EXIT, VOICE, AND THE FATE OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC
An Essay in Conceptual History

By ALBERT O. HIRSCHMAN*

Es gibt wenig Menschen, die sich mit dem Nächstvergangenen zu beschäftigen wissen. Entweder das Gegenwärtige hält uns mit Gewalt an sich, oder wir verlieren uns in die Vergangenheit und suchen das völlig Verlorene . . . wieder hervorzurufen.

[The immediate past is but rarely the object of our interest. Either the present takes hold of us forcefully or we lose ourselves in the remote past and attempt . . . to re-create what has been wholly lost.]

—Goethe

Die Wahlverwandtschaften
[The Elective Affinities]

INTRODUCTION

THE year 1989 was greeted with something of a yawn. Its first half would be marked by the elaborate, far-flung, and infinitely wordy bicentenary commemoration of the French Revolution. Everything was laid out well in advance, and the schedule of events was strictly followed up to the appointed climax, the celebrations of the Fourteenth of July in Paris. Thereafter, with the bulk of festivities, conferences, and speeches over, people would return to their usual pursuits. But then, as though the spirits of revolution, once invoked, assumed a life of their own, came the surprise, the “divine surprise” of that year: a series of totally unexpected political and popular movements broke out in rapid succession in Eastern Europe—from Poland, Hungary, East Germany, and Czechoslovakia to Bulgaria and Romania—overturning the hitherto uncontested power of the Communist parties and thereby altering fundamentally the seemingly stable bipolar world “order” of the preceding forty-five years.

The most radical of these changes took place in the German Democratic Republic, where the internal convulsion led in short order to the

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extinction of the political entity in which it occurred. The East German state was unable to survive the collapse of communist power and was absorbed (geschluckt, or “swallowed,” is the expressive term often used) by its outsize twin, the Federal Republic of Germany, within a year of the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989.

In spite of a considerable outpouring of articles and books—including some autobiographical accounts by key actors—a great deal about these events remains poorly understood. The very fact that they came as a total surprise to both spectators and actors suggests that our capacity to comprehend large-scale political and social change remains utterly underdeveloped. Under the circumstances, any conceptual tool that holds out the promise of providing a handle on the enigmatic events is likely to be eagerly seized upon. This is what happened in Germany to the concepts of “exit” and “voice,” which I had proposed in my book Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States.1

The German translation of that book was published in 1974 under the title Abwanderung und Widerspruch,2 literally “outmigration and contradicting.” This was a daringly free, though apt, translation of the terms exit and voice, and it may have been chosen by the translator because even then migration and would-be migration were characteristic alternatives to actual resistance in the German Democratic Republic. So the title, with its accent on migration as a primary form of exit, may have contributed to making the book appear particularly relevant to the commotion of 1989. In any event, only six days after the spectacular opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, 1989, the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Germany’s most respected daily newspaper, published an article by Henning Ritter, director of the social science and humanities section, with the title “Abwandern, Widersprechen: Zur aktuellen Bedeutung einer Theorie von A. O. Hirschman” (To exit, to voice: On the current relevance of a theory of A. O. Hirschman). According to Ritter, my 1970 thesis was being tested “experimentally on a large scale” by the upheaval in East Germany. Since then, several political scientists and sociologists have made extensive, if on occasion conflicting, uses of the concepts of exit, voice, and loyalty in interpreting the events of 1989, now generally called die Wende (the turn).3 Eventually the topic even received a degree

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3 For me the most stimulating contributions were several articles by Detlef Pollack, a sociologist of religion at the University of Leipzig. See in particular Pollack, “Das Ende einer Organisationsgesellschaft,” Zeitschrift für Soziologie 19 (August 1990). Pollack gives an in-
of official sanction as the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Association), an agency of the Federal Republic, listed the exit-voice approach to the analysis of the Wende among the research projects eligible for its grants.4

I became aware of this interest in my twenty-year-old book as I spent the academic year 1990–91 at the Wissenschaftskolleg (Institute for Advanced Study) in Berlin. At that time, I was also able, through reading and interviewing, to become more closely acquainted with the history of the GDR and, in particular, with the remarkable story of its demise. Perhaps not surprisingly, I came to feel that the exit-voice perspective could indeed be of help in seeing some of the events in a new light and that it could itself be enriched by its encounter with a complex historical testing ground. Moreover, to conclude this introduction on a personal note, the topic provided me with a point of reentry into German politics and history after an absence of over half a century from the country where I had spent my first eighteen years.

