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Clemens, Walter C., Jr. *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1991. 346 pp. \$29.95

The swift currents of modern international politics often move quicker and in different directions than even the most up-to-date historian and his publisher can anticipate. Walter C. Clemens' recent book *Baltic Independence and Russian Empire* is presently the most recent in-depth analysis of the three Baltic Republics and their trials on the road to independence. Yet it is also in a sense out of date like yesterday's horoscope. Not only have the Baltic states declared their own independence, but this fact has been recognized by all of the Western nations as well as by the U.S.S.R. In addition, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have taken their rightful seats in the United Nations.

The above commentary is not meant to imply that professor Clemens' work lacks in value to the contemporary reader. Indeed, it is the only current scholarly work which succinctly summarizes the troubled histories of the Baltic nations, including the complicated negotiations for independence during the years 1917-1920. The first part of the book also contains a good summary of the interwar years and the international and domestic events which permitted the annexation of the three re-publics by the Soviet Union in 1940.

The bulk of the study covers in considerable detail the relationship between the Baltic states and the U.S.S.R. from the accession of M. Gorbachev to the position of General Secretary of the Communist Party of the U.S.S.R. in April of 1985 to early 1990. Because of the author's personal contacts with scholars and other professionals in Estonia and his own travels in that country, much of the emphasis is laid on Estonian events; but a more than adequate coverage is allotted to Latvian and Lithuanian politics. Clemens is excellent in analyzing the genesis and growth of the independence movements in the three Baltic republics, seeing them as being especially motivated by the Balts' historical consciousness, i.e. their deep-seeded sense of nationhood and freedom. A goodly part of the work is taken up by a detailed analysis of the dynamics of Baltic nationalism, the reaction of the local communist apparatus to this movement and what in essence amounts to the communist party's capitulation to the independence movement. Whether individual party members have in their hearts renounced their ideological marriage to Marxism-Leninism remains of course to be seen. What makes Clemens' study especially fascinating to the layman and scholar alike is his use of difficult-to-obtain or unavailable sources of information, including local newspaper editorials, television and radio interviews, as well as personal discussions with leading political and cultural leaders in especially Estonia.

The author also attempts to predict the future of a "multi-national" Soviet Union where national, religious and historical forces exercise a strong centrifugal force on the country's political unity. He compares current events in the U.S.S.R. to the histories and political structures of ancient Athens, Rome, and the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian empires. While Clemens rejects a federalist political mode for the "new" U.S.S.R., he suggests for the Baltic States an Austrian-Swiss style of neutrality. The Baltic States should thus become a political-economic buffer zone between East and West. He also correctly points out that while the United States and the Western Allies have generally championed the case of national self-determination and individual human rights, they also fear "balkanization," i.e., the political and economic instability that appears to follow nationalistic movements. So far the Baltic Republics have, however, been noteworthy exceptions to such civil strife which has indeed plagued other parts of Eastern Europe.

If there is any weakness in this work, it lies, in the opinion of the reviewer, in the somewhat helter-skelter, journalistic style of presentation, its structural looseness and the author's tendency to insert colloquialisms and parenthetical statements in the narrative. The above detracts from the otherwise scholarly tone of writing. Yet these are minor criticisms of a work that will be required reading for the layman, student or scholar who seeks a reliable introduction to contemporary Baltic politics.

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