

Tito's biography

Autor Administrator
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 Zadnja Promjena Wednesday, 12 October 2011

Josip Broz was born on May 7, 1892 in the Croatian village of Kumrovec, in what was then the Austro-Hungarian Empire (and now is in Slovenia), he was the seventh of fifteen children born to Roman Catholic peasants. His blacksmith father, Franjo Broz was a Croat, and his mother, Marija, was Slovene. After spending a part of his childhood years with his maternal grandfather in Podsreda, he returned to Kumrovec to attend school. He failed the first grade and left his formal education behind in 1905, to be apprenticed with a locksmith. As a journeyman locksmith, he moved about the Empire. The 18-year-old Broz joined the Croatian Social Democratic Party; in 1913, he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian Imperial Army. At the beginning of World War I, Broz -- who had won a silver medal at an Army fencing competition May 1914 -- was sent to Ruma. It was there that he began to find himself and his life's calling, being arrested for anti-war propaganda and imprisoned. He was sent to Galicia to fight against the Russians and Serbs in 1915, and was seriously wounded by a howitzer shell. In April 1915, his entire battalion was captured by the Russians.

The wounded Broz spent several months convalescing in a military hospital, where he learned to speak Russian. In the fall of 1916, he was sent to a work camp in the Ural mountains. While at the work camp, the first Russian Revolution of February 1917 (March, new style) occurred, culminating in the abdication of Tsar Nicholas II on March 15th. Broz was arrested for organizing demonstrations among the prisoners of war in April 1917, but he escaped and joined the Bolsheviks in St. Peterburg (renamed Petrograd after the first revolution), engaging in street fighting during the attempted Bolshevik coup d'etat in Petrograd on July 16-17, 1917.

The Bolshevik insurrection failed to spark a wider revolt, and was crushed by forces loyal to Aleksandr Kerensky, head of the provisional government. Broz fled for Finland to try avoid arrest, but his flight failed and he was locked-up. He escaped from a train taking him to another work camp, and in November, he joined the Red Army in Omsk, Siberia, fighting with the Red Guards in the first years of the Russian Civil War pitting Reds against Whites (royalists) and others. Broz applied for membership in the Russian Communist Party in the spring of 1918.

The Treaty of Versailles incorporated Croatia into the newly established Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (or Yugoslavia), and when he returned to his village in 1920, he joined the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). Now employed as a metalworker, Broz became a union organizer. He was frequently arrested after a Bosnian CPY member assassinated the Yugoslavian Minister of the Interior, which led to the outlawing of the CPY. Broz switched his organizing activities to the underground, and in April 1927, he had ascended to the CPY's Committee in Zagreb. As a CPY Committeeman, he caught the attention of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). Through Soviet influence, Broz was raised to the position of deputy of the Politburo of the CPY Central Committee and named leader of the Croatian and Slovenian committees.

By 1934, parliamentary democracy in Yugoslavia had been replaced by a dictatorship under the aegis of the Yugoslav King, and the CPY remained banned. It was in this year, shortly after his release from his latest prison sentence, that Broz was named a full member of the CPY Politburo and Central Committee. He adopted the *nomme de guerre* "Tito" to use in his party work (possibly because *`tito alba,* the owl, is a creature of the night, but represents wisdom). The newly yclept Tito went to the USSR in 1935, where he served in the Communist International's (Comintern) Balkan section. After a year with the Comintern, Tito -- who apparently won the confidence of Stalin -- was named Secretary-General of the CPY and returned to Yugoslavia to rebuild the party. Tito filled party posts with his own, hand-picked replacements. Eventually, his position as Secretary-General of the CPY was ratified officially by 105 of the 6,000 CPY members at a secret meeting in Zagreb in 1940.

The Yugoslavian government was pressured by Germany and Italy to join the Axis. Initially, it resisted, but it finally threw in its lot with the Axis on March 25, 1941, under duress. On March 27th, the government was overthrown by a pro-Western military coup in Belgrade, thus aborting Yugoslavia's alliance with the Axis. A few days later, on April 6th, Yugoslavia was invaded by German, Hungarian and Bulgarian troops, and the Yugoslav army was vanquished in less than two weeks, surrendering on April 18th. When the Axis invaded Yugoslavia in 1941, Stalin ordered the CPY to offer no resistance due to the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact signed in August 1939. Despite ample warning, Stalin did not believe Hitler would attack him. What he did not know about the Axis incursion into Yugoslavia was that Hitler was securing his southern flank prior to the launching of Operation Barbarossa, the imminent invasion of the USSR. When Germany attacked the USSR in June 1941, it now became a duty for a communist to defend his motherland, and thus, the Soviet Union, by fighting the Axis powers. Tito called a meeting of the Central committee, which named him Military Commander. The partisan's struggle began with Tito's call to arms for the people of Yugoslavia with the slogan, "Death to Fascism, Freedom to the People!"

