

Conflicting Visions of Socialism: Tito-Stalin Split

By Franklin Rangel

The USSR being the first and most dominant socialist force in the world immediately led to all other leftist movements being cast under its shadow, especially during the Cold War. One of these client states was Yugoslavia, located in a premium strategic point and led by a popular socialist veteran, Josip Broz Tito. Stalin and Tito's ideological differences and Yugoslavia's unique position in terms of foreign policy led to a public split between the two countries. Tito's critique of classical liberalism, and the disagreements that he had with Stalinism, led the USSR and Yugoslavia down different paths both ideologically and internationally.

At the time that these two leaders were forming their political identities, the US was the main power that exemplified neoliberalism, a modern defense of classical liberalism. During and after the Second World War, the US and its government prided itself on its capitalist, free-market ways. They portrayed it as the main difference between them and the Stalinist USSR. Their capitalist policies reflect the values of John Locke and property, one being "only by putting a value on gold and silver, and tacitly agreeing in the use of money; for, in governments, the laws regulate the right of property"(2). The US, both back then and now, organized its economy in a capitalist, mostly free-market system. The government did step in at times to keep things relatively fair by regulating the practices of private companies, very similar to how Locke described how the capitalist system would function in a state that practices classical liberal ideals.

The aspects of classical liberalism that Stalin and Tito criticize differed little in nature. After the first world war, these two men began to form the identities they would carry with them as leaders. As both Tito and Stalin derived their ideologies from Marx's critique of classical liberalism, they had similar problems with the belief system that it holds. Locke, one of the most influential in creating classical liberalism, critiques the previous system, feudalism, by saying that people should own their own property. "Through the earth and all inferior creatures be common to all men, yet every man has a property in his own person; this nobody has any right to but himself"(2). The Marxian critique vehemently opposes this value. In the eyes of socialists and Marxists, private property inevitably leads to the creation of the bourgeoisie, whose only function in society is to exploit the working class. If people are allowed to employ others on their land, it will lead to wage slavery, where people depend on their employers to survive (1). Today, this is known as living paycheck to paycheck. Both Tito and Stalin took these critiques and applied them in different ways for their respective countries. Stalin had another major influence that fought alongside him in the Russian Revolution as well, Vladimir Lenin. Although they agreed on most things, one important difference manifested itself in the Yugoslavian case.

When it came to foreign policy, Stalin and Lenin differentiated in a key way. Lenin was instrumental in creating the Communist International, or Comintern, as a way to ensure an alliance between communist revolutions. During the Russian Civil War, he helped to establish communist-led states in Belarus, Ukraine, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Mongolia. Lenin very much believed in the spread of world communism, but Stalin opposed his perspective. Instead, he supported the idea of "Communism in one country"(5). This idea is based on the fact that every other major power at the time was opposed to the USSR, which was true when Stalin came

into power. Through this belief, Stalin wanted to set up satellite states that would serve as buffers against the capitalist world, rather than grow organic communist movements.

Tito, like many other leading socialist figures at the time, had many core criticisms of Stalin and his regime. One of these main criticisms was directed at “communism in one country.” Tito believed in growing organic communist revolutions like Lenin, so this policy brought him to such lengths as to call the Stalinist USSR imperialistic, claiming, “the trade of the Soviet Union With the socialist countries is carried on a purely capitalist basis. They sell as high as possible and buy as cheaply as they can, trying to get as much as possible from socialist countries under the pretext of strengthening the international working class movement by helping the first country of socialism”(7). The USSR, in Tito’s eyes, had essentially set up colonies across Eastern Europe, demanding complete control and using them only for ulterior motives. In the Marxian sense, Stalin’s policies would be very capitalist.

The Yugoslavian leader despised the massive bureaucracy in Stalin’s government and believed that it betrayed the most basic socialist principles. Stalin had set up an enormous network of insiders and bureaucrats to serve his every need. Every decision came from the top down and was centralized, directly going against the concept of the disintegration of the state. Tito writes, “What about the withering away of the state in the Soviet Union? Are there any tendencies in that country to turn over the state functions, either economic or political, to the lower organs? Are there any signs of decentralization? So far there have been none”(6). In Marx’s theory, this kind of extremely centralized state will inevitably become a tool of the bourgeoisie, and in Tito’s eyes, and in the eyes of many socialists today, the Stalinist USSR was a bourgeoisie state. Tito brought his own alternative forward instead.

The brand of socialism that Yugoslavia enacted honed in on a specific aspect of Marxism and broadened it widely. Tito’s vision for socialism centered around the idea of a worker-controlled economy. This form of organizing socialism is today known as market socialism. In essence, the workers are given full control of their workplaces, most commonly factories, rather than the state owning all property. Tito claims, “Our state also has a general fund for capital accumulation, and each factory is obligated to give a part of its accumulation fund to the state accumulation fund in relation to its productivity. This is about all that the factories are to contribute to the general industrial development. After all these deductions are made, the rest goes to the workers”(7). Tito had it all planned out, even down to how taxes would work in this system. His main goals were to give all profits to the workers that produce the products, and go down a path that would lead to the disintegration of the state. He believes that this is the most Marxian way to go, stating, “Such decentralization is simply applied Marxism. We are giving factories to the workers, and this strengthens our state and makes the workers feel, more than ever, that they are the owners of the mean of production”(7).

