

Geoffrey Swain, *Tito: a Biography*, 'Communist Lives' Series, I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd.. London, 2011. pp. 219. ISBN 978-1-84511-727-6. Reviewed by Antonia Young.

From the outset, Geoffrey Swain details Tito's rise to power and how his life experiences prepared him for leadership. Revolt against Hungarian occupation in the villages of his native Croatian region of Zagorje left deep impressions on the 11-year-old Tito. Swain sees these as the source driving Tito's career, eventually leading him to power in post-Second World War Yugoslavia. Although he only attended school for four years, his awareness of local political revolt served him for life. Conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian army in 1913 and the youngest sergeant-major in his regiment, he was transferred to the Serbian Front, then the Russian Front. There Tito was wounded and taken prisoner, escaping in 1917. After the Revolution, he joined the International Red Guard on the Trans-Siberian railway. On return to Croatia, it was no longer a part of the Kingdom of Hungary, but part of the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Tito's Russian experiences served him well; he gained recognition as a leading communist, that encouraging him to 'Bolshevize' the Croatian Communist party.

By the time of World War II, the Yugoslav Communist Party had become 'something of a role model for other parties to follow' (p. 27). The author provides a very detailed analysis of Tito's political manoeuvres throughout his life, in order to balance his own ideals with the views and goals of changing allies and a continuously rebellious Croatia.

From the time of Tito's return to Croatia, and throughout his leadership in Yugoslavia, frequent nationalist activities ran counter to the aims and ideals of the

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larger Yugoslavia to which each nation belonged. Swain puts these tensions into historical perspective throughout the book; from the actions of Mihailović against the partisans during the Second World War through to the effects of the new constitution of 1974 which allowed Tito an unlimited term in office, as President for Life (by then he was already aged 82).

Summer 1942, the formative period of the founding of Tito's Yugoslavia, was a time when young people started to train, ready for post-war reconstruction, such as trainee nurses, who could prevent the spread of typhus, and to get uncontaminated water to all villages. Tito's partisans worked with some assistance from Moscow and he was regularly in touch with that city, taking instructions from it. But this was not always willingly or without questioning. In particular they were not in agreement concerning the assistance offered from England, since the Soviet Union was more accepting of Yugoslav monarchy in exile, while Tito was more critical.

Milovan Djilas worked closely with Tito and was full of praise for his actions. But later their views diverged, for example (in 1943) over the nationalistic tendencies of Croatia. After the Yugoslav capitulation to Germany, Tito asked for Allied assistance and was flown to Bari. Djilas conveyed Stalin's warning to Tito about the intentions of the British. However, the British succeeded in getting Tito's agreement on a post-war settlement, whereby the people's liberation movement undertook not to aggravate the situation concerning the king and the monarchy. Croatia remained a problem to Tito throughout his life as leader in Yugoslavia. For a period there was discussion of a possible Federation including Bulgaria, with Stalin's support. However this support waned, and the idea never took practical shape.

There was an early intention to incorporate Albania into Yugoslavia, and Enver Hoxha actually begged Tito, in 1946, for it—partly in order to have a stronger

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defence against 'an imperialist attack'. At the same time Hoxha wanted to support the Greek communists and the fact that Tito instructed Yugoslav Army units to defend Greek communist bases in Albania, without informing Stalin, or even consulting with Hoxha, led to the split from the Soviet Union.

Swain gives an extensive account of the development of the Workers' Self-Management and Peasants' Co-operative systems. At the time this was seen to be a remarkable and innovative development of Communism. The development led to an attack on 'bureaucracy', while stressing local initiative. In 1952, the success of the system was celebrated at the Sixth Congress of the Yugoslav Communist Party, where, in order to signify continuity with Marx, the Party was henceforth known as the League of Communists. The concern for the Marxian idea of the 'withering away of the state' was frequently discussed and caused disagreement over decades, a concept on which Tito himself changed his thinking.

During the Khrushchev era, Tito was hopeful that the earlier strong links with the Soviet Union could become a reality; however, as Swain shows in detail, there were many complicating factors and less than collaborative allies. As a result the efforts to maintain good relations were constantly being challenged. While Tito felt he was playing a crucial role in the de-Stalinisation of the world communist movement, the Soviet Union was moving slower than he was.

The events of the 1950s and 1960s in both Hungary and Czechoslovakia are carefully analysed, Swain places them in context alongside Tito's manoeuvres to influence power struggles in Moscow, following his earlier concern to support Khrushchev as his best ally in the Soviet Union. Swain sees these events as turning points for Tito's hopes for the Soviet Union ever to significantly reform its mode of

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Communism. However, Tito's use of purges, rather than debate, also followed Stalinist models. Swain details these changes of course after the 1968 crackdown.

In 1968, the philosopher editors of the journal *Praxis* had been denounced for fomenting student unrest. Shortly after this there were fears that the Croatian cultural organization, *Matice Hrvatska* (Croatian Cadre), was giving too much attention to nationalist sentiments. The 1970s was a time of rising commerce and finance in Yugoslavia, while the importance of the blue-collar workers fell. A counter movement to re-instate the strength of working people called for reorganization of the Communist Party contrary to Tito's ideals. There was restoration of centralized planning and as relations with the Soviet Union deteriorated, so interest in the non-aligned movement increased again, such that non-alignment became a key policy in the decade. By the 1970s, Tito had acquired thirty-two official residences and many expensive assets. Without a family life, his last years were spent out of touch with those to whom he had been close. In the year before his final illness he put in place a system of rotating chairmanship of the Presidium between leaders of the six federal republics.

Unless readers are thoroughly familiar with exact dates of events and significant meetings, they might struggle to have a clear understanding of sequences, especially since references are often given only to months and days, omitting the year. For this reason also, an additional tool for clarification would have been a timeline at the start of the book. Nevertheless, the book supplies very full and careful analysis of the many political issues that Tito addressed throughout his life, with ample bibliographical references. However there is no separate Bibliography, containing these.

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