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Episode #084

Tito | The Man Who Stood Up To Stalin

28th August, 2020



[00:00:04] Hello, hello, hello, and welcome to English Learning for Curious Minds by Leonardo English, the show where you can listen to fascinating stories and learn weird and wonderful things about the world at the same time as improving your English.

[00:00:22] I'm Alastair Budge and today we are going to be talking about Josep Broz, otherwise known as Tito.

[00:00:31] He was the man who rule

d Yugoslavia for almost 40 years, survived 21 [assassination¹](#) attempts, and was one of the few people to stand up to Stalin and [live to tell the tale²](#).

[00:00:47] It's a fascinating story, and I hope you'll enjoy it.

¹ the murder (often of someone famous)

² to survive (a dangerous experience)



[00:00:52] This episode was actually a request from a member of Leonardo English, an awesome Spanish guy called Daniel.

[00:01:00] And if you would like to request topics for episodes, plus get access to all the bonus content, subtitles, transcripts, and key vocabulary, as well as joining a community of curious minds from all over the world, then I'd definitely recommend checking out becoming a member of Leonardo English.

[00:01:20] The place to go for that is the website, which is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:01:27] So, Tito.

[00:01:29] Our story starts in 1892, in a small village called Kumrovec, in what was then Austro-Hungary, but is now part of Croatia.

[00:01:41] Josip Broz was the seventh son of a family of 15 children. His parents were peasants, although they were by no means [destitute](#)³, they weren't completely [impoverished](#)⁴. They had a reasonably large farm, and a house of their own.

³ without any possessions

⁴ very poor



[00:02:01] Much of Josip Broz's early life is [debated](#)⁵, from how many brothers and sisters he had, to where he was actually born. We'll [skip](#)⁶ over much of this because it isn't really that important for the purposes of our story.

[00:02:18] When he was about 15 years old, Broz left home, and [wandered around](#)⁷ a series of towns and cities in central Europe, doing [odd-jobs](#)⁸, repairing bicycles, working in restaurants, and generally doing manual jobs.

[00:02:37] Everything changed in 1913 when he was forced to join the Austro-Hungarian army.

[00:02:45] Austro-Hungary still had [conscription](#)⁹, as did most European countries, and the young Broz became a soldier at the age of 21, a year before World War I broke out.

[00:02:59] During the war, he [distinguished himself](#)¹⁰, and it was here that he first started displaying his organisational skills and bravery.

⁵ contested

⁶ move over

⁷ moved around without purpose

⁸ small jobs

⁹ when people are made to join the armed forces

¹⁰ to stand out



[00:03:10] He was sent to the Eastern front to fight against Russia, and in 1915 he was almost killed by a Russian [lancer¹¹](#), a soldier on a horse carrying a large sharp [pole¹²](#).

[00:03:25] Although this [incident¹³](#) nearly was the end of the young Broz, it proved to be a [defining¹⁴](#) moment in his life.

[00:03:35] Injured, he was captured by the Russians, and sent to a Russian prisoner of war camp.

[00:03:42] It was here that he discovered communism, or at least, became [sympathetic¹⁵](#) to the communist organisations that were soon to seize power in Russia.

[00:03:54] When he returned 'home', he found that the country he had grown up in, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was no more, and the country he returned to was called the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.

[00:04:11] The name of this country was changed to Yugoslavia in 1929, and it included the countries we now know as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

¹¹ a soldier carrying a long, sharp stick

¹² a long stick

¹³ an event

¹⁴ very important

¹⁵ (of a cause) understanding



[00:04:30] Now, we could obviously talk for hours about the difficulties that Yugoslavia had, and the difficulties of uniting seven different countries under one ruler, but let's stick to the most important things to remember when it comes to Tito.

[00:04:50] Firstly, power in this new country, the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes was **concentrated**¹⁶ in the hands of the Serbs.

[00:05:01] Secondly, different **factions**¹⁷, different groups of people within this new kingdom **favoured**¹⁸ different approaches. Some favoured centralised control from the capital, Belgrade, while others favoured more **autonomy**¹⁹ for the different regions.

[00:05:23] So when Josep Broz returned 'home', he found that the country he had left was no more, and the country that had replaced it was a series of different **factions**, different groups, all with their own **agenda**²⁰ and a different view of what would be in the best interests of their people.

[00:05:48] He also returned home a communist, and joined the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, the CPY, which was formed in 1919.

¹⁶ mainly held (by)

¹⁷ groups within a larger group

¹⁸ preferred

¹⁹ the right to rule itself

²⁰ the things that a party or group wants to achieve



[00:05:59] But despite the CPY's increasing appeal in Yugoslavia, it was [banned²¹](#), it was [outlawed²²](#), in 1921, and Broz and his communist [comrades²³](#) continued to work underground, organising gatherings, spreading the communist message, and operating below the surface.