THE INTERPLAY OF EXIT AND VOICE: A REFORMULATION

To set the stage for my inquiry it is useful to present and reformulate as briefly as possible the concepts of exit and voice as they will be used here. Exit and voice were defined in my book as two contrasting responses of consumers or members of organizations to what they sense as deterioration in the quality of the goods they buy or the services and benefits they receive. Exit is the act of simply leaving, generally because a better good or service or benefit is believed to be provided by another firm or

organization. Indirectly and unintentionally exit can cause the deteriorating organization to improve its performance. Voice is the act of complaining or of organizing to complain or to protest, with the intent of achieving directly a recuperation of the quality that has been impaired. Much of my book and of my subsequent writings on this subject dealt with the conditions under which exit or voice or both are activated.

A recurring theme of my 1970 book was the assertion that there is no preestablished harmony between exit and voice, that, to the contrary, they often work at cross-purposes and tend to undermine each other, in particular with exit undermining voice. Easy availability of exit was shown to be inimical to voice, for in comparison with exit, voice is costly in terms of effort and time. Moreover, to be effective voice often requires group action and is thus subject to all the well-known difficulties of organization, representation, and free riding. By contrast, exit, when available, does not require any coordination with others. Hence one of my principal points: "The presence of the exit alternative can . . . atrophy the development of the art of voice."

This inverse relationship between exit and voice was confirmed by numerous examples from economic and social life. Thus, the fact that shares can be readily sold in the stock market makes it difficult for shareholders to have any real influence on management through voice; when exit from a marriage by divorce is easy, less effort will be made at repairing the relationship through "voice," that is, through communication and efforts at reconciliation; and, as was affirmed by the influential "Turner thesis," the absence of a strong workers' movement in the United States can be explained in part by the possibility, real or imagined, of "going West"—in the United States mobility was greater, or was widely believed to be greater, than in Europe during the period of rapid industrialization.

In many situations, exit thus tends to undermine voice, particularly, so I argued, when exit deprives the potential carriers of voice of their most articulate and influential members, as is often the case. In a recent essay I came to speak of the "basic seesaw pattern" of exit and voice. This pattern could also be characterized as a simple "hydraulic" model: deterioration generates the pressure of discontent, which will be channeled into voice or exit; the more pressure escapes through exit, the less is available to foment voice.

It is remarkable that so primitive a model was able to account for as

5 Hirschman (fn. 1), 43; emphasis in original.
many diverse situations and experiences as have been marshaled by myself and others. But it could not be expected to be universally valid, and indeed the events of 1989 in the GDR traced out a very different relationship. As was pointed out by an East German sociologist,\(^7\) here exit (out-migration) and voice (protest demonstrations against the regime) worked in tandem and reinforced each other, achieving jointly the collapse of the regime.

Even before this spectacular case of collaboration of exit and voice, I had become aware of some complications affecting the seesaw or hydraulic model. For example, I noted that since exit and voice are “two basic, complementary ingredients of democratic freedom, [they] have on the whole been enlarged or restricted jointly.”\(^8\) Also, in reconsidering the question of school vouchers, I speculated that the opening up of previously unavailable opportunities of choice or exit may generate feelings of empowerment in parents, who as a result may be more ready than before to participate in school affairs and to speak out.\(^9\) Such a positive relationship between increased availability of exit and increased willingness to voice rests on a structure that is more complex than the one underlying the seesaw pattern. What happens here is that the newly won right to exit actually changes the human agents involved. Being allowed more choice they become more aware of and more desirous to explore the whole range of choices at their disposal. Once men and women have won the right to move about as they please, they may well start behaving in general as adult and hence as vocal members of their community.

Here, then, is a quite general rationale for thinking that enlarging the opportunity for exit can on occasion make for more rather than less participation and voice. This is indeed close to how things worked out in the German Democratic Republic in 1989. But the course of events over the forty-year-long life of that state comprised a large variety of exit-voice relationships. Some correspond faithfully to my original script; others depart from it more or less in the way that has just been sketched but

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\(^7\) See the articles by Pollack cited in fn. 3.

