

Steven Pfaff.

Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany: The Crisis of Leninism and the Revolution of 1989.

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Frankly speaking, when I leafed through Steven Pfaff's book for the first time, I was a bit sceptical whether its subject and approach would be able to sustain a volume of such length. After reading it, I can say that it can, indeed: the author and his study of the end of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) in 1989-90 have convinced me.

Steven Pfaff starts his study with the observation that the rapid and largely non-violent collapse of the GDR's communist regime and its transition to democracy and a reunified Germany surprised not only the political world but also the scholarly world. The academic community in particular seemed overtaxed by the paradox that the Leninist regime in East Central Europe that had seemed the most exemplary and stable was the one that broke down most quickly. This bafflement and, further, the "uniqueness" of the East German developments resulted in a widespread neglect of the East German case. It simply did not fit classical theories, models and explanations of "transitions to democracy" (pp. 3-8).

This lack of interest in and the enigma of the East German case motivated Steven Pfaff to undertake his study. He was convinced that the social sciences possess analytical instruments to deal with case; moreover, he claims that sociology would stand to benefit precisely from investigations of such "exceptional cases" (pp. 2, 8, cf. 263-266).

As he states in the introduction, "the ambition of the book is to understand the mechanisms that spurred mass demonstrations, led to a peaceful surrender of power by the orthodox Leninist elite, and hastened German reunification" (p. 11). Based on theories of collective action (M. Olson, R. Hardin, Th. Schelling, M. Lichbach, etc.) and guided by the paradigmatic analyses on "exit, voice, and loyalty" by Albert O. Hirschman, Pfaff develops his own theoretical model of exit-voice dynamics as a social mechanism. The model allows the formulation of five theses ("propositions") of which the fifth is perhaps the central one. It says: "Exit can trigger voice, but during an episode of political contention propelled by exit, beyond a certain point the occurrence of exit depresses the occurrence of voice" (p. 29). Pfaff scrutinizes in the following nine chapters these propositions and then draws a few conclusions. On the whole, the empirical research confirms the theses.

What are the crucial achievements of this case study? Overall, Pfaff's study is convincing in its clear purpose, selection of analytical tools, and clarity of argumentation. Pfaff is not satisfied with a one-dimensional empirical "test" of the given theoretical model of "exit, voice and loyalty". Rather, he strives for a complex examination and explanation of an empirical phenomenon with the intention of theoretical amendments. He achieved both goals as he combines quantitative and qualitative empirical methods, and connects survey data with archival research and narrative techniques. He embeds the exit-voice dynamics in their concrete social, economic, and political contexts by taking into account the social history of the late GDR. This "design" of the study in fact involves a reversal of a methodological observation Pfaff himself makes in the preface. He states that he began his "journey" as a "historian and became a sociologist" (p. xii). That may indeed be the right path for the process of discovery. But taking the sequence of (re)presentation, one might say, too, that he travels from the sociologist's modelling through analytical episodes, through comprehensive depictions of key historical episodes in the GDR's transition.

Among the book's important analytical achievements I would point out first of all the social and temporal complexity of the exit-voice model. The "communicative" or "signal" function of exit and voice is examined as well as the "coordination" function of each of them in their often "dilemmatic" character. The analysis covers the common people's and regime opponents' distinct "insurgent" and "reformist" voices but also loyal rank and file as well as the power circle closer to the old regime. Loyalty is considered not a monolithic attitude but rather a complex disposition that alters depending on contextual conditions. The model covers the period of the consolidated ancient regime (late 1980s), the phase of the first exit wave (summer 1989), over the peak of the revolutionary mobilization (Fall 1989), right up to the turn to rapid reunification (winter 1989-90 to spring 1990).

Second, the innovative insights concerning the (de-)mobilizing effects of the state-socialist "niche society" are particularly noteworthy. Triggered by the first exit wave in late summer 1989, niche social networks or social capital among relations, friends, and colleagues proved to be the "material" upon which the explosion of spontaneous mobilization in the early fall of 1989 was based. But this specific mobilization's mechanism, which provided certain advantages under the repressive conditions of the Leninist regime, showed its vulnerability when the magnitude of exits to West Germany reached a certain level after the fall of the Wall. Such informal, momentary and personalized social ties are highly vulnerable in the absence of any single "element". Hence, the second "flood" of exit had to undermine the structural requisites of an ongoing powerful voice so that the turning point in the exit-voice-relation was inevitable.

Finally, a few supplemental, rather than critical, remarks are in order: (1) Although the notion of communist regimes as "one-party states" (p. 67) or "mono-organizational regimes" (pp. 8, 23, *passim*) is a well-known term stemming from the "Totalitarian Approach", it is factually false or at least misleading. In a few state-socialist countries, the GDR among others, there was more than one political party or organization. In addition to the absolutely dominant Communist Party (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) and organizations affiliated with it (such as the unified trade unions or the youth organization), there were for instance the Christian Democrats (*Christlich Demokratische Union*, CDU) and the Liberals (*Liberaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands*, LDPD). All these organizations were part of the communist rule. The complex structure of social organization and domination showed manifold consequences in the processes of decline and transition. While Pfaff is well aware of this, it seems appropriate to correct a terminology that rests on the exemplary totalitarian cases of the German Nazi Regime and the Soviet Union. If really necessary, one might speak of "mono-subject societies" (M. Brie, R. Land et al.) or "organization societies" (D. Pollack). Perhaps Pfaff's notion of mono-organizational regimes alludes to Pollack's idea, but if so Pfaff has not clarified it. I would prefer the use of typological notions such as "communist rule", "(post-)totalitarian regime" (Linz/Stepan) or "state-socialist society"(2). If we want to explain the entire process of the communist breakdown and transformation, we would have to pay more attention to the processes and results of delegitimizing and socio-cultural hollowing of state-socialism in the 1980s. One paradoxical result of this decay, which Pfaff perhaps underestimated to some degree, is a broad informal liberalization without any formal political liberalization (cf. pp. 67ff). This informal liberalization includes values, norms, ways of acting, life-styles, etc. It involves all social strata and generations, in particular the younger workers and parts of professionals blocked in their careers and mobility desires (as even Pfaff repeatedly indicates: pp. 83ff, 161f, 206ff). And it involves, not least, the so-called "functional elite", the rank and file comrades in the apparatuses (3). It seems to me almost impossible to overestimate the role of West Germany not only as the target of any exit but also as the real alternative. Both the existence of a second "home" as well as the "daily show" (in West German TV) of a better socialism in capitalism continually undermined the communist regime and then any moderate or radical reform movement

of the GDR after the fall of the former.

In sum, *Exit-Voice Dynamics and the Collapse of East Germany* is an important and impressive contribution to the analysis of the crisis and transformation processes in East Germany. The application of one theoretical model proves to be not a weakness; on the contrary, since Pfaff adapts and extends the model in an innovative manner, applies different methods and integrates a significant amount of empirical and historical material, the theoretical narrowness is transformed into strength. Altogether, the book represents an outstanding case study. By combining the skeleton of a “social mechanism” with the flesh of “event history” it provides a “dense description” of post-totalitarian state crises, popular protest movement and “revolution” following the best traditions in historical sociology. In doing so, the study is also worth reading for students who do not favour the collective action theory or related Rational Choice approaches. It transcends the single case of East Germany and will stimulate broader debate in the field.

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