

YUGOSLAVIA, TITO AND THE "PARTISANS"

LOUIS ADAMIC

YUGOSLAVIA was invaded by the Axis on April 6, 1941. On April 17 the Yugoslav premier authorized the signing of a capitulation agreement with the German High Command. Most of the government, with the king and his entourage, fled the country, leaving it to fate, chaos and the enemy. But the Yugoslav people did not capitulate. Instead, they are writing one of the most magnificent chapters in the history of human grandeur.

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The chapter really begins on March 27, 1941, when the Yugoslavs, surrounded on all sides by the Axis, suddenly overthrew their government in Belgrade, a dictatorship which two days earlier had signed a pact with Hitler. In the March rejection of collaboration, and the April refusal to yield to force, lie the seeds of the grass-root Partisan-Liberation movement, which carries within itself more meaning and promise for the future than anything else of which I now know.

During the three years between the two Aprils, the Yugoslav people have fought the occupation forces tooth and nail, by day and by night, with blood, bluff, ingenuity and courage. To-day the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, better known as Partisans, number between 250,000 and 300,000. They have freed approximately half of Yugoslavia; they have withstood six major Axis offensives; they are now fighting more Nazi troops than are the combined Fifth and Eighth Armies in Italy. According to British sources, they keep about 2 Axis divisions pinned down away from other fronts. That the Yugoslav Partisans have already contributed heavily to victory over the Axis is no longer open to question.

But this is only the half of it. The people of Yugoslavia have established a provisional government, the National Council of Liberation, which acts in the liberated areas. It is the first free government in Hitler's European fortress; its democratic policies and programme furnish the first concrete measures in occupied Europe to put the "Four Freedoms" into action.

How could a small, undeveloped, practically unarmed country, overrun and occupied by the Axis, accomplish the incredible? Perhaps because the people, thrown as they were into a chaotic whirlpool of invasion and internal strife, of disrup-

tion and insecurity, of brutality, theft, starvation, kidnapping and murder, discovered an infinitely powerful motive and method, and an extraordinarily able leader. The motive is double: to rid the land of the Nazis, their collaborators and all their works; and to remake Yugoslavia into a country where everybody will have the chance to develop to his fullest capacity. The method is the application of militant democracy. The leader is Josip Brozovich, known to the world as Tito.

For a long time the West believed that Yugoslavia's amazing resistance was due to General Drazha Mikhailovich, minister of war in the Yugoslav government-in-exile. During the last six months, however, the facts have begun to emerge in the press, and with them, the reasons for the false "build-up" of Mikhailovich.

To understand what has been going on, we have to take a quick look at pre-war Yugoslavia. Since 1929 the country had been a dictatorship with all the trimmings: an extremely restricted franchise, a large, well-organized secret police, a divide-and-rule technique which brewed discord and persecution among national and religious groups, setting Serbian against Croatian and Slovenian, setting Roman Catholic against Greek Orthodox.

There were other lines of cleavage. Yugoslavia is an agricultural country, about 80 per cent of whose people are peasants. There was a terrific gap between the poverty of the peasants and the luxury of the small and corrupt ruling class. The ruling class—higher government officials, army officers, clergy, politicians, merchants—cared little about their welfare; in fact the peasants were referred to as "cattle without tails." But the upper class was not entirely its own master either. Foreign diplomatic pressures, foreign capital and interests, twitched a good many strings in Yugoslavia. A man couldn't climb to the top unless he had the "right connections" at home and abroad. And, in the scramble toward success, he had to imitate the "right people"; he *had* to exploit his own countrymen. That was inevitable in the life of the pre-war Balkans.

There was another factor. Practically all the army officers were Serbians. So were most of the key men in government and business. To these men, Serbia was the heart, the central core, of Yugoslavia. To them, the country was only a "Greater Serbia," and they had little use for Croats and Slovenians. This "Greater Serbia" fantasy had a lot to do with the Mik-

hailovich legend, assiduously constructed by the government-in-exile.

