito's project and the emergence of modern Bosniak national identity, but is also due to the popularity Tito continues to enjoy amongst the huge swaths of the population. This is why the suggestions of the SDA official Tarik Dautovic have caused such consternation even amongst his party peers who felt obliged to emphasize their party's commitment to anti-fascist traditions. At a time when Fascism, Nazism, and other kinds of elaborations of some of the most hateful, and violent, right wing ideologies are echoing throughout Europe, and are finding comfort even in the White House, it is essential that we remember, and continue to honor, the anti-fascist legacy of the former Yugoslavia. Anti-fascism was of course bigger than Josip Broz. It is safe to say that most Partisans who bravely fought the Nazis and their domestic collaborators were not members of the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, KPJ. But it is equally important to remember that without the KPJ and Tito specifically it is hard to imagine how a resistance movement could have emerged out of the cauldron of civil wars and Nazi/Fascist terror that swept through the region starting in April 1941. It was Tito who, in the late 1930s, brought army discipline to the notoriously fractional, and tiny, Communist Party of Yugoslavia. It was Tito who directed the attention of the party towards the resistance effort against the Nazis and their domestic collaborators at a time when even the most progressive forces in the now occupied Yugoslavia embraced the wait-and-see approach towards Hitler's new racial order. It was Tito who pushed even some of the more reluctant party members into an unequivocal resistance against the occupier even at a great personal cost. It is indisputable that Tito was a man of great courage who throughout 1941-1945 risked personal safety for the benefit of the anti-fascist movement. Even his greatest ideological opponents, including Winston Churchill, were impressed by his bravery. Yes, Tito had help, mostly from the Soviet Red Army in liberating Yugoslavia (especially Belgrade), but it is astonishingly impressive when one thinks that in the midst of a brutal civil war between Yugoslavia's main nations, and under the heavy Nazi/Fascist boot of a vastly superior enemy, Tito cobbled together the Partisan movement, which over the course of a few years, between 1941-1943, grew from a few thousands to a quarter million. Arguably, Tito's achievements were even greater in peacetime. Out of the ashes Hitler left behind in Yugoslavia, and after a series of bloody civil wars where most Yugoslavs died at the hands of each other, Tito created a new Yugoslavia. Yes, he used methods of Stalinist repression (especially before his split with Stalin in 1948), but without an inspirational program of economic and social rejuvenation socialist Yugoslavia could not have taken off. In the postwar years, the relatively small Yugoslavia witnessed an astronomical GDP growth, one of the highest in Europe and saw its role on the world stage enhanced by its election as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council and later as a founding member of the Non-Aligned Movement. Tito's split with Stalin was initially forced on him, and Tito reluctantly embraced the subsequent moderate liberalization of the economic and political life, but the results were significant. The country opened up to the West, the Yugoslav passport opened borders other Eastern Europeans living under Communism could only dream of crossing, and Yugoslavia's visibility in sports far outweighed its relative size and significance. At a time when Nazis are

marching the streets of American cities, when some EU-member states are becoming openly xenophobic and racist, and the Fascist legacy has crept back into the school curricula and social space of the post-Yugoslav nation-states, it is essential that we remind the citizens of these states, and the world, just what a historical giant Josip Broz Tito was and of the contributions he gave to the anti-fascism of the region, and Europe. This is why we should fight, at every step, any effort to erase Tito from our collective memory. Fedja Buric is an assistant professor of history at Bellarmine University in Louisville, KY, USA.

The opinions expressed in the comments section are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect the views of BIRN or Bellarmine University. Fedja Buric balkaninsight.com 24.8.2017.

#JosipBrozTito #antifa&scaron;izam #antifascism