Their prior organization as underground communist cells used to functioning in secrecy and with the strictest discipline meant that Tito's partisans were very well-organized and extremely effective. Tito's aim was not only to liberate Yugoslavia, but to establish the CPY in liberated areas. Revolutionary governments were established in areas the Partisans liberated, which foreshadowed the administrative structure of post-war Yugoslavia. The non-communist, mostly

Serbian Chetniks who also fought against the Axis and had the support of both the British and the government in exile. However, they were not seen as effective as Tito's Partisans, and the US and the UK switched their support to the Partisans after they successfully fought off ferocious Axis attacks from January to June 1943. The Partisans were officially recognized at the Tehran Conference, with the result that aid and Allied guerrillas were parachuted behind Axis lines to assist them. Still, Tito refused to cooperate with the government-in-exile in London.

After the February 1945 Yalta Conference, at which the parameters of post-war Europe were agreed upon, Marshal Tito consolidated his power and that of the CPY by purging his government of non-communists. Tito signed an agreement with the USSR on April 5, 1945 that permitted "temporary entry of Soviet troops into Yugoslav territory". With the help of the Red Army, Tito's Partisans won the war against the Axis and their collaborators. Tito then ordered foreign troops off of Yugoslav soil after V-E Day, and turned to eliminating domestic rivals, including members of the originally fascist Cetnik (who eventually collaborated with the Germans to try to stop Tito) and the fascist Ustashe, who supported the Nazis as a vassal state in Croatia. Members of both organizations were summarily tried and executed en masse. General Dragoljub Mihailovic, the Cetnik leader, was executed in Belgrade in March 1946.

Winning the rigged November 1945 elections, Marshal Tito imposed a new constitution on Yugoslavia. He further consolidated his power by organizing a strong army and a secret police force (the UDBA), both of which were personally loyal to him. In the post-war years, Tito used the UDBA to eliminate Nazi collaborators. Initially, the economy and society were collectivized in Soviet fashion, although he did not push for the collectivization of agriculture. Tito began to resent Stalin's constant meddling with his government and his suggestions on how Tito should run his economy. On his part, Stalin was unhappy with what he perceived as an independent foreign policy that was out of sync with Moscow. Stalin tried to depose Tito, but would not go so far as to invade Yugoslavia, whose mountainous terrain had hamstrung Hitler's troops and ideal territory for partisan attacks against an organized military force.

Tito denounced the Soviet policy of "...unconditional subordination of small socialist countries to one large socialist country." In response, Stalin had Tito and the CPY expelled from the Cominform in June 1948. The USSR, through the Soviet block Common Market Comecom, boycotted Yugoslavia.

Through the vehicle of UDBA, Tito purged the CPY of hardcore Stalinists, those that could not be "reeducated." He began decentralizing the economy, putting more power into the hands of workers' councils on the principle of workers' self-management. To keep himself in power and Yugoslavia independent of the USSR, he turned to the West for financial aid. The Greek Civil War sputtered out after Tito sealed off the border with Greece, denying communist infiltrators egress into Greece.

After the death of Stalin in March 5, 1953, Tito attempted a reconciliation with the USSR, meeting with new CPSU party boss Nikita Khrushchev in Belgrade in 1955. The meeting resulted in the Belgrade Declaration, which affirmed equality in relations between communist countries (although in the case of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, that equality was observed in the breach rather than the observance). Freed to a degree of the Soviet threat, Tito's policy of "nonengagement" developed into a policy of "nonalignment." He overhauled his foreign policy to promote a non-aligned bloc between the West and the Warsaw Pact. Convening a meeting of 25 non-aligned states with India's Nehru and Egypt's Nasser in 1956, a third, alternative neutral bloc came into being. Tito traveled extensively in the developing world during the 1960's and 1970's to promote non-alignment. On the domestic front, Tito maintained a balance among the different nationalities of his polyglot country. It ensured stability for as long as the CPY and the secret police maintained control of Yugoslavia. Tito's system of "symmetrical federalism," while predicated upon the principle of equality among the six republics and two autonomous provinces, in fact played the nationalities off against each other.

His ties with the West encouraged trade, which helped boost Yugoslavia's standard of living. Yugoslavia's beaches became a top tourist destination for Western European tourists, due to their beauty, the relative openness of Yugoslav society and the favorable exchange rate, which made an excursion to Yugoslavia very affordable. The economy of some of the Yugoslavian provinces, particularly Croatia and Slovenia, thrived during the Cold War.

Marshal Tito was styled President-for-Life in 1974. While he allowed a freer exchange of people and ideas than most of the countries in the communist bloc, the major question of his regime remained would Yugoslavia survive the death of Tito. Without a strongman and the monopoly on power enjoyed by the CPY, backed up by the Army and the secret police, would Yugoslavia remain a country?

Josef Broz Tito died on May 4 1980 in a hospital in Ljubljana, Slovenia, after being gravely ill for almost four months. He was the last of the World War II leaders to leave the world stage, having outlived his patron, then nemesis Stalin by almost 30 years. The country that he kept together did not outlive him by much more than a decade. Croatian nationalists won the first free elections in their province in April and May 1990, and the independence of Croatia was proclaimed on June 25, 1991, touching off a series of civil wars that left Yugoslavia a rump of Serbia and Montenegro. IMDb Mini Biography By: Jon C. Hopwood