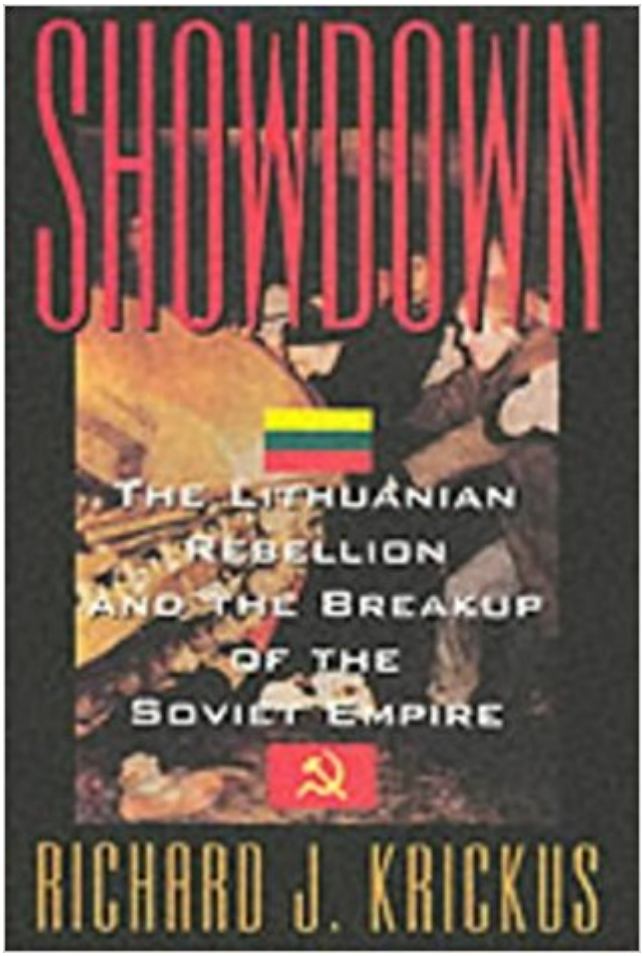
Showdown: The Lithuanian Rebellion And The Breakup Of The Soviet Empire



Synopsis

On January 13, 1991, in the Lithuanian capital of Vilnius, tens of thousands of Lithuanians supported their leader’s declaration of independence from the USSR. The Soviet’s deadly response and the movement’s ultimate success, with its far-reaching consequences, stunned the world. American author and political scientist, Richard J. Krickus, was in Lithuania as an elections monitor during the momentous days leading to independence. His eyewitness account explains how this nation of fewer than four million people set in motion the forces that broke apart the vast Soviet Union. Based on personal knowledge of the dangerous events and the brave Lithuanians involved, this book also explains how America aided this unforeseen catalyst to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Book Information

Hardcover: 244 pages

Publisher: Brassey’s Inc; 1st edition (March 1997)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1574880586

ISBN-13: 978-1574880588

Product Dimensions: 1 x 6.8 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars 4 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #2,942,372 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #60 inÃ Â Books > Travel > Europe > Lithuania #8437 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > European #33521 inÃ Â Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Political Science

Customer Reviews

Political scientist Krickus argues that Lithuania’s secession from the Soviet Union in 1991 was a key (if usually ignored) element in President Gorbachev’s ouster and the demise of the Soviet Union. Krickus provides a concise history of Lithuania, from its formation as a state, to internal conflicts, to its finally being swallowed up by the Soviets after World War II. A long struggle for freedom followed, coming to a head with a 1991 declaration of independence. Soviet troops attempted to crush the rebellion, but international pressure caused the Soviets to acquiesce to Lithuania’s status as a free state. The subsequent turmoil within the Soviet power structure forced Gorbachev out, yet his policy of glasnost, or "new openness," had all but guaranteed the empire’s collapse. Krickus was in

Lithuania during 1991, acting as an elections monitor, and his firsthand experiences, plus the book's clean, vigorous prose, make this a compelling read. Brian McCombie

