



## Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia

*Richard West*

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A revealing biography of Tito, the Yugoslav leader who was a partisan against the Germans and the first Communist head to break with the Soviet Union, considers his role in the breakup of Yugoslavia after his death.

## **Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia Details**

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## **From Reader Review Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia for online ebook**

### **Robert Nardin says**

The author's viewpoint of the past 1,000 year history of the area is detailed and of course interesting. I learned more about Yugoslavia from this one book than any other source. All it's different nationalities and groups are akin to Game of Thrones. No people have treated each other as bad as the Croats and Serbs. The Ustashi represents one of the most horrific and brutal periods in human history only given a brief respite by Tito and the communists. Not so much detail included on the the story of the day to day life or history of Tito who remains just as admirable if not slightly more enigmatic.

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### **Mary Durben says**

Excellent book, especially for its history of the South Slavs in the early pages. The story of the Ustasche during WWII especially illuminating and horrifying.

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### **Matthew says**

A fascinating book that melds a biography of Josip Broz Tito with a history of the country he held together.

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### **Ismaeil Hegazi says**

Marshal Tito was one of the greatest men ever in all times and specially in the 20th century !

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### **Seán Duffy says**

Vladimir Dedijer on the death of his wife Olga in battle 'We laid my wife in the shallow grave, covered her with turf and then made a mound of stone. We removed our caps; a salvo of four shots was fired and Partisan Laza exclaimed: "Long live her memory!" Then we set out through the dark forest to catch up with our units.'

This is the scorched battlefield from which Tito, and the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, grew. The Partisans were a rare case of a socialist resistance that relied to only a very small extent on aid from the Soviet Union – becoming Europe's most effective anti-Axis resistance. This book tells their tale from formation to the eventual collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

Tito remains a curious entity for the varied and always in dispute radical left. He has escaped the opprobrium of more directly Stalinist communist leaders due to his relatively relaxed approach to various freedoms within Yugoslavia, yet little is widely known about the way in which he and his party governed, nor indeed

about the very specific character of what became Yugoslavia and subsequently ceased to be.

West's book is the most accessible and perhaps best investigation of this complex character I have read. Less personal and tinged by malice than Milovan Djilas' memoirs, West's outsider view of the construction and subsequent degradation of a nation that punched well above its weight marries appropriately with the complex rise of a fascinating character.

There are many misconceptions regarding the national dynamics that existed in Yugoslavia, spilling out with great ferocity during the Second World War and again towards the end of the 20th century, and West navigates these well whilst highlighting many considerations unknown to me until I read this book.

The book is chock full of these fascinating insights that flesh out the underlying cultural considerations that came to construct Yugoslavia as well as international reaction to it. Many of these address common misconceptions that have permeated the West. For example, the perception of Bosnia as a vastly divided nation along religious lines is really something that was enforced upon it. The communities that existed there pre-war; Catholic, Orthodox, and Muslim were well represented in every family, living peacefully with very little conflict for many decades. Further, the idea that Gavrilo Princip (the man who shot Archduke Franz Ferdinand leading to the beginning of the First World War) was a Serbian nationalist is completely untrue. He was, like many members of his organisation a pan-Yugoslavist who refused to be referred to as a 'Serb' at his trial, a trend that had a strong influence on the socialist groupings that would form the Partisans in later years. I was particularly surprised to find out the New York Daily News called for an atom bomb to be dropped on Belgrade, seemingly just because they could.

Though the intricacies of battles and how the Partisans went from guerrilla resistance movement to centralised government is only touched upon, the atrocities of the Croatian Ustasha (a fascist fundamentalist Catholic militia) are starkly set out, as well as those of similarly ultra nationalist groups in Serbia and elsewhere:

'The Bishop of Mostar described how the Ustasha brought six wagons full of mothers, girls and children under 8 to the station of Surmanci. They were taken out, brought into the hills and thrown alive into deep ravines'

There are numerous examples cited of this cruelty, including slashing pregnant women's stomachs with bayonets and ripping out the foetus inside. So remarkable this is that apparently even Nazi soldiers stationed in the area had cause to complain about the levels of violence they were witnessing. Even when the Ustasha knew the war was lost, they sang a sardonic song "Oh Russia, all will belong to you. But of Serbs there will be few" highlighting their unrepentant blood lust for Orthodox Serbs.

The Partisans themselves are of course not immune to these charges. Tito clearly engaged in the execution of those who would seek to prevent a communist Yugoslavia, and famously had many surrendering Ustasha executed on sight. Allegedly in the gorge at Bassovizza near Trieste there was some 500 cubic metres of corpses reported by Italian soldiers.

In 1943 Tito's Partisans numbered around 220,000 and had far surpassed the Chetniks as the main source of resistance to fascism in Yugoslavia, the latter group at this point had become openly collaborationist. It is here that Tito arises as the heir apparent to a new nation, though this was far from certain. As reported by many in the Comintern and in Moscow there was much debate regarding who the Soviet Union should support as the leader of a new federal republic – a factor that was in many ways the decisive one.