\(^8\) Hirschman (fn. 6), 79.

\(^9\) Ibid., 89. In describing the process of slave emancipation in Cuba in the late 19th century, Rebecca Scott has shown how slaves at times adopted a mixed, exit cum voice strategy; she calls it “voice in pursuit of exit.” After 1880, when a new statute had imposed certain obligations on slave owners with regard to treatment and payment of slave labor, a substantial number of slaves, in alliance with abolitionists, took advantage of this statute to bring charges against their masters for violations. They obtained their freedom in this manner rather than by simply “running away.” See Scott, “Dismantling Repressive Systems: The Abolition of Slavery in Cuba as a Case Study,” in Alejandro Foxley et al., eds., Development, Democracy, and the Art of Trespassing: Essays in Honor of Albert O. Hirschman (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), 274.
will invite yet new interpretations. Time has come to plunge into “the facts.”

EXIT AS ANTAGONIST OF VOICE: 1949–88

From the very day of its founding, the stability of the German Democratic Republic was undermined by its coexistence with the Federal Republic. The possibility of improving one’s lot by just getting out—by moving to the other, bigger, freer, and soon to be more prosperous Germany—fundamentally distinguished the East German postwar experience from that of the Poles, Czechoslovaks, and Hungarians, who had no such alternatives or prospects and who by and large were confined to their countries.

This basic existential difference between the German Democratic Republic and the other three comparatively advanced Soviet satellites in Eastern Europe explains much about their divergent political history. In Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary epic battles were fought against communist domination, from the 1956 Revolution in Budapest to the Prague Spring of 1968 and the emergence of Solidarity in Poland in 1980. After these movements were forcibly suppressed, new forms of resistance or dissidence promptly reemerged and created new spaces for “civil society,” or, as Václav Havel called it, the “independent life of society.”

In the German Democratic Republic, by contrast, the only important manifestation of discontent was the early and promptly crushed workers’ uprising of Berlin on June 16–17, 1953. Thereafter, resistance (other than attempts to exit) and dissidence were minimal—until the powerful movement of autumn 1989, of course.

One may put in a claim right here, then, for a resounding confirmation of the simple hydraulic exit-voice model: the presence, real or imagined, of the exit option did undermine the development of the art of voice in the German Democratic Republic. For many years the GDR was the most reliably tranquil as well as the most supine of the Soviet satellites. In Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia resistance and dissidence were also up against enormous odds, but at least these movements did not have to contend with the sabotage and lure of exit.

Once stated, this very general first finding must be qualified by a more detailed look at exit and voice as they operated in the German Democratic Republic. For the purpose of the history of exit, Table 1 shows yearly data on East-West emigration from 1949 to 1989. Migration was

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<th>Year</th>
<th>Refugees</th>
<th>Authorized Migrants</th>
<th>Including Ransomed Political Prisoners</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<td>(850)</td>
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<td>(630)</td>
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<td>(1,100)</td>
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<td>(1,150)</td>
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<td>3,846</td>
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<td>(1,480)</td>
<td>12,117</td>
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<td>1979</td>
<td>3,512</td>
<td>9,003</td>
<td>(900)</td>
<td>12,515</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>3,988</td>
<td>8,775</td>
<td>(1,010)</td>
<td>12,763</td>
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<td>11,093</td>
<td>(1,584)</td>
<td>15,433</td>
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<td>9,113</td>
<td>(1,491)</td>
<td>13,208</td>
</tr>
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<td>7,729</td>
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<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>3,651</td>
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<td>21,428</td>
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<td>1987</td>
<td>6,252</td>
<td>12,706</td>
<td>(1,247)</td>
<td>18,958</td>
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<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>9,718</td>
<td>27,939</td>
<td>(1,083)</td>
<td>37,657</td>
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<td>1989</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>343,854</td>
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substantial throughout the first twelve years of existence of the new state. Significantly, it reached its high point, close to the record of 1989, in 1953, year of the brief and ill-fated June 17 uprising in Berlin. It is not difficult to understand how the failure of this attempt at voice should have led to an exceptionally large exit. But even during the other years of that early period, emigration was substantial in relation to the total population of about seventeen million.

