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SOCIALISM AND NATIONAL UNITY IN YUGOSLAVIA, 1945-63: RECORDS OF THE U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT CLASSIFIED FILES



During World War II, Yugoslavia was divided between the Axis powers and their allies. Royal army soldiers, calling themselves Cetnici (Chetniks), formed a Serbian resistance movement, but a more determined communist resistance under the Partisans, with Soviet and Anglo-American help, liberated all of Yugoslavia by 1944. In an effort to avoid Serbian domination during the post-war years, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Montenegro were given separate and equal republican status within the new socialist federation of Yugoslavia; Kosovo and Vojvodina were made autonomous provinces within Yugoslavia. Despite the attempts at a federal system of government for Yugoslavia, Serbia played the leading role in Yugoslavia's political life for the next 4 decades. Yugoslavia remained independent of the U.S.S.R., as Tito broke with Stalin and asserted Yugoslav independence. Tito went on to control Yugoslavia for 35 years. Under communist rule, Yugoslavia was transformed from an agrarian to an industrial society.

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Historical Description

Communist Takeover and Consolidation

The communists under Tito emerged from World War II as sole rulers of Yugoslavia, without major Soviet assistance. King Petar surrendered his powers to a three-member regency in late 1944, and under Allied pressure Tito and Subasic agreed to merge their governments. On March 7, 1945, a single provisional Yugoslav government took office with Tito as prime minister and war minister, Subasic in charge of foreign affairs, and Tito supporters occupying almost all cabinet posts. A communist-dominated Provisional Assembly convened in August, and the government held elections to choose a Constituent Assembly

in November. New election laws barred alleged wartime collaborators from voting and all candidates had to be nominated by the communist-controlled People's Front, the descendant of the wartime People's Liberation Front that encompassed all non-collaborationist political parties and organizations. The police harassed noncommunist politicians and suppressed their newspapers during the election campaign. Subasic and other non-communist ministers resigned in protest, while the Serbian Radicals, the Croatian Peasant Party, and other parties boycotted the election. People's Front candidates won 90 percent of the vote.

The newly-elected Constituent Assembly dissolved the monarchy and established the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia on November 29, 1945. Two months later, it adopted a Soviet-style constitution that provided for a federation of six republics under a strong central government. In an effort to prevent Serbian domination of the new state, the regime made separate republics of Montenegro and Macedonia and created within Serbia itself an ethnically mixed Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and a mostly Albanian Autonomous Region of Kosovo. At a later date, the regime further divided Serbian territory by recognizing three "nations," the Serbs, Croats, and Muslims, in an attempt to overcome competing Serbian and Croatian claims to that republic. The constitution established a rubber-stamp Federal Assembly and a presidential council to administer the federal government. It also included restricted wording on the inviolability of the home, the right to work, freedom of speech, association, and religion, and other rights. Tito headed the party, government, and armed forces; his party functionaries oversaw the industries and supervised republican and local officials.

Tito's government repaired wartime damage, instituted land reform, and established a Soviet-style economic system. United Nations deliveries of supplies prevented starvation and contagion but did not solve the fundamental problem of rural poverty. In August 1945, the regime seized remaining large and medium-size land holdings along with property belonging to banks, churches, monasteries, absentee landlords, private companies, and the expelled German minority. It gave half the land to peasants and allocated the rest to state-owned enterprises. The authorities postponed forced collectivization but required peasants to sell any surplus to the state at below-market prices. Peasants received incentives to join newly founded state and cooperative farms. The Communists quickly implemented the Stalinist model for rapid industrial development; by 1948 they had nationalized virtually all the country's wealth except privately held land. State planners set wages and prices and compiled a grandiose five-year plan that emphasized exploitation of domestic raw materials, development of heavy industry, and economic growth in underdeveloped regions. The Yugoslavs relied on tax and price policies, reparations, Soviet credits, and export of foodstuffs, timber, mineral, and metal exports to generate capital. They redirected the bulk of their trade toward the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Between 1945 and 1948, the government punished wartime collaborators. British forces in Austria captured Ustase members and Croatian and Slovenian collaborators along with innocent refugees. These were returned to Yugoslavia, where Partisans summarily executed thousands of innocent and guilty prisoners. The regime also imprisoned thousands of Cetnici and executed Mihajlovic and other Cetnik leaders as collaborators after a show trial in 1946.

