

**Portland State University**  
**PDXScholar**

---

Young Historians Conference

Young Historians Conference 2013

---

May 2nd, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM

## The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia

Olivia Hinerfeld  
*St Mary's Academy*

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians>



Part of the [European History Commons](#)

---

Olivia Hinerfeld, "The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia" (May 2, 2013). *Young Historians Conference*. Paper 6.  
<http://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2013/oralpres/6>

This Event is brought to you for free and open access. It has been accepted for inclusion in Young Historians Conference by an authorized administrator of PDXScholar. For more information, please contact [pdxscholar@pdx.edu](mailto:pdxscholar@pdx.edu).

# The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia

By

Olivia Hinerfeld

Prof. Vannelli

Hon. Modern European History

March 11, 2013

Olivia Hinerfeld

PSU Hst/ Hon. Modern European History

Mr. Vannelli

March 11, 2013

### The Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia

In the last century, one nation achieved an incredible rise to power and devastating collapse in the span of mere decades. Yugoslavia—a now nonexistent country—flourished under the influential leadership of Josip Broz Tito (1892-1980). Before Tito came into power, Yugoslavia experienced a variety of governmental structures. The Kingdom of Yugoslavia was established in 1918, only to be substituted in 1943 by the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia. Just three years later, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was proclaimed, which was eventually replaced by the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963. Named Prime Minister in 1943, Tito entered politics at a unique time in the nation's history; as Yugoslavia shifted from a monarchy to a federation, he became one of the country's biggest advocates for a communist style of government. At the time he became Prime Minister, World War II was coming to a close and communism had become characterized by the concentration of power in Moscow. A visionary leader, Tito believed in empowering a plurality of independent centers of political authority. Consequently, the Yugoslavs defected from the communist bloc in 1948. This pluralistic worldview carried over into Tito's leadership of Yugoslavia itself. Consisting of six national republics and two autonomous regions, Tito was able to unify these disparate people into one communist entity. Elected President in 1953, Tito went on to rule over Yugoslavia until his death in 1980. In his thirty-seven years as leader of

Yugoslavia, Josip Broz Tito instituted a policy of “polycentrism” which unified the culturally diverse people; however, upon his death, the policy collapsed due to the ineffective leadership of the collective presidency, economic troubles, and ethno-religious unrest, resulting in the country’s disintegration.

In order to protect Yugoslavia from the influence of major world powers, Tito introduced a policy in which the nation opted to remain neutral amidst worldwide conflicts. Known as the Non-Alignment Movement, the policy was largely brought into effect largely in response to the United States conflict with the Soviet Union in the Cold War. As the nuclear arms race between the two world powers intensified, Tito expressed concern about becoming involved. Upon initiating the policy of neutrality, Tito decided to host the first “Conference of Non-Aligned Heads of State.” The conference took place in Belgrade in 1961 and had twenty-five countries represented. The second conference occurred in Cairo in 1964, with forty-seven countries represented.<sup>1</sup> These conferences bore great significance, as they demonstrated Tito’s growing influence on other nations in the world. Fortunately for Tito, because the conflicts between the two United States and Soviet Union never escalated from the Cold War to full-scale war, Yugoslavia was able to maintain its policy of Non-Alignment. However, the weakness of the policy became apparent in that it was based on “Tito’s personality cult” and “great prestige abroad” as opposed to the “political and economic strength of the system itself.”<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Tito’s unique leadership made it possible for the Non-Alignment Movement to begin in Yugoslavia, posing threats to major world powers. The United States and the Soviet

---

<sup>1</sup> “The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History,” *Non-Aligned Movement*, last modified Sep. 21, 2001, <http://www.nam.gov.za/background/history.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Slobodan Stankovic, *The End of the Tito Era: Yugoslavia’s Dilemmas* (California: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), 104-105.

Union viewed Yugoslavia as a menace; its rapid economic growth and rising population were beginning to establish it as a forthcoming world authority. Nevertheless, the Non-Alignment Movement was not the only reason these nations felt threatened by Yugoslavia.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was formally comprised of six republics—Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia—and two autonomous regions, Kosovo and Vojvodina. Within these eight constituencies, three religions predominated: Orthodox Christianity, Roman Catholicism, and Islam. Yugoslavia officially recognized two alphabets, both Cyrillic and Roman.<sup>3</sup> Through a policy of “polycentrism,” Tito successfully unified these notably distinct republics into one federation. For many years, Yugoslavia aligned itself with the Soviet Union. However, after Tito came into power, he sought to distance the nation from the center of Communist rule. He believed that in the USSR “a man [was] a number, and the people a colorless mass which must docilely obey and fulfill all the orders of their leaders.”<sup>4</sup> Thus, Yugoslavia disassociated itself from the Communist bloc in 1948. To Stalin’s dismay, the Yugoslav Communist Party stayed in power and continued on as before, not falling to capitalism as the Soviets predicted. The federation’s success in this regard caused other Communist rulers to question the merits of obedience to the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> Tito’s model gave Communist countries a “far wider area of choice” in shaping both their “relationship to the non-Communist world” as well as “internal institutions and policies.”<sup>6</sup> As Yugoslavia flourished, the absurdity of “the Kremlin contention that their

---

<sup>3</sup> “Josip Broz Tito,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 15, No. 19 (May 10, 1980): 829-830.