The existence side-by-side of the two German states was a remarkable historical experiment in migration. Here were contiguous territories inhabited by people speaking the same language and sharing a common history and culture. The ease and attraction of moving from East to West were further increased by the Grundgesetz (basic law or constitution) of the Federal Republic of Germany, which stipulated that GDR citizens settling in the West would be automatically eligible to become FRG citizens. As such, they would then be eligible for the considerable range and substantial level of social welfare benefits available in the Federal Republic.

These structural characteristics would normally make for a considerable flow of emigration in response to even small differences in economic and political conditions. In fact, of course, such differences were large, as the two countries were organized according to wholly opposite economic and political principles. Moreover, in the 1950s and 1960s West Germany achieved a rapid and remarkably steady economic expansion, known as the *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle), whereas the East German economy, burdened by reparations to the Soviet Union (rather than benefiting, like West Germany, from the Marshall Plan) and subjected to central planning on the Stalinist model, experienced only a modest recovery from the large-scale destructions of World War II.

The flow of people from the East was large enough to cause concern in the German Democratic Republic. Initially the East German authorities may have shrugged off the "voting with their feet" of many of their citizens and may even have welcomed it. As Fidel Castro felt later with respect to Cubans leaving for Miami, the GDR powerholders probably thought it advantageous to be rid of disgruntled and irreconcilable "class enemies": expropriated landowners, shopkeepers, and other "bourgeois" elements. But soon such complacency would give way to concern and then to alarm: it became clear that in this instance mass emigration was not a "safety valve," a metaphor that had often been rather aptly used to describe earlier emigration experiences. Rather, as it continued, the exodus of East Germans to the West—among them many highly skilled members of the labor force—came to be likened to a life-threatening
"hemorrhage" that had to be stopped. The building of the Berlin Wall in 1961 was intended to achieve this objective.

The Wall did succeed in substantially reducing the outflow. After 1961 the statistics distinguish between two flows: first, emigrants who moved to West Germany with the permission of the East German authorities (Übersiedler)—often older people allowed to rejoin younger family members who had preceded them; second, there were those, less numerous but still in the thousands, who managed to flee to the West in spite of the Wall and other strict border controls.

Table 1 documents the precipitous drop in the number of total emigrants, from around 200,000 per year to an average of 32,000 during the first five years following the building of the Wall. Thereafter total emigration declined further, reaching its lowest level in the 1970s, when the yearly average was 15,000. In the 1980s the flow swelled again, particularly in 1984, when large numbers of long-time applicants suddenly received permission to leave. Thereafter, the door was shut once again.

The pressure to leave clearly increased in 1988 and forced the authorities to be less restrictive while the number of unauthorized departures also rose ominously. Then, in 1989 the gates were simply forced wide open and the outflow of people soon exceeded the "exodus" or "hemorrhage" levels of the pre-Wall period, until, eventually, the Wall came down.

What is actually surprising about the statistics from 1961 up to 1988-89 is the extent to which the Berlin Wall and the assorted draconian border controls were unable to stop the emigration. Though much reduced, out-migration remained throughout in the five-digit range—small in relation to total population, but definitely more than a trickle. As a result, the hope for escape to the West was kept alive year after year by the actual life experiences of thousands of exiting people. Both the real emigration of large numbers in the early postwar years and the continuing hope for exit (including the illusion about its possibility) in later years help explain the comparatively low levels of voice.

Moreover, in addition to the actual exits to the West, modern communications technology made possible a vicarious, if temporary, mass escape—via West German television. The East German writer Christoph Hein makes this point in a 1990 interview precisely in order to explain the weakness of the dissident movement in the GDR:

[In the GDR we had a difficult task because] the whole people could leave the country and move to the West as a man [geschlossen] every day at 8 P.M.—via television. That lifted the pressure. Here is the difference with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and the Soviet Union. There the pressure contin-
ued to bear down and generated counter-pressure . . . that’s why I always envied the Russians and the Poles. . . . In general, the helpful proximity of the Federal Republic was not helpful to our own development. . . . Here we had no samizdat, as long as we had access to the publishing houses of West Germany.\footnote{Christoph Hein, \textit{Texte, Daten, Bilder}, ed. Lothar Baier (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990), 42.}