Tito was also different from many different socialist thinkers at the time in that he did not think that his application of socialism was the way for every country. As has been expanded upon, Tito believed that each socialist movement should be allowed to determine their own interpretation of Marx. To Tito, Yugoslavia exemplified this attitude: he claims, “We have only applied the science of Marx and Lenin to our specific conditions. There is no new tendency that could be called Titoism. This must be explained to the masses. Otherwise, it would be harmful to the international working class movement, if it were thought that this is some new tendency”(7). He recognizes that each revolution is different, and so the organization of each socialist system will be different. Obviously, there are limits to this, as he has been shown to be a harsh critic of the vast bureaucratic systems of Stalin’s USSR.

When Tito broke Yugoslavia off from the Eastern Bloc, Stalin took as many avenues possible to control the narrative surrounding it. The main reason that Stalin put forward into the public was that their conflict was a purely ideological one: “The Cominform resolution of 28 June 1948 accused the Yugoslavs of deviating from the Marxist-Leninist line. The published letters exchanged by Soviet and Yugoslav leaders from March through May 1948— letters that were merely a prelude to the Cominform resolution in June—were entirely ideological in tone”(4). Stalin did not want it to be known, especially to the other members of the Cominform, that he was essentially using the dispute over the communist status in the Greek Civil War the Balkans to clamp down even more on Eastern Europe. So, to keep both continuity and control over the Eastern Bloc, anything and everything that Stalin said about the split was ideologically based.

Tito was not originally set on distancing Yugoslavia from the USSR as much as he did. In response to the resolutions and overall policy of the USSR of differentiating Yugoslavia and Soviet ideals, “the Yugoslavs insisted that they were not in any way deviating from the Marxist-Leninist line. Not until later, when Tito sought to bolster domestic support for his leadership and to give the Yugoslav model a new ideological justification, did he embrace the argument that the split occurred because of Yugoslavia’s own path toward socialism”(4). While this was going on, Stalin sent multiple threatening letters to Tito and the Yugoslav government about its international policy and attitude towards the Balkans and the Greek Civil War (4).

In response to Stalin’s aggression, Tito took Yugoslavia down a path that trapped the Eastern European country between the two superpowers of the time, the US and the USSR. In the few years following the split, Tito made it clear that Yugoslavia was not in favor of either the capitalist US or the Stalinist USSR, saying in an interview, “Yugoslavia does not belong to any bloc. If not attacked, she will not participate in any war. She will only go to war if attacked [...] Aggression is not our method of spreading the revolutionary movement in the world”(7). Tito went to great lengths to express Yugoslavia’s neutrality, especially as it seemed more and more inevitable that the two superpowers would soon be mired in conflict. However, this position of neutrality was much more US-friendly than Yugoslavia’s position was when it was a part of the Eastern Bloc. This newfound friendliness between the two nations -for Yugoslavia the promise of trade, and for the US lowering Stalin’s power - had consequences on Tito’s ideology.

As his relationship with the US lessened in negativity, Tito’s words began to resemble some main tenets of classical liberalism. During the process of the split, Tito was challenged many different times by both western media and other socialists on his methods. In response to questioning if the Yugoslav system could survive external pressure, he declared, “It can hold out. Why not? The best methods by which we can help the international working class consists of this: that we struggle to construct socialism in Yugoslavia with the fastest possible tempo and for the raising of the living standards, in one word, for the creation of socialism. This would be the best example for other countries”(7). The idea of never-ending progress is core to the idea of classical liberalism. Especially in the Industrial Revolution, standard of living was one of the main ways that scholars measured human “progress.” To see Tito exemplify this same ideal is to observe the ways in which his country has affected his own ideology. Continued contact and military assistance with the West allowed Tito to change and specify his critique of classical liberalism even more.

After Stalin’s death, Tito and the new Congress of the Communist Party in the USSR began to make amends. The two countries opened up trade between one another, and the aggressive rhetoric from both sides died down. In 1956, Tito made a speech to the twentieth

Congress, saying, “The visit of your leaders, Comrades Khrushchev, Bulganin, and Mikoyan, to our country last year, in 1955, and the announcement of the so-called Belgrade Declaration, not only ushered in a new period in the development of relations between our two countries and our relations with the other countries of people's democracy, but it also had a powerful, positive influence on the development of international relations”(8). In the end, what was true at the beginning of this process is true at the conclusion of it. The fact that the USSR was the most powerful socialist state influenced Tito’s own ideological path in one way or another, leading to Yugoslavia’s ultimately tumultuous existence.

References

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