The Communists often used collaboration charges to stifle political and religious opposition, as well as economic and social initiatives. The Roman Catholic Church bitterly opposed the new order. After the war, the authorities executed over 200 priests and nuns charged with participating in Ustase atrocities. Archbishop Stepinac protested government excesses and the secularization of education, institution of civil marriage, and confiscation of church lands. In September 1946, the regime sentenced him to imprisonment for sixteen years for complicity with the Pavelic government. He served five years before the regime released him. Yugoslav-Vatican relations deteriorated during the imprisonment of Stepinac, and the government severed them in 1952 when Pope Pius XII named Stepinac a cardinal. The authorities permitted the funeral and burial of Stepinac in Zagreb in 1960, after which Yugoslav-Vatican relations gradually improved until diplomatic relations were reestablished in 1970.

The Yugoslav-Soviet Rift

Fearing that Soviet control of Eastern Europe was slipping, Stalin ceased advocating "national roads to socialism" in 1947 and ordered creation of a Soviet-dominated socialist bloc. In September the Soviet, East European, Italian, and French communist parties founded the Cominform (Communist Information Bureau), a successor to the prewar Comintern (Communist International) that Stalin had hoped to manipulate for the benefit of the Soviet Union.

Establishment of Cominform headquarters in Belgrade strengthened the image that Yugoslavia was the staunchest Soviet ally in Eastern Europe. Stalin, however, saw Yugoslavia's independent Communists as a threat to his hold on Eastern Europe, and hidden resentment strained relations between the Yugoslav and Soviet leaders. Resentment had grown on the Yugoslav side during the war because of Stalin's objections to the Partisans' political initiatives, his refusal to provide the Partisans military aid early in the struggle, and his wartime agreements with Churchill and Roosevelt. After the war, Yugoslav leaders complained about Red Army looting and raping in Yugoslavia during 1944 and 1945, and about unfair trade arrangements. The Yugoslavs also resisted establishment of joint companies that would have allowed Moscow to dominate their economy.

In early 1948, the Soviets stalled negotiations on a Yugoslav-Soviet trade treaty, and they began claiming that the Red Army had liberated Yugoslavia and facilitated the Partisan victory. In March, Moscow withdrew Soviet military and civilian advisers from Yugoslavia, charging the Yugoslavs with perversion of Stalinist dogma. The Yugoslavs rejected the charges, criticized the Soviets for recruiting spies within the Yugoslav party, military, police, and enterprises, and defiantly asserted that a communist could love his native land no less than the USSR. This insubordination infuriated Stalin, and Yugoslav-Soviet exchanges grew more heated. Finally, at a special session in Bucharest that the Yugoslavs refused to attend, the Cominform shocked the world by expelling Yugoslavia and calling upon Yugoslav communists to overthrow Tito.

At first the Yugoslav party responded to the Cominform measures with conciliatory overtures. Portraits of Stalin, Marx, Engels, and Tito hung side by side at the Fifth Party Congress in

July 1948, and the delegates chanted pledges of support for Stalin and the Soviet Union. In a lengthy address, Tito refuted Soviet charges against Yugoslavia, but he refrained from attacking Stalin. The vast majority of Yugoslavs supported Tito. The press publicized Soviet attacks widely; Moscow appealed for loyalty, but its appeals were nullified by renewed claims that the Red Army had liberated Yugoslavia from fascism. A few prominent Yugoslav communists did defect, and for five years after 1948 the regime imprisoned thousands of suspected pro-Soviet communists.

The Yugoslav regime strove to prove its allegiance to Stalin after 1948. It answered Moscow's criticisms by supporting Soviet foreign policy and implementing additional Stalinist economic measures. In 1949 the Yugoslav government began collectivizing agriculture; over the next two years, it used a carrot-and-stick approach to induce 2 million peasants to join about 6,900 collective farms. The campaign, however, caused a decrease in agricultural output, and the use of coercion eroded peasant support for the government. Peasant resistance and a 1950 drought that threatened the cities with starvation soon stalled the collectivization drive. The government announced the program's cancellation in 1951.

In 1949 Yugoslavia stood isolated. Relations with the West worsened because of the bitter dispute with Italy over Trieste, the regime's refusal to compensate foreigners for nationalized property, continued Yugoslav support for the communists in Greece, and other issues. The Soviet-bloc governments launched an economic blockade against Yugoslavia, excluding it from the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. The Soviets propagandized harshly against Tito in Serbo-Croatian broadcasts, attempted to subvert Yugoslav party organizations, and sought to incite unrest among the Hungarian, Albanian, and Russian minorities in Yugoslavia.