[00:06:24] He ended up being arrested in 1928, after [allegedly²⁴](#) being found with bomb-making equipment, and was thrown into prison for 5 years.

[00:06:38] When he was released, in 1933, it was time for a new Josep Broz.

[00:06:45] He adopted the name 'Tito', which he was known by for the rest of his life.

[00:06:52] He quickly [rose through the ranks²⁵](#) of the CPY, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, which was still illegal at the time.

[00:07:02] His talent was noticed by the Comintern, the Russian organisation that promoted communism abroad and supported communist parties outside Russia - they saw that Broz could be a useful [asset²⁶](#) in Yugoslavia.

²¹ not allowed

²² not allowed

²³ friends

²⁴ according to some people

²⁵ got promoted

²⁶ a valuable person



[00:07:18] In August 1937, he became the acting General Secretary of the CPY, making him the most important member of the communist party in Yugoslavia, which was still illegal, remember, it didn't become a legal party until after World War Two.

[00:07:40] Tito was given this position after his [predecessor²⁷](#), the person who came before him, was [purged²⁸](#), was killed by Stalin, and it has even been [alleged²⁹](#) that Tito may have had something to do with getting rid of his [predecessor](#).

[00:07:59] Whether that's true or not, it certainly was very convenient for Tito.

[00:08:06] But then World War Two broke out.

[00:08:09] In 1941, Yugoslavia was invaded by the [Axis³⁰](#) forces, mainly Germany and Italy, but also supported by Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. With a weak army, and a weak state, Yugoslavia quickly [crumbled³¹](#).

[00:08:28] When the Axis forces invaded, Tito went into full underground mode and became a [partisan³²](#) fighter.

²⁷ the person who held a position before someone else

²⁸ to get rid of a person from an organisation

²⁹ see allegedly

³⁰ the countries (Germany, Japan, Italy & others) who fought against the Allies in World War Two

³¹ fell

³² the groups that fight against an occupying military force



[00:08:37] There was a strong, [partisan](#) movement that was continuing to fight against the invaders.

[00:08:43] And the interesting thing about this time was that the different [partisan](#) groups were using the [chaos](#)³³ as a way to try to [further](#)³⁴ their own aims and ambitions.

[00:08:57] Tito, as leader of the CPY, and supported by the Comintern, emerged as the most successful of all of these Yugoslav [partisan](#) groups.

[00:09:09] The main rival to Tito, and to the CPY, was something called the Chetniks, who were a Serbian group that had actually [collaborated](#)³⁵ with their Nazi invaders, and were supporting the Serbian government.

[00:09:26] Their aim was for a return to the [throne](#)³⁶ of the Serbian king, King Peter II.

[00:09:34] However, the Allies saw the [superior](#)³⁷ organisation of Tito and the CPY, and said that it should be Tito's [troops](#)³⁸ who should attack the [Axis](#) forces.

³³ total confusion

³⁴ develop, advance

³⁵ worked together with another group or person

³⁶ the chair used by a king or queen

³⁷ better

³⁸ soldiers



[00:09:47] And in 1944, Tito's army entered Belgrade and fought off the Nazis.

[00:09:56] Long story short, after the end of World War II, the CPY was in a position of power in Yugoslavia. It was seen not only to have successfully fought off the Nazis, but also to have done it independently, without the help of Moscow.

[00:10:17] That put the CPY, and Tito, in a pretty strong **bargaining**³⁹ position. Unlike other communist countries in Europe, they didn't owe Russia anything.

[00:10:31] Tito was elected prime minister of Yugoslavia in 1945 with an **overwhelming**⁴⁰ majority. He was viewed as the man who had saved the country, and it was quite right that he should take his place as its leader.

[00:10:49] The king was **ousted**⁴¹, he was removed, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was declared.

[00:10:57] Back in Moscow, Stalin was a little **wary**⁴² of Tito, and the independence that he **evidently**⁴³ wanted to have for Yugoslavia.

³⁹ discussing in order to reach an agreement

⁴⁰ very large

⁴¹ forced to leave

⁴² cautious (about someone)

⁴³ clearly and easy to see



[00:11:09] And from the end of the Second World War until his death in 1953, Stalin became more and more frustrated with Tito.

[00:11:20] Communist Russia was the ‘[mothership](#)⁴⁴’. It supported lots of [satellite countries](#)⁴⁵, and was trying to spread communism all over the world. But these countries, perhaps with the exception of China, were [subservient](#)⁴⁶ to Russia, they followed Moscow’s orders, and when Stalin told them to do something, they generally did it.