Rather than being a biography of Tito, the book uses his life as a framework for the history of Yugoslavia,

often presenting him more as a subject of forces swirling around him than the architect of a unified nation. Undoubtedly however it is the level headed leadership of the Marshal that suppressed many of the underlying hatreds in the nations, and his perhaps shrewd dealings with foreign powers to ensure the Yugoslav economy did not suffer some of the excesses seen in many more closed off socialist states that brought this about.

When much of the rest of the Eastern Bloc became satellite states of the Soviet Union, Tito refused to accept the 1948 resolution of the Cominform, that accused Yugoslavia of departing from Marxism-Leninism. This led to anti-Stalinist purges in some sections of Yugoslav society, the details of which West does not have a great deal of insight into. It appears that Tito had fairly large scale support for his actions against the anti-revisionists and utilised the opportunity to show himself as a moderniser, and to eliminate any challengers to his rule. How successful this was, is varied from republic to republic.

The fallout between Stalin and Tito is better explored in Djilas' 'Conversations with Stalin' but it is clear from their early encounters that in fact Tito was very much seeking very close cooperation with Stalin and it was only in response to aggression from the latter that the relationship soured. Tito of course became something of a bête noir for Stalin, who pushed the propaganda line that he was 'the paid troubadour of the worst Wall Street hangmen'. You do suspect that had Stalin survived for many more years to come, Tito's days at the top may well have been numbered.

Tito's humour and apparent disinterest in personal grudges shines through the book – and it was this I found particularly intriguing about the man himself. I do not for a moment accept there is such a thing as a wholly benevolent dictator but many situations arise where you begin to understand that Tito was not the knee-jerk aggressor many of his counterparts were. In fact he often comes across as decidedly funny and self-deprecating. When asked of one of his wives Jovanka, and their seeming estrangement he responded that at 85 his nerves were quite strong but not strong enough to endure her nagging.

Yet at the same time Tito managed to create a system of power in which careerists and dogmatists rose to the top with very little relevance to their actual talents, including the later tyrant Slobodan Milošević. West fails to really flesh out the system of appointments and leg-ups in Yugoslavia leaving the reader somewhat unclear as to why characters like Milovan Djilas fell from favour so rapidly – even if the various publications leading to his downfall are discussed in full. There is some context missing here that I did find myself desiring.

The book ends with West reflecting on his days in Yugoslavia when the all-encompassing rule of Tito appeared stifling, with graffiti that stated 'Tito is ours, and we are Tito' seeming ominous and totalitarian to the author suddenly seeming charming during the nationalist uprisings after his death that tore Yugoslavia apart.

As is the case in many former socialist republics, the nostalgia that now flourishes for a time gone by has equally arisen in some parts of the former Yugoslavia, but it is depressing testament to the ultimate failure of Tito's project that what is now Croatia and Serbia in particular are states dominated by ethnocentrism and nationalist politics.

If you wish to understand how this came to be – you will find no better book.

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**Adil says**

Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia: And the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia (Paperback)

by Richard West

Carroll & Graf Publishers

436 pages

isbn 0786703326

Tito and the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia is about the once proud nation of Yugoslavia and how it collapsed into 6 different weak republics. This biography explains how Josip Broz Tito held the nation of Yugoslavia together for more than 45 years despite deep ethnic and religious conflict and propelled it to the center of the world when it was still a weak nation. Tito was the face of Yugoslavia and when he died the country died with him.

The biography talks about Yugoslavia's biggest feats including defeating the German Nazi army and helping the allies rid Europe of Nazi occupation. Although Yugoslavia was communist they were independent and they were not allied with the USSR. During Tito's time Yugoslavia was at peace and no fighting occurred. Despite Tito's efforts Yugoslavia still had a lot of problems; religious + ethnic conflict and nationalism. The result after the breakup of Yugoslavia was bloody civil war and much war crimes.

The biography uses many different angles and inside sources to help define how one man unified a whole nation. The biography gives a lot of historical background information and uses a lot of media sources in order to support its central theme: Tito was the father of Yugoslavia and the country survived through him. Overall I would say most people would not read this book unless they have Yugoslavian heritage and like history. It's an alright book but half the things I read in this book I already knew. I think this book needs to examine new angles and perspectives.

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### **Samuel says**

It was a communist who made this country into a haven and religious extremists who destroyed it and brought it down to hell.

Awesome book, an easy read and very informative and enlightening.

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### **Boris Cesnik says**

What a well presented book! I did not expect such a clear and comprehensive presentation of the main episodes of Tito's life and beyond. It's not the usual dull and itemized bio. You get the bigger picture here. Yes it has some holes and gaps here and there but nothing that you can't fill in with more readings. This book is meant to give you the frame and a clear understanding of the socio-political, economical, cultural and historic context in which Tito was born, raised, grew up, matured, operated and eventually passed away. The boring list of names, dates and facts leave them to some other biographers. This book so simply explains with more details you may require the big picture of the Yugoslavia culminating in Tito, from his rise to power to his death and its aftermath.

Again I can only come up with the following adjectives in relation to this book: simple, clear, disarming, truthful, non biased, wide and sensitive.