<sup>4</sup> Vladimir Dedijer, *Tito* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1953), 427.

<sup>5</sup> George F. Kennan, “Polycentrism and Western Policy,” *Foreign Affairs* 42, No. 2 (Jan., 1964): 170.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 175.

way must be the way of all countries” became apparent to other nations.<sup>7</sup> Due to the threat Yugoslavia posed to the stability of the Communist bloc, Stalin endeavored to bring about a split in the Yugoslav Communist Party by raising the suspicion that some members were Stalinists; yet, this attempt was unsuccessful, going to prove that Stalin failed to grasp “the conditions under which” the Communist Party of Yugoslavia had been developed and “what had been its experiences.”<sup>8</sup> Tito built a relationship amongst the Yugoslavs “in which people believe in one another and had confidence in one another.”<sup>9</sup> Through polycentrism, he decentralized economic and cultural life, allowing the power to rest with the people. To Tito, this policy was a means of “uniting the citizens of a country in one Front” with the purpose being the “materialization of the Communist Party.”<sup>10</sup> In essence, polycentrism was an experiment of “the American way—a crazy quilt of nationalities—fiercely independent, with equal rights for all citizens.”<sup>11</sup> With the right kind of leadership, Tito demonstrated to the world that there was more than one path to socialism—that a republic as diverse as Yugoslavia could stay united. Yet as the Tito era came to an end, the world was in a period of great conflict. These conflicts foreshadowed the disintegration of Yugoslavia, for the federation’s success was founded in Tito’s cult of personality. Without Tito’s leadership, the fragmentation of Yugoslavia would prove unavoidable.

On May 4, 1980, Josip Broz Tito died at the age of eighty-eight. Having ruled over Yugoslavia for nearly four decades, he left an impressive legacy. After his death, the

---

<sup>7</sup> Dedijer, 422.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, 422.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid, 404-405.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 428-429.

<sup>11</sup> David Binder, “Fare Well Illyria!” (foreign correspondent for the *New York Times*), 73.

nation had a literacy rate of 85%, population of 21.3 million, and GDP of \$26 billion.<sup>12</sup> But most significantly, he left behind “Titoism,” an ideology his successors would fail to grasp. Denying the existence of his own philosophy, Tito claimed, “We are Marxists, I am a Marxist and therefore I cannot be a ‘Titoist.’ ...What exists in our country is socialism and cannot be called ‘Titoism.’”<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, Yugoslavia operated under certain unique circumstances. In Yugoslavia, the factories were “turned over to the workers” with the intention of providing the foundation for a “socialist democracy.”<sup>14</sup> Tito sought to develop a “spirit of comradeship” and “spirit of equality” among people, to ensure economic, social, and political freedoms for all individuals, so as to realize his ideal of true socialism.<sup>15</sup> Above all, Tito’s utmost goal was to prove that Yugoslavia remained a Communist state, in spite of Western influence. Despite Tito’s disavowal, Titoism possessed inherent differences from traditional Marxism that needed to survive in order for the continuation of Yugoslavia’s success. After Tito’s death, three pillars needed to be maintained: “worker’s self-management, political nonalignment, [and] the federal organization of the state.”<sup>16</sup> In 1974, Yugoslavia amended its Constitution with the intent of preparing for the transition between leaders. Under Tito’s direction, the Constitution dictated the formation of a nine-member collective presidency; six people would represent each of the six republics, another two would represent each of the two autonomous regions, and one individual would rule the party. In 1978, Tito suggested an amendment to the Constitution in which one member of the collective presidency would

---

<sup>12</sup> Andrew Borowiec, *Yugoslavia After Tito* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), 97.

<sup>13</sup> Dedijer, 432.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 426.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, 405.