[00:11:47] Tito, and Yugoslavia, didn’t.

[00:11:51] Moscow wanted Yugoslavia to be integrated into the East European Communist bloc. Tito refused.

[00:12:00] The Moscow way was for the central government to have complete control over people’s lives. In Yugoslavia, although it was still a communist country, Tito relaxed quite a lot of central controls, and allowed more regional control.

[00:12:19] Tito pursued independent foreign policy for Yugoslavia, [courting](#)⁴⁷ Albania and Greece, while Moscow wanted to have complete control over all foreign relations conducted by every communist country

⁴⁴ the larger ship from which smaller ships are launched

⁴⁵ countries that are dependent on another, larger one

⁴⁶ willing to do what someone else says

⁴⁷ trying to form an alliance with



[00:12:35] Tito didn't just annoy Stalin, he became a threat.

[00:12:41] If there was this one communist power that existed largely ignoring Moscow, this would be an example to the other communist powers that they could do it as well.

[00:12:55] And Joseph Stalin, as we all know, was not the sort of man that you wanted to **get on the wrong side of**⁴⁸. He murdered hundreds of thousands of his own people, and millions died as a result of his decisions.

[00:13:12] You can probably imagine what happened next.

[00:13:16] Stalin tried to get rid of Tito in various ways. He started just by criticising him and trying to **purge** him, hoping that his **fellow**⁴⁹ communists in Yugoslavia would **turn on**⁵⁰ him.

[00:13:32] That didn't work. Tito still held control of the CPY, the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, as well as the military police

[00:13:43] He then kicked the CPY out of Cominform, the European group of ruling communist parties. The idea was that by **isolating**⁵¹ Yugoslavia, he could push Tito out,

⁴⁸ to cause someone to be angry (with you)

⁴⁹ someone who is in the same situation

⁵⁰ suddenly attack (someone)

⁵¹ separating, cutting off



and then replace him with someone who was more friendly, and more willing to be [obedient](#)⁵² to Moscow.

[00:14:06] That didn't work either.

[00:14:09] Tito was a communist, and Yugoslavia was a communist country, but Tito had cleverly [walked the line](#)⁵³ between Moscow and the West.

[00:14:21] Yugoslavia wasn't completely cut off from the West, and so even when it was [sidelined](#)⁵⁴ and cut off by Moscow, it still had this [lifeline](#)⁵⁵ to the West. Unlike the other European communist countries, Moscow wasn't its only hope, which gave it and Tito a lot more [bargaining power](#)⁵⁶.

[00:14:46] Throughout this time, Stalin wasn't just criticising Tito and hoping the problem was going to go away, he was actively trying to [assassinate](#)⁵⁷ him, and there were a reported 21 [assassination](#) attempts in total on Tito's life.

[00:15:05] This caused Tito to write in a letter to Stalin:

⁵² willing to do what someone else wants

⁵³ managed to balance two different sides

⁵⁴ pushed to the side

⁵⁵ a way of getting help

⁵⁶ the ability of a person or organisation to get what they want

⁵⁷ to kill



[00:15:10] Stop sending people to kill me. We've already captured five of them, one of them with a bomb and another with a rifle. If you don't stop sending killers, I'll send one to Moscow, and I won't have to send a second.

[00:15:26] Stalin died in 1953, officially of a heart attack.

[00:15:34] Interestingly enough, there is a theory that it wasn't a heart attack that killed him, and that Tito actually [made good](#)⁵⁸ on his threat, and Stalin was poisoned by the President of Yugoslavia, by Tito himself.

[00:15:50] It does sound a little [implausible](#)⁵⁹, but having Stalin out of the way was certainly a [relief](#)⁶⁰ for Tito.

[00:15:59] After Stalin's death, there was hope of a [reconciliation](#)⁶¹ with Moscow, and for a while it did look like this was to be a possibility.

[00:16:11] However, Khrushchev, the man who took over from Stalin, proved to be not too much different to his [predecessor](#), and relations between Moscow and Yugoslavia never really [blossomed](#)⁶² again.

⁵⁸ complete

⁵⁹ not believable

⁶⁰ a feeling of comfort when something you don't like is not there any more

⁶¹ when two parties become friends again

⁶² become more beautiful



[00:16:28] Instead of [leaning](#)⁶³ towards Moscow, Tito formed alliances with other semi-neutral countries, such as Egypt and India.

[00:16:39] The world was in a state of you're either communist or you're non-communist, and Tito, despite being the leader of a communist country, managed to navigate this situation quite successfully.