Under the apparently smooth dictatorial surface, pre-war Yugoslavia was torn in countless directions by all sorts of conflicting, dividing forces: regional and religious discrimination, graft, corrupt politics, capital-labor struggles, carpet-bagging, oppression, assassination. But there were also democratic forces which had long been engaged in a dogged, uphill struggle for a workable constitution, for a bill of rights, for union. And there were the plain people, the great bulk of the population, whose refusal to give up is the backbone and the substance of the Partisan movement.

When the country officially collapsed on April 17, many soldiers and officers of the capitulating army melted away with their guns into the mountains and woods. And, as the invasion progressed, civilians also melted into the woods. Little groups of people sprang up everywhere, sporadically and spontaneously, determined to fight the occupation with everything they had—mostly pitchforks, knives, bare hands, indomitable courage and a burning idea. Groups formed in the cities too, and various national leaders began to try to organize the struggle for freedom.

Two principal resistance movements got started about the same time, directly after the country's collapse. Among the soldiers in the hills was Drazha Mikhailovich, then a colonel and the chief officer still at large. He organized some of the soldiers and, with them as a nucleus, set about recruiting civilians. He is said to have had at one time a force of 300,000 men. But his main tactical idea was to hold off as much as possible from fighting the invaders, and to concentrate on training an army which would go into action when and if the Anglo-Americans should open a campaign in Yugoslavia. Mikhailovich's political idea was right in line with that of the government-in-exile: to return to the pre-war regime in Yugoslavia, which was to become more of a "Greater Serbia" than ever.

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That these two ideas did not satisfy the Yugoslav people is amply demonstrated by the history and present status of the Mikhailovich—the royal government—movement. Let us see what the British have to say about it. Since the British and American governments have done everything possible to back the Yugoslav government-in-exile, they cannot be accused

of undue prejudice against Mikhailovich and partiality for the Partisans. Rather tardily and with some reluctance, they have recently admitted that, in the words of Mr. Churchill, "Of course, the partisans of Marshal Tito are the only people who are doing any effective fighting against the Germans now." That "now" is slightly misleading; it is well over two years since Mikhailovich has done any effective fighting against the Germans. Instead, and again in Mr. Churchill's words, "Some of his commanders made accommodations with Italian and German troops." "Partisan activities upset his commanders' accommodations with the enemy. He endeavored to suppress them."

This means that some of Mikhailovich's commanders collaborated with the Nazis and Fascists. They did so, for one thing, to obtain weapons with which to "suppress" the Partisans. Mikhailovich has repeatedly opened battle against them, trying his best to wipe out what he called "the Communist bandits." The depth of the chasm separating him from his people's movement is marked by a famous Partisan story. In October '41, before Tito's name was a household—and fox-hole—word, the Partisan leader visited Mikhailovich twice, in an attempt to coordinate their separate resistances. Mikhailovich is said to have thought him a Russian general and, when informed of the truth some time later, to have exclaimed, "If I'd known who he was, I would have shot the Red."

Moreover, it must be admitted that until the summer of '43 neither the British Foreign Office, through which passed the dispatches released by the government-in-exile, nor the British and American press, made any effort to correct that view. Happily, of late the picture has changed. According to British figures, Mikhailovich's forces now number between 6,000 and 15,000 men. They are almost completely inactive, left alone in certain mountain areas. Mikhailovich's star as the heroic savior of his people fizzled out in futility, fanaticism and fratricide.

The course of the Partisan-Liberation movement is far more auspicious. It developed from the spontaneous guerrilla resistance of the people who, when the country fell, began pouring into the woods and mountains—all kinds of people: Serbians, Croatians, Slovenians, Bosnians, Macedonians, Montenegrins; Catholics, Orthodox, Moslems, Jews; people of different parties; Democrats, Independents, Agrarians, Socialists, Communists; men and women, boys and girls; peasants, workers,

writers, shoemakers, teachers, fishermen, lawyers, housewives with babies, doctors, priests—people by the thousands, then ten of thousands, then hundreds of thousands.