<sup>16</sup> Borowiec, 103.

serve as the overarching president of Yugoslavia, serving a single one-year term.<sup>17</sup> Upon Tito's death, the collective presidency went into effect, with the amendment that established one predominant leader. Thus, a continuous line of men and women succeeded Tito. This disrupted the nation each year as a new person took office, adding to the instability of the federation.<sup>18</sup> Though the intent of the proposed Constitutional changes was pure, the collective presidency made Yugoslavia unpredictable. Tito had amended the Constitution in an attempt to prevent a dictator from succeeding him, but he instead paved the way for economic collapse and the ascension of an ideological rival.

Largely due to the ineffective leadership of the collective presidency, Yugoslavia's economy began to collapse. After Tito's death, two majorities evolved. One group believed that the nation needed to focus on stricter economic policies to improve the developing country, while the other group argued that Tito's grandiose foreign policy needed to endure. They argued that Yugoslavia needed to continue acting as a leader in the Non-Alignment Movement and opposing anticommunists.<sup>19</sup> As the government failed to focus on a clear direction forward, this division led to discrepancies in the allocation of funds. In 1974 and 1980, the nation's budget was balanced.<sup>20</sup> However, a combination of factors led to debilitating economic collapse in the years following Tito's death. In 1982, Milka Planinc was elected head of the collective presidency. She wanted to lower inflation, which was growing at a rate of 40% annually at the time.<sup>21</sup> Thus, the collective presidency enforced a policy of "full employment" to both limit inflation and attack the rising levels of unemployment. Meanwhile, with Tito dead, both the USSR and United

---

<sup>17</sup> Stankovic, 105.

<sup>18</sup> Borowiec, 105.

<sup>19</sup> Stankovic, 104.

<sup>20</sup> Donald F. Graff, "A Quiet Transition in Yugoslavia," *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom), May 28, 1982.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*



States felt confident that Yugoslavia was no longer a major threat. In 1984, the Reagan administration introduced a policy in a National Security Decision Directive to target Yugoslavia's economy; the United States sought to topple Communist Nations, forcing Eastern Europe to participate in a market-oriented economy.<sup>22</sup> Western trade barriers halted economic growth in Yugoslavia, forcing the government to take out International Monetary Fund (IMF) loans. In 1982, the federation's foreign debt reached 16.9 billion in US dollars. By 1988, the foreign debt topped twenty-one billion in US dollars with a 217% inflation increase.<sup>23</sup>

While ineffective leadership and economic collapse were highly detrimental to post-Tito Yugoslavia, ethnic conflicts became the federation's true downfall. Slobodan Milosevic, an ideological rival of Tito's, proved to be the primary instigator of these clashes. In the late 1980s, Milosevic was garnering support for himself in Serbia. Without Tito, Communism was failing in Eastern Europe; Milosevic proposed a different style of rule, advocating for "incendiary Nationalism."<sup>24</sup> To his good fortune, Milosevic was close friends with Ivan Stambolic, a man with high standing in Tito's Yugoslav Communist Party. In the 1980s, Stambolic was elected President of the Republic of Serbia. In a thirty-hour meeting that spanned from September 23 to September 24, 1987, Milosevic engineered President Stambolic's ouster, effectively taking over Serbia. From that moment on, he declared Serbia to be "Communist by name and Nationalist by

---

<sup>22</sup> Sean Gervasi, "Germany, the US, and the Yugoslav Crisis," *Covert Action* 43, (Winter 1992-1993): 42-43.

<sup>23</sup> Henry Kamm, "Yugoslavia's President Says Crisis Harms the Country's Reputation," *The New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1988.

<sup>24</sup> Marlise Simons and Alison Smale, "Slobodan Milosevic, 64, Former Yugoslav Leader Accused of War Crimes, Dies," *The New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2006.

choice.”<sup>25</sup> After becoming President of Serbia in 1987, Milosevic began to exert authority over Yugoslavia, encouraging nationalistic tendencies. Back in 1981—one year after Tito’s death—ethnic Albanians held riots in Kosovo, rebelling against Yugoslav rule.<sup>26</sup> In Tito’s time, these conflicts were quashed; however, the Serbian president deliberately resurrected these nationalistic grudges. When Milosevic took power, the two largest ethnic groups of Yugoslavia were Roman Catholic Croats and Orthodox Christian Serbs. Conscious of this fact, Milosevic used nationalism to set the stage for a brutal civil war that spread across the federation. He orchestrated wars that pitted the Serbs against Slovenes, Croats, Albanians, Kosovars, and Bosnians, all with the intention of realizing his dream of a “Greater Serbia.”<sup>27</sup> As a result of a practice called “ethnic cleansing,” millions of people were killed or displaced during the conflicts with the Serbs. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina alone resulted in two hundred thousand deaths and left millions of people without homes. Both in 1991 and 1996, opposition forces attempted to oust Milosevic. They finally succeeded in 2000. In 2001, Milosevic was sent to The Hague to be charged with war crimes; he was discovered dead in his cell in 2006. Slobodan Milosevic left a dark legacy: Serbian Nationalism served as a key part of inciting ethnic conflicts in Yugoslavia. Thus, the disintegration of Yugoslavia was largely his fault.