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## **Ogross says**

Well I've started this and I'm not going to make it through. Way too much history. I read the first thirty pages and couldn't remember a thing about which group was which. I think I'm going to try a biography written by one of his closest friends. Obviously the history is important to who Tito was, but I need a book that's not written like a history textbook. Without much prior knowledge of this region, I was drowning in the details.

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## **Erik Graff says**

This is at once a partial biography of Josip Broz and a history of Yugoslavia from its reformation after World War II until its break-up, Tito's life and political practice being considered both in terms of how he kept the country together and how his means of doing so may have contributed to its eventual dissolution.

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## **Mary says**

West mostly adheres to the root of Yugoslavia's troubles as an “[a]ncient religious rivalry going back almost a thousand years” rather than “a struggle for power between the republics of Serbia and Croatia.” But he refers to the “nationalities problem” throughout the book. In summary and to generalize, the Croats committed atrocities against the Serbs, who, in turn, carried out atrocities against Muslims and also Croats.

### **Catholic Church**

The Catholic church played a nefarious role in Croatia during WWII which the locals and those in the Vatican refused to acknowledge, let alone atone for.

### **Western Support for Tito**

The declassification of Ultra has made it clear that the West backed Tito as the most likely victor in the Yugoslav civil war. My own research in grad school also made it pretty clear to me that even if Tito received no backing, the Partisans were the strongest tribe. At times during WWII the Germans thought defeating Tito was more important than “repelling an Allied landing.”

### **Tito's Success in Yugoslavia**

“As Tito knew perfectly well, the Partisan Army had come to power not as agents of revolution, not even as patriots fighting the foreign invader, but as the defenders of Serbs in the NDH (wartime Croatia). Without the Ustasha government and its murderous policy toward the Serbs, the Partisans would have had few recruits, and the Communist Party would never have come to power. This was the principal reason why Tito did not want to rake up the Ustasha [war] crimes [after WWII].”

Despite some great research, footnotes, first-hand interviews, extensive travel and Serbo-Croat language acquisition, West buys into what I see as more of a myth of a much admired Yugoslavia: “a remarkably free-market state, with only a small bureaucracy, and virtually no welfare system” “a healthy drift back [of wannabe workers] from the cities into the countryside and agriculture” “sacked workers travelled abroad as *gastarbeiter*” and that the Orthodox Church was above reproach. “Nobody thought the State had a right or a duty to interfere on behalf of some ‘underprivileged’ interest groups such as the unemployed, the ethnic minorities, working mothers, single parent or putative victims of child abuse. It [Yugoslavia] had almost entirely escaped the three popular Western causes of multiracialism, women’s rights and homosexual

equality. The first of these was irrelevant in a country that did not encourage immigration. The other two causes did not take hold in a country enjoying a good relationship between the sexes.” Barf.

The Yugoslavian experiment coincided with the post-war life of Tito. He was the linchpin to making unification happen. When he died, it all began to unravel again. I do wonder if it was ever a good idea to unite the nations of Yugoslavia despite the relatively well-off lifestyle afforded to its citizens while it lasted. I’m still bitter and horrified by their most recent civil war. I think the Yugoslav good life was paid for through Western loans mostly defaulted upon. We propped up Tito and his version of communism against our premier bete noir, Stalin.

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### **Christopher says**

It is a good thing this book is so well written and comprehensive to counteract the intense upper-class English biases of the author which are basically constantly on display. Still, when it comes to Tito biographies this is probably the best that currently exists.

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### **C. says**

Here it is not a question of liberalism or nationalism. But worse than that - bears.

It's a real invasion, and that's why we talk about them at our Party meetings. We're seriously thinking of leaving.

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### **Andrew Clement says**

This was a good overview of Tito's life and policies, which places them within the broader context of the region. The author was a correspondent in Socialist Yugoslavia for most of its existence. Because of this, he is able to embellish his argument that the conflicts in the region flow from religious rather than ethnic conflict with a good amount of 'on the ground' and ethnographic information. I also enjoyed that West attempts to show how this conflict developed starting in the Middle Ages.

While the author has clearly done his research, some parts of the book, especially those related to the post-WWII era, digress almost completely from the role of Tito. At times, I was left with the sense that I was reading a thinly-disguised memoir of the time that the author spent reporting from Yugoslavia. This makes some parts of the book feel mis-packaged. For instance, the section entitled "Towards Conflict in Bosnia-Herzegovina" contains little more than reminiscences of some time that the author spent in Mostar shortly before the wars began, rather than a brief analysis of the events leading directly up to it.

Would recommend to those interested in Tito's role in the wider history of the region, though this is not an in-depth profile of the man himself.

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## **Stefan says**

Not as much a biography as it is a history of Yugoslavia during, and after, Tito. Very interesting, very informative and extremely well documented. Written by a British journalist who visited Yugoslavia often since the 50's. He avoids anecdotal events (i.e. love affairs, what he eats, what he said to who, etc.) and concentrates on relevant ones, which is quite nice in a biography. The last three chapters present the upcoming disasters of Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia. I can see his intent of showing what became of Tito's legacy but those chapters seem somewhat botched and clash with the rest of the book. Overall an excellent read for those interested in the man.

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