They armed themselves by raiding local gendarmeries, or killing a German or Italian and taking his weapons. In Kragujevats two men with empty rifles held up ten quisling policemen and made off with their guns and bullets. Somewhere else a thousand guerrillas, armed with wooden lances, fell upon a German garrison by night, in order to get arms. Everywhere the guerrillas harrassed the invader, sniping at him, slitting his throat behind a hedge, swooping down on him at unexpected times and places, blowing up his supply trains, stealing his provisions, and always helping themselves to his munitions of war. It was, root and branch, the mass uprising of a people. And it has remained a people's movement.

On April 22, '41, five days after Yugoslavia's capitulation, the first National Liberation Front was formed in Slovenia. Simultaneously, toward the end of April, Tito began to try to bring some sort of union out of the country's seething chaos.

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Tito—Josip Brozovich—was well equipped for the task. He was born in 1890 to a poverty-stricken peasant family. His father was Croatian; his mother, Slovenian. In 1914 he was drafted into the Austro-Hungarian army. Taken prisoner and sent to Russia, he joined the Communists and fought in the Russian Revolution. In 1924 he returned to Yugoslavia, became head of the metal workers' union, took the underground name of Tito (the Yugoslav Communist Party had been outlawed in 1921). Five years later he was arrested by the Belgrade regime's secret police, underwent their special brand of torture, and spent four years in prison. On his release, he went abroad again, where he helped to organize the International Brigades of the Spanish Civil War. Finally he returned to Yugoslavia, to prepare against *der Tag*.

Added to this hard-won experience, invaluable to Yugoslav resistance, Tito has qualities which would make him an outstanding leader in any man's language. He has that curious blend of courage, character, integrity and principle which Americans call "guts." He is a man of heart and understanding, loved and trusted by his followers. High officials of the Allies say he shows uncanny generalship. That he has rallied together people in all branches of Yugoslav life indicates the quality

of his statesmanship. Most important of all, however, he saw from the beginning that this is a people's war, and he fought it accordingly. This is the one point on which Tito is completely uncompromising. To the rest of the world, perhaps his signal achievement of long-range influence is the demonstration that Communists and non-Communists can work effectively together.

In May of '41, Tito, already badly wanted by Himmler, who knew his record, made his way to a Belgrade flat, through streets patrolled by Nazis with tommy-guns, to confer with Dr. Ivan Ribar, widely known as a progressive member of the Democratic party, and a few other leaders. A programme was drawn up; secret proclamations soon appeared on city walls. The news began to spread. In June the Partisans opened active fighting.

Over the summer, as organization and military tactics improved, more and more of the originally isolated guerrilla bands came together to harry the Nazis on an increasing scale. Reprisals only sent more and more people in town and village, mountain and forest, to join the Partisans. In August the Supreme Command was reorganized to include all Yugoslavia. By November of the following year, the movement had grown so strong that the Partisans created a regular army from the previous loose guerrilla units. At the same time, an "Anti-Fascist Assembly for the People's Liberation in Yugoslavia" created executive and legislative procedures for governing the liberated areas. In December '43, a formal provisional government was established, the National Council of Liberation. Of what might be called its cabinet, the National Committee of Liberation, Tito is president. He is also Marshal of Yugoslavia, Supreme Commander of the National Liberation Army and Partisan Detachments of Yugoslavia, and a Commander-in-Chief of the Allies. An Anglo-American mission, headed by Brigadier-General Fitzroy H. R. MacLean, has been with Tito for several months. A Soviet mission of 22 officers, under Lieutenant-General Korneyeff, a well-known Russian Army commander, arrived early in March '44. There is a Yugoslav mission in Cairo, assigned to the Allied headquarters for the Middle East.

Tito's military and political ideas are aptly summed up in the Partisan-Liberation Front slogan: "Death to Fascism. Liberty to the People." The Partisans didn't wait for an Anglo-American invasion; they went on the principle: "Hit the Nazi wherever and whenever you find him." This takes highly

mobile troops; in a year one brigade covered 2,800 miles on foot, another has marched 75 miles in 36 hours over mountainous territory with one half-hour stop. Tito used the regular army to hold the Germans along the front while his guerrilla units hit them in the rear with swift, terrible punches. Some of his Partisan detachments are now fighting miles within Austria and Hungary.