[00:16:54] Tito was repeatedly re-elected President of Yugoslavia, and in 1963 the [constitution](#)⁶⁴ was changed, and he was elected President for life, so he had an unlimited term.

[00:17:10] Compared to other communist countries in Europe, life for normal people in Yugoslavia was actually quite good. They enjoyed more freedoms, less fear of [persecution](#)⁶⁵ and of being packed away on a train to a labour camp, and a standard of living that was better than that of their [contemporaries](#)⁶⁶ in other countries in the Soviet bloc.

[00:17:36] However, and there is always a however when it comes to a country's leader who is elected President for life and rules for almost 40 years, his reign was not without its victims.

⁶³ moving

⁶⁴ the set of political principles by which a country is governed

⁶⁵ to treat a people unfairly over a long period of time

⁶⁶ people in the same position as you



[00:17:49] Tito was most definitely an authoritarian. Yugoslavia was not a democracy, he had supreme control, there was a certain [cult of personality](#)⁶⁷ about him, and he was [ruthless](#)⁶⁸ in punishing those who opposed him.

[00:18:09] Tens of thousands of political prisoners were sent to forced labour camps, the most famous of which was an island called Goli Otok, or [Barren](#)⁶⁹ Island, which is off the coast of modern-day Croatia.

[00:18:26] If you [picture](#)⁷⁰ a Croatian island, you might think of beautiful beaches, lovely blue sea, and people generally having a good time.

[00:18:35] Goli Otok was not like this.

[00:18:39] It had practically no [vegetation](#)⁷¹, very strong winds, and contained a prison where Tito would send his rivals, hundreds of whom died working there.

[00:18:53] So Tito was no angel, but he was considered the least bad of any of the communist-era rulers in Europe, and was often [courted](#)⁷² by Western leaders, meeting everyone from Churchill to Willy Brandt, Richard Nixon, and Jimmy Carter.

⁶⁷ when people are encouraged to admire a famous person, often politician

⁶⁸ not worrying about the impact on others

⁶⁹ without plants or trees

⁷⁰ think about

⁷¹ plants

⁷² sought alliances with



[00:19:12] Tito died in 1980, aged 88, and [dignitaries](#)⁷³ from 122 countries came to his funeral.

[00:19:23] When we look back on his legacy, though, it's an interesting one to properly [evaluate](#)⁷⁴, and historians are divided about what exactly he left behind.

[00:19:36] He had managed to keep the country of Yugoslavia alive, and united for the duration of his rule, for almost 40 years.

[00:19:47] Yet 11 years after he died, the country collapsed, and 12 years after he died, it was [plunged](#)⁷⁵ into civil war.

[00:19:58] Obviously now, Yugoslavia is 7 different countries. To [recap](#)⁷⁶, that's Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovenia.

[00:20:13] One argument is that it took a leader like Tito to keep such a [fragmented](#)⁷⁷ nation together, and when he died, there was nobody who was capable of [picking up the mantle](#)⁷⁸, and of doing what he was able to do.

⁷³ important people

⁷⁴ consider

⁷⁵ to quickly fall (into a situation)

⁷⁶ to repeat

⁷⁷ formed of lots of different parts

⁷⁸ to continue a job that someone else was doing



[00:20:29] The other side is that Tito had almost 40 years to truly unite Yugoslavia, to bring its people together and create a true sense of unity in the country.

[00:20:42] He [squandered](#)⁷⁹ it, he missed his chance, and he spent too long trying to do everything - trying to be communist but also friends with western countries, he knew that uniting the Serbs, the Croats, and the Slovenes was an impossible task, yet other than [cracking down on](#)⁸⁰ [dissent](#)⁸¹ and [enforcing](#)⁸² his one view of a unified Yugoslavia, he didn't really do much to fix the problem.

[00:21:13] The legacy of Tito is a complicated one, and not least because it is shared by 7 different countries.

[00:21:21] It says a lot that in the 10 years after his death, so before the [collapse](#)⁸³ of Yugoslavia, his [mausoleum](#)⁸⁴, where he is buried, had been visited by 14 million people.

[00:21:36] But on the 15th anniversary of his death, in 1995, the only people coming to pay their respects at his grave were a few family members and old communists.

⁷⁹ wasted

⁸⁰ becoming more strict (about)

⁸¹ differences of opinion

⁸² making people obey (a law)

⁸³ the sudden fall

⁸⁴ the building where someone important is buried



[00:21:50] The name Tito means different things to different people. If you are from Serbia, you probably think differently about him than if you are from Croatia.