Troop movements and border incidents convinced Yugoslav leaders that a Soviet-bloc invasion was imminent, requiring fundamental changes in foreign policy. In July 1949, Tito closed the Yugoslav-Greek border and ceased supplying the pro-Cominform Greek communists, and in August Yugoslav votes in the United Nations began to stray from the Soviet line. Welcoming the Yugoslav-Soviet rift, the West commenced a flow of economic aid in 1949, saved the country from hunger in 1950, and covered much of Yugoslavia's trade deficit for the next decade. The United States began shipping weapons to Yugoslavia in 1951. A military security arrangement was concluded in 1953, but the Western powers were unable to bring Yugoslavia into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Italy won control of Trieste in 1954.

Introduction of Socialist Self-Management

Faced with economic stagnation, a Soviet-bloc trade embargo, dwindling popularity, and a dysfunctional Soviet-style economic system, Yugoslav leaders returned to the core of their philosophy, the writings of Marx. Their aim was to reassess their ideology and lay the groundwork for a new economic mechanism called Socialist (or workers') self-management. Enterprises formed prototype workers' councils in 1949, and the Federal Assembly passed laws in 1950 and 1951 to implement the system fully. These laws replaced state ownership of the means of production with social ownership, entrusting management responsibilities to the

workers of each enterprise. The laws empowered enterprise workers' councils to set broad production goals and supervise finances, but government-appointed directors retained veto power over council decisions. The government also reformed economic planning and freed some prices to fluctuate according to supply and demand, but foreign trade remained under central control.

The replacement of a command economy with a self-management system required the Communist Party to loosen its hold on decision making. At its Sixth Congress, in November 1952, the party renamed itself the League of Communists of Yugoslavia (LCY) to signal a break with its Stalinist past and a revision of its leading role in the country's political life. The Congress declared that the party would separate itself structurally from the state. Instead of directing government and economic activity, the party was to influence democratic decision making through education, propaganda, and the participation of individual communists in political institutions, workers' councils, and other organizations. Free intraparty debate would determine party policy, but once the party had made a final decision, the principle of democratic centralism would bind all members to support it. By rejecting multiparty pluralism, the party retained a monopoly on political organization. Three months after the Congress, the People's Front became the Socialist Alliance of Working People of Yugoslavia (SAWPY), an umbrella organization through which the party would maintain this monopoly. In addition, individual communists continued to occupy key government and enterprise-management posts.

In 1953 the Federal Assembly amended virtually the entire 1946 constitution to conform with the new laws on workers' self-management. On the federal level, the amendments created an administrative Federal Executive Council and reorganized the Federal Assembly. The amendments also reduced the already minimal autonomy of the individual republics, while local government retained power in economic and social matters.

In March 1953, the government began dissolving collective and state farms. Two-thirds of the peasants abandoned the collectives within nine months, and the socialist share of land ownership sank from 25 percent to 9 percent within three years. In an attempt to mitigate the problem of peasant landlessness, the government reduced the legal limit on individual holdings from 25 to 35 hectares of cultivable land to 10 hectares; this restriction would remain on the books for over three decades and would prevent the development of economically efficient family farms. The government also eliminated the system of compulsory deliveries, fixed taxes in advance, encouraged peasants to join purchasing and marketing cooperatives, and increased investment in the agricultural sector. As a result, Yugoslav agricultural output grew steadily through the 1950s, and its farms had record harvests in 1958 and 1959. Yugoslavia maintained its focus on industrial development through the 1950s, despite the government's new approach to economic planning and enterprise management. The industrial sector boomed after 1953; manufacturing exports more than doubled between 1954 and 1960; and the country showed the world's second highest economic growth rate between 1957 and 1960.

Living conditions, health care, education, and cultural life improved in the wake of the economic and political reforms. In the mid-1950s, the government redirected investment toward production of consumer goods, and foreign products became widely available. The regime also relaxed its religious restrictions, allowed for a degree of public criticism, curbed abuse of privileges by party officials, and reduced the powers of the secret police. Travel restrictions eased; Yugoslavs gained greater access to Western literature and ideas; artists abandoned "socialist realism" to experiment with abstraction and other styles; and film makers and writers, including Nobel Prize-winner Ivo Andric, produced first-rate works. But already in 1953 liberalization was an uneven, changeable phenomenon in Yugoslavia. A meeting of party leaders at the north Adriatic island of Brioni that year resolved to strengthen party discipline, amid growing concern that apathy had infected the rank and file since the Sixth Congress. Over the next several years, the party tightened democratic centralism; established basic party organizations in factories, universities, and other institutions; purged its rolls of inactive members; and took other measures to enhance discipline.