Spurred on by Milosevic’s Serbian forces, Yugoslavia gradually began to fragment. As experts had predicted, “serious ethnic conflicts” served as “the principal difficulty for Tito’s successors” and were a major contributor to this phenomenon.<sup>28</sup> By 1992, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was in ruins. Slobodan Milosevic’s

---

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> William Rees-Mogg, “Slobodan Milosevic, 64, Former Yugoslav Leader Accused of War Crimes, Dies,” *The Times* (London, England), Apr. 17, 1981.

<sup>27</sup> Simons and Smale.

<sup>28</sup> Stankovic, 113.

goal of replacing Communism with Nationalism had succeeded. Slovenia and Croatia were the first to secede in 1991, with Macedonia following shortly thereafter. The following year, Bosnia Herzegovina also declared its independence. In order to resolve longstanding ethnic conflicts in Bosnia, the Dayton Peace Agreement of 1995 created two self-governing entities within the nation, dividing the Serbs and Muslim-Croats. After the secession of Bosnia Herzegovina, only Serbia and Montenegro remained in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, now calling itself the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Due to the years of turmoil in the federation, the international community refused to recognize the new republic. Thus, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia divided into successor states in 2003.

In the span of eighty-five years, Yugoslavia managed to rise to the status of world power in control of the majority of Eastern Europe and to completely fall out of power, ultimately disappearing off the map. For thirty-seven years, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia thrived under Josip Broz Tito's leadership. He unified the diverse nation, growing both an educated population as well as growing a healthy and robust economy. Significant for his cult of personality, Tito introduced policies of 'non-alignment' and 'polycentrism,' which revolutionized the nature of a Communist government. Upon Tito's death in 1980, marred by the unproductive leadership of a nine-member collective presidency and riddled with foreign debt, Yugoslavia started to dissolve. When Slobodan Milosevic was elected President of Serbia in 1987, all hopes for Yugoslavia maintaining a Communist style of government was lost. Through widespread 'ethnic cleansing,' Milosevic coordinated the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people. During Milosevic's rule, Yugoslavia's various republics began to declare their

independence. All that Tito had worked for, all that he had strived to create, was lost. Nevertheless, his legacy as a benevolent dictator will not be forgotten. Tito demonstrated to the world the importance of respecting different cultures and the inherent power of neutrality. He developed a new archetype for a leader, one who above all values the input of the masses, as opposed to the input of the elite. On the idolatry of leaders, Tito once said, "If a man separates himself from the people, if he tends to be set on a pedestal, then he will only inspire fear or hatred...the people are those who are the motive power, they are the ones who inspire their leaders and the leader is but the organizer and the formulator of the people's thoughts."<sup>29</sup> Although Yugoslavia no longer exists, Tito, leader of the republic for nearly half of its existence, will serve as a role model for centuries to come.

## Bibliography

---

<sup>29</sup> Dedijer, 418.

- Binder, David. "Fare Well, Illyria!" Unpublished Manuscript, 2002.
- Borowiec, Andrew. *Yugoslavia after Tito*. New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979.
- Dedijer, Vladimir. *Tito*. New York: Simon and Shuster, 1953.
- Gervasi, Sean. "Germany, the US, and the Yugoslav Crisis." *Covert Action*, vol. 43 (Winter 1992-1993): 42-43.
- Graff, Donald F. "A Quiet Transition in Yugoslavia." *The Telegraph* (United Kingdom), May 28, 1982.
- "Josip Broz Tito." *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 15, No. 19 (May 10, 1980): 829-830.
- Kamm, Henry. "Yugoslavia's President Says Crisis Harms the Country's Reputation." *New York Times*, Oct. 19, 1988.
- Kennan, George F. "Polycentrism and Western Policy." *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Jan., 1964): 171-183.
- The Non-Aligned Movement. "The Non-Aligned Movement: Description and History." Last modified Sep. 21, 2001. <http://www.nam.gov.za/background/history.htm>.
- Rees-Mogg, William. "The Strains of Yugoslavia without Tito." *The Times* (London, England), Apr. 17, 1981.
- Simons, Marlise and Alison Smale. "Slobodan Milosevic, 64, Former Yugoslav Leader Accused of War Crimes, Dies." *New York Times*, Mar. 12, 2006.
- Stankovic, Slobodan. *The End of the Tito Era: Yugoslavia's Dilemmas*. California: Hoover Institution Press, 1981.