Lithuania's Sajudis had all the hallmarks - positive and negative - of an anti-colonial national liberation movement, and Richard J. Krickus' book succeeds in its main task as a blow-by-blow recounting of its road to triumph. Written by an American of Lithuanian descent, a national security analyst, and former professor at the US Marine Corps University, his account follows this national and strategic trajectory. Krickus has gone on to become a leading academic propagator of a new cold war with Moscow.I could go on at length in disputing some points, such as his glossing over the Lithuanian Activist Front's 1941 liberation of Vilnius through pogrom and Nazi collaboration; that Brezhnev would have been celebrating the 60th, not 50th anniversary of the Revolution in 1977; and that Russian was not the official language of the Lithuanian SSR - the republic was bilingual, as in Quebec. (The '89 language law was about making Lithuanian the *exclusive* official language - again parallel to Quebec).Krickus' observer role in the 1990 elections rather justifies the view that engaged expatriates and their descendents were part of an ongoing, cold war liberationist agenda, exploiting glasnost to achieve decades-old aims. (VOA = CIA.) As Krickus acknowledges, the American Right in paricular fed Sajudis (as it had Solidarity earlier) with the express goal of causing trouble for the Kremlin, and for Gorbachev whom it especially despised. Krickus' own naivite at being exploited in turn as a propaganda tool by Sajudis activists was rather amusing. But I'll take further issue with three major themes framing his analysis.One, that "ethnicity is vital to a person's self-esteem . . . and is deeply imbedded in one's psyche and not just a peripheral impulse" (p. 21) has no basis in human biology. As Krickus himself recounts, national consciousness in 19th century Lithuania (as elsewhere in early modern Europe) had to be purposely resurrected, molded, grafted and cultivated like a hothouse plant; it did not spring naturally from soul or soil. One had to be "carefully taught," as the song goes. It is therefore, like all modern nationalisms, derivative and not a biological drive yearning for free expression. His own status as a product of the American melting pot underscores this: his Lithuanian heritage had to be consciously polished at home like a relic in amber.Secondly, as in other successful anti-colonial movements, there's mixed evidence that the victorious nationalist resurgance has improved the ethical or economic terrain for any of the parties involved. When ordered to fire on "Soviet people," Moscow's military - as the Soviet Army - backed off at first blood in Vilnius, and balked altogether on the streets of the capital. As the *Russian* Army, it pounded non-Russian Chechnya into the ground and blasted Russian troublemakers in Moscow with tankfire. Post-independence Lithuania has sunk into a depressed backwater rife with

unemployment and religious fundamentalism. Landsbergis is by the way, hardly emerged as a heroic liberation figure; like Vaclav Klaus of Prague, he was no Soviet-era dissident but a sinecured intellectual rising from the woodwork only when safe to do so, taking on a Russian bear already declawed.And third, while the 1990 elections - leading to a Sajudis victory, and the declaration of sovereignty - were no doubt procedurally "free and fair," the amount of outside subsidy and support Sajudis received definitively turned the tide against the genuinely popular Communist Party leader, Algirdas Brazauskas. Gorbachev's naive Soviet view of free elections was blasted out of the water as if by a post-Citizens' United Super-PAC. Krickus downplays this lateral influence - with good reason, as he was part of it. It does ironically seem that Western democracy, rather than role model on a hill, has descended into the soft-money pit of 1990 Lithuania.Krickus' rendering perhaps exaggerates the overall importance of the Vilnius showdown in the final collapse of Soviet power. Tienanmen Square in June of '89 had much to do with inhibiting further repression in the reforming "Communist World", as with the East German party's refusal to crack down on the Leipzig protests. (Note that for all the bloodshed in Beijing, Deng Xiaoping is still lauded as a "great reformer.") Though Lithuania became polarized between Sajudis and the CPSU, there was initially a chance to achieve a "loyal opposition" through Algirdas Brazauskas as head of the Lithuanian CP. Gorbachev botched this not only because of his naivite in believing all residents of the USSR were at heart "good Soviet people," but also in that throughout its history the CPSU rejected the very concept of loyal opposition. Thus when its people were free to express themselves the middle ground quickly evaporated. Gorbachev's recognition of this dilemma came too late to save the situation in Vilnius; perhaps otherwise, this era might have concluded more gracefully for all concerned.Krickus' book is dotted with minor errors as noted, but it's a riveting first-person period account; all the more fascinating when read between the lines.

Krickus, who was on the ground in Lithuania for much of the period, offers a well written and insightful account of the Lithuanian independence movement during the later Gorbachev years. Unlike many foreign observers, he is sensitive to the differences in personality and tactics that emerged in the Sajudis movement. The description of the Soviet attempt to take the TV tower is particularly moving (I know some people who were there that night). I suspect Krickus is slightly overestimating the effect of Lithuanian resistance on the outcome of the August coup attempt, but this is a minor quibble.

Perhaps there may be too many names for a reader unfamiliar with the setting and the plot, but the

main character, the Lithuanian people, could not have asked for a better story teller.I was in Vilnius in August, September, October and part of Novembember of 1990, and met many of the individuals mentioned in the book, as well as others, yet unnamed. Perhaps I should have kept a diary and recorded some of the events that should be known. I would be glad to share them with Mr. Krickus, if he chose to contact me.

Krickus' work in this area is told in the format of a novel, not dry history. The people involved in critical moments are real. It is a compelling story and one that puts into perspective why the expansion of NATO should include the Baltic states.