Milovan Djilas, one of Tito's closest confidants, disagreed with the Brioni decisions. In a number of articles in the foreign press, he criticized the party leadership for stifling democratic intraparty debate. He also exposed elitism in the private lives of leaders and suggested that the League of Communists dissolve itself as a rigid political party. This criticism exceeded Tito's tolerance, and his former comrades dismissed Djilas from his posts and imprisoned him. In 1957 Djilas published *The New Class*, in which he described the emergence of a new communist ruling elite that enjoyed all the privileges of the old bourgeoisie. The book won him international notoriety and prolonged his jail term. Publication of *Conversations with Stalin* in 1962 earned him more fame and a second prison term.

Nonalignment and Yugoslav-Soviet Rapprochement

Yugoslav-Soviet relations showed signs of new life soon after Stalin died in March 1953. In an unprecedented gesture, Nikita Khrushchev, first secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, visited Tito in Belgrade in 1955. Khrushchev expressed the regrets of the Soviet party for the rift, although he did not blame it on Stalin directly. Tito rejected this explanation, and after formal discussions the Yugoslav and Soviet leaders decided to resume only state relations. In the final communiqué of the meeting, known as the Belgrade Declaration, the Soviet Union acknowledged the right of individual socialist countries to follow their own path toward socialism.

The Yugoslav and Soviet parties restored relations in 1956, and at the Soviet Communist Party's Twentieth Congress, Khrushchev blasted Stalin for his "shameful role" in the Yugoslav-Soviet estrangement. After a visit to the Soviet Union in June that deepened the rapprochement, Tito entertained hopes that all of Eastern Europe would adopt some version of Yugoslavia's model for socialist development. Movement toward liberalization in the Soviet bloc, however, ground to a halt with the 1956 Hungarian revolution and the Soviet invasion that crushed it. Yugoslav-Hungarian relations cooled after the execution of Imre Nagy, the Hungarian revolutionary leader who had taken asylum in the Yugoslav embassy in Budapest.

Yugoslav-Soviet relations were unstable in the years following the Hungarian invasion, but by 1961 they had entered a period of detente.

Nonalignment became the keystone of Yugoslavia's foreign policy in the 1950s. While isolated from the Great Powers, Yugoslavia strove to forge strong ties with Third World countries similarly interested in avoiding an alliance with East or West and the hard choice between communism and capitalism. Tito found common ground with Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser and India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and they worked together to organize a movement of Third World nations whose collective statements on international issues would carry greater weight than their individual voices. In 1961 Belgrade hosted the first major conference of the world's nonaligned nations. Tito used the prestige gained from the meeting and from his denunciations of neocolonialism to enhance the leverage gained by positioning Yugoslavia between East and West.

Reforms of the 1960s

Initial steps toward market socialism and freer foreign trade in 1961 produced unacceptable inflation and a foreign-trade deficit, and emergency anti-inflation measures plunged Yugoslavia into recession in 1962. The recession produced an urgent debate on fundamental economic reforms, especially decentralization of investment decision making. During the debate, naturally conflicting interregional economic interests rekindled ethnic rivalries, and emotional nationalist claims reemerged to complicate economic discussions. Party leaders were unable to solve the widening economic gap between the country's more prosperous northern republics and the underdeveloped southern regions. Resentment grew from suspicions that some republics were receiving an unfair share of investment funds.

The government adopted stopgap recentralization measures to end recession in 1962, but inflation and the foreign-trade deficit again rose sharply, renewing debate on economic reforms. Led by Eduard Kardelj and Vladimir Bakaric, party liberals (mostly from Slovenia, Croatia, and the Belgrade area) promoted decentralization measures and investment strategies that would benefit the wealthier republics. Conservatives (mostly from Serbia and Montenegro) supported maintaining or stiffening central controls and continuing investment in the less developed regions. In 1963 Yugoslavia established new constitutions at the national and republican level, expanding the concept of self-management beyond the economic sphere into social activity. This was achieved by creating local councils on education and culture, social welfare, public health, and political administration. The composition of the Federal Assembly was altered, simultaneous office-holding in the party and government was outlawed (except for Tito), and government tenure was limited and dispersed by the introduction of a regular rotation system.

Source: Yugoslavia, Country Study, Federal Research Division, Library of Congress

Formerly Scholarly Resources microfilm publication - Records of the Department of State relating to Internal Affairs, Yugoslavia, 1945-1963.

Source Note: RG 59, Records of the Department of State, Central Classified Files, Decimal Files (1945-1949)760H and 860H; (1950-1959)768, 868, 968; (1960-1963)768, 868, 968