The army, as we have seen, has the broadest possible base. It is open to everybody who is willing to fight Nazis. Its ranks are filled with people of all religions, nationalities, political shades (except the die-hard supporters of the pre-war regime). Over half—58 per cent—are Serbian. About one-quarter are women, a few of whom are company commanders. They dress and fight like the men, and endure the same hardships.

The bulk of the army's equipment was captured from the enemy, although a few Partisan factories are turning out mines, grenades and small ammunition, and Allied supplies have now begun to trickle in. Since the army has practically no airforce, the Germans didn't need anti-aircraft weapons; and the Partisans have little with which to ward off German air attacks. They have a few anti-tank guns and a small number of tanks. Fuel is wholly captured stock. The army is moderately well equipped with rifles and small arms, but very deficient in artillery. To reach their maximum effectiveness in the war, the Partisans need everything: planes, tanks, arms, food, medical supplies, and clothing.

They wear a mixed conglomeration of garments. What uniforms they possess have been captured or picked up somehow: German, Italian, Ustashi, Hungarian, Bulgarian, pre-war Yugoslav, even British battle dress. In this patched-up motley the only touch in common is the red five-pointed star in every Partisan cap. The same star, added to the old Yugoslav flag, makes the Partisan flag, which is flown with those of the various regions. People take for granted that the star is of Russian derivation, and it is probably true; but one Partisan fighter says it is a coincidence, that the Partisan star goes back to the Liberation movement of 1848 against Austria and Hungary. He says it is the morning star, Danica, "which is always red."

There are no salaries in the Partisan army, and no induction centers. The age limit is 14 to 65. Recruits over 18 get two hours' rifle instruction before they are ready for action; under 18, they are drilled for three weeks. Officers, however, are trained for two months in one of several military academies Tito has set up.

Casualties incapacitated for further fighting are assigned to do war work in their home villages, or to an organization called "Military Forces in the Rear." Very recently, several thousand soldiers and civilians have been sent for recuperation to camps in the Middle East.

As a rule, the Partisans eat twice a day. Food is very scarce—plenty of meat, but little bread and potatoes, no fats, sugar or coffee. During some of the toughest moments, Tito and his soldiers have subsisted on raw meat, leaves and grass. Once an Allied officer with them had to live for 24 hours on three apples. When food runs specially short, the men eat first, then the officers, then the high command.

On the march, in battle, and at rest, the Partisan armies sing. Blood-curdling songs about what they will do to the Nazis; songs of the future, about how they will rebuild Yugoslavia; topical songs like the one a year ago which ran "O Chetniks, servants of the Italians, you cannot save the Italian railroads from destruction." They sing about Tito: "Comrade Tito, O White Violet, the whole of our youth follows you." Their favorite is the old haunting Slavic air, "Hey, Slavs, in vain the depth of hell threatens, O Slavs, you are still alive."

Each Partisan brigade has its chaplains—Moslem, Jewish, Orthodox, Catholic. The bearded patriarchs march and fight with the troops. At one point during the German "fifth offensive" Tito, his High Command, and four divisions were completely encircled by seven German and five satellite divisions. For a week the circle tightened. Then the Serbian priest, Vladimir Zechevich (now minister of the interior), collected 600 wounded who were going to die anyway and smashed through the German lines. Perhaps this incident explains the Partisan slogan: "A beard is worth a brigade."

Although the battalion is the basic fighting unit, the social unit is the company. To each company, as well as to larger and smaller units, is attached a political officer who represents the liberation movement as a whole, not any particular party. These officers preside at the weekly meeting of each company, at which complaints are aired, political and military strategy analyzed, and a thousand subjects discussed. Also, before and after every battle, the company meets to engage in explanation, suggestion, praise or criticism of that particular action.