[00:22:03] What is [undeniably⁸⁵](#) true though is that he was a powerful force in post World War II Europe, and without him, the world we live in today may have looked quite different.

[00:22:18] OK then, that is it for Josep Broz, [aka⁸⁶](#) Tito.

[00:22:23] Whatever you think of him, he had a fascinating life, and a huge impact on that area of the world, and Europe more widely.

[00:22:33] As always, I would love to know what you thought of today's episode.

[00:22:36] We have quite a few listeners and members from a few of the countries that formed part of Yugoslavia, so I would especially love to know what you thought of today's episode.

[00:22:49] What do you think of Tito? How has this changed, if at all, over the years?

[00:22:56] And of course, even if you're not from around there, I would still love to know what you think.

[00:23:00] You can email hi - hi@leonardoenglish.com

⁸⁵ definitely true

⁸⁶ Also Known As



[00:23:06] And as a final reminder, if you are looking to improve your English in a more interesting way, to join a community of curious minds from all over the world, and to unlock the transcripts, subtitles, and key vocabulary, then you should definitely check out becoming a member of Leonardo English.

[00:23:24] As a member, you can also request topics, just like Daniel did for today's episode.

[00:23:30] So if that's of interest, and I really hope it is, then the place to go to is leonardoenglish.com.

[00:23:39] You've been listening to English Learning for Curious Minds, by Leonardo English

[00:23:45] I'm Alastair Budge, you stay safe and I'll catch you in the next episode.

[END OF PODCAST]



Key vocabulary

Word	Definition
Assassination	the murder (often of someone famous)
Live to tell the tale	to survive (a dangerous experience)
Destitute	without any possessions
Impoverished	very poor
Debated	contested
Skip	move over
Wandered around	moved around without purpose
Odd-jobs	small jobs
Conscription	when people are made to join the armed forces
Distinguished himself	to stand out
Lancer	a soldier carrying a long, sharp stick
Pole	a long stick



Incident	an event
Defining	very important
Sympathetic	(of a cause) understanding
Concentrated	mainly held (by)
Factions	groups within a larger group
Favoured	preferred
Autonomy	the right to rule itself
Agenda	the things that a party or group wants to achieve
Banned	not allowed
Outlawed	not allowed
Comrades	friends
Allegedly	according to some people
Rose through the ranks	got promoted
Asset	a valuable person
Predecessor	the person who held a position before someone else



Purged	to get rid of a person from an organisation
Alleged	see allegedly
Axis	the countries (Germany, Japan, Italy & others) who fought against the Allies in World War Two
Crumbled	fell
Partisan	the groups that fight against an occupying military force
Chaos	total confusion
Further	develop, advance
Collaborated	worked together with another group or person
Throne	the chair used by a king or queen
Superior	better
Troops	soldiers
Bargaining	discussing in order to reach an agreement
Overwhelming	very large
Ousted	forced to leave
Wary	cautious (about someone)



Evidently	clearly and easy to see
Mothership	the larger ship from which smaller ships are launched
Satellite countries	countries that are dependent on another, larger one
Subservient	willing to do what someone else says
Courting	trying to form an alliance with
Get on the wrong side of	to cause someone to be angry (with you)
Fellow	someone who is in the same situation
Turn on	suddenly attack (someone)
Isolating	separating, cutting off
Obedient	willing to do what someone else wants
Walked the line	managed to balance two different sides
Sidelined	pushed to the side
Lifeline	a way of getting help
Bargaining power	the ability of a person or organisation to get what they want
Assassinate	to kill



Made good	complete
Implausible	not believable
Relief	a feeling of comfort when something you don't like is not there any more
Reconciliation	when two parties become friends again
Blossomed	become more beautiful
Leaning	moving
Constitution	the set of political principles by which a country is governed
Persecution	to treat a people unfairly over a long period of time
Contemporaries	people in the same position as you
Cult of personality	when people are encouraged to admire a famous person, often politician
Ruthless	not worrying about the impact on others
Barren	without plants or trees
Picture	think about
Vegetation	plants
Courted	sought alliances with



Dignitaries	important people
Evaluate	consider
Plunged	to quickly fall (into a situation)
Recap	to repeat
Fragmented	formed of lots of different parts
Picking up the mantle	to continue a job that someone else was doing
Squandered	wasted
Cracking down on	becoming more strict (about)
Dissent	differences of opinion
Enforcing	making people obey (a law)
Collapse	the sudden fall
Mausoleum	the building where someone important is buried
Undeniably	definitely true
AKA	Also Known As



We'd love to get your feedback on this podcast.

What did you like? What could we do better?

What did you struggle to understand?

You can email us at hi@leonardoenglish.com.