The cultural education committee elected by each company sees that everybody can read and write, prepares lectures, distributes what books are available. Some companies have their own monthly newspapers; there are battalion and division

papers as well. Everyone around listens avidly to the daily radio bulletins. The average Partisan soldier is remarkably well informed in considerable detail as to events in the rest of the world. Tito himself has a special radio service of the world's press; for one thing, he knows exactly what has been printed in America about Yugoslavia.

What is going on in the army is in many ways hardly distinguishable from what is going on among civilians. And in this Yugoslavia is almost unique, for war usually brings a spiritual gulf dividing the fighting men from the people at home. The gulf, product of an inevitable disparity in experience which affects even the most imaginative, grows widest in those countries whose battle lines are farthest away from home soil. It is narrower in countries whose armies fight on their own territories. Its growth can be checked by strong unity of purpose, by a goal so valuable and compelling that it transcends the difference between civilian and military experience. So far in World War II, the gulf is widest in the United States, narrowest in Russia.

In Yugoslavia's Liberation movement there is no spiritual gulf between army and non-army. The civilian population has suffered as much, and in almost the same way, as the fighting forces. There is the closest intercourse between them, the closest similarity in experience; there is identity of purpose; and the chief weapon of both is the shining knowledge of what they are, together, fighting for. "Death to Fascism. Liberty to the People" is a living reality to soldier and civilian alike.

Tito has established universal suffrage, and the government carries on its work from the bottom up. Men and women in the village elect district committees to govern locally. These committees vote for representatives to regional committees, by whom are elected delegates to the state councils. The state councils elect representatives to the National Council, a law-making body equivalent to Congress or the British Parliament. The National Council elects a kind of Senate, at present composed of 67 members, of which Ivan Ribar is president. The National Council also elects a president, and five vice-presidents representing the five principal national groups. The top men in the government—the president, vice-presidents, ministers—represent all anti-fascist forces in Yugoslavia. Six are Serbian, five are Croatian, three are Slovenian, one is Bosnian and one is Montenegrin (he is a Serbian by nationality).

Along with universal suffrage, Tito has instituted state schools which adults must attend when not actually fighting.

There is also a state theatre whose actors go on tour in political sketches as well as other plays. The Liberation movement is fighting ignorance as hard as Nazis. In school, press and theatre, in the army, in village and town, people are learning by experience what unity and equality can be like. And they learn fast. By this time the people of the Liberation Front are politically mature. They know what fascism is and is not, and what liberty is and is not. With eyes turned to the future, they intend to make Yugoslavia a social, economic and political democracy. They are prepared to cooperate, and perhaps to federate, with other nations aiming at the same goal. As a start, Tito is in constant touch with liberation movements in Albania, Bulgaria, Greece and Italy.

From the beginning the Partisan movement has drawn much of its inspiration from the U.S.S.R. The Russian military record has brought joy and hope to the Yugoslavs, and the proud knowledge that, in addition to fighting the Nazis on their own account, they were helping Russia by keeping so many Axis forces away from the Russian front. Yugoslavs (Slavs of the South) have always felt a deep kinship with the Slavs in the North.

But it is not only that; the Partisans know how successfully the Soviet Union has handled its minority problems—a vital point in Yugoslavia. They know also that the U.S.S.R. has freed Russia from western encroachment, and that its aim is to develop Russian resources, human as well as material, for the benefit of the people themselves. However, Yugoslavs are looking in other directions too. In fact, they are looking about as far, and as far ahead, as they can see. They intend to base their new system of government on principles derived from the governments of Switzerland, the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R. Up until a few years before the war, America was the prime source of inspiration; but that rather faded because of our equivocal foreign policy.

The people's movement in Yugoslavia has covered quite a lot of ground in the last three years. It started from scratch—a people, a leader and an idea. The idea, a very old one, has for centuries shed light across the turbulent world, beckoning man onward over broken ground, through dawn and through darkness, through cloud and through fear. It is the grandest, noblest idea he has yet conceived: the essential kinship, equality and value of all human beings. In so far as a people and a leader release and augment each other's strength to draw nearer to the idea, they go in the direction of man's highest promise, and give new heart to those who stumble and falter along the way.