So much for an exit-centered account of the considerable differences in resistance to the communist regime in the GDR and its neighbors in the Soviet bloc. But I do not wish to claim that differences in the ease of exit are the whole explanation. In looking backward, we hardly ever escape the presence of multiple (hence inconclusive) causation. It is certainly true in the present case that exit was infinitely more available, promising, and beckoning in Eastern Germany than elsewhere in Soviet-dominated Eastern Europe. At the same time, however, the chances for the emergence of voice in some shape or form were also much smaller there, for three principal reasons.

First, unlike the Poles, Czechs, or Hungarians, the citizens of the East German rump state could not look back on a sheltering history or national tradition of their own, nor did they have any established, more or less independent institutions (like the Catholic church of Poland) that would sustain them in a struggle for some autonomy from the all-powerful Communist Party and state. Only at a fairly late stage did the Protestant church in East Germany take on that function to some extent.\footnote{Full documentation is found in Gerhard Rein, \textit{Die protestantische Revolution, 1982–1990} (Berlin: Wichern, 1990); see also Ehrhart Neubert, “Eine protestantische Revolution,” \textit{Deutschland-Archiv} 23 (May 1990).}

Second, it is likely that many East Germans initially embraced the ideology of the new state for reasons intimately connected with the catastrophic historical episode they had just lived through. In addition to the Communist Party cadres and militants who had survived the Nazi regime and the war, there were those who, having been first seduced and later disenchanted and perhaps appalled by national socialism, eagerly embraced the ersatz ideology or \textit{Weltanschauung} that was now tendered to them in the guise of antifascism and “true” socialism.\footnote{Christa Wolf, who was sixteen years old when the Nazi regime collapsed in 1945, speaks of this experience in an interview in 1987–88: “My generation has early on exchanged one ideology for another.” See Wolf, \textit{Christa Wolf im Dialog} (Frankfurt: Luchterhand, 1990), 26. In another interview she amplifies this theme: “Today we see—some of us, anyway—that we were in danger of exchanging one salvation doctrine for another; for it is much more difficult to develop new forms of feeling and thinking than to exchange simply (though that was not so ‘simple’ either) old articles of faith for new ones” (p. 74). This experience is also re-created in two of her finest novels, \textit{Nachdenken über Christa T.} and \textit{Kindheitsmuster}.} To accept this new creed meant that they could almost providentially forget the past or
even atone for it. During the early postwar period this reaction fulfilled a cleansing function in East Germany that was the equivalent of the unrelenting pursuit of work and prosperity in the West. In the other countries of Eastern Europe, with their very different histories, the newly installed communist regimes never held that sort of initial ideological advantage.

Third, and probably most important, East Germany was different from the other communist-dominated countries of Eastern Europe in that it was the front line of the extended Soviet empire in its contest with the West. It was in East Germany that the highest concentration of Russian troops and tanks was to be found, and it was there that the Soviet short- and medium-range atomic missiles were later located. It therefore seemed unthinkable that the Soviets would ever permit any loosening of the leash that tied the East German regime to their own. "The more the day of reunification approached, the greater became the agreement among the theorists [of politics] about the impossibility, the dangers, and the uselessness of reunification."\(^{14}\) No one in his or her wildest dreams ever imagined that the Soviet empire would disintegrate from within, the way it did in 1989 (and then again in 1991). Hence, the only conceivable scenario for East Germany recovering some freedom of movement was the defeat of the Soviet Union after a nuclear exchange between the two superpowers—a prospect too awful to behold and generally excluded from one's field of vision or discourse. The chances for successful voice were accordingly seen as being extremely low in East Germany, far more so than in less strategically situated areas where some relaxation of imperial controls was conceivable.

In sum, the direct obstacles to voice, that is, to any political movements of resistance or dissidence, were enormous. They must be added to the indirect undermining of voice by the real or imagined availability of exit to the West. Jointly these direct and indirect restraints on voice produced an exit-voice balance that was tilted far more against voice and in favor of exit than that prevailing in other Soviet-controlled East European territories, with the already noted result of substantially divergent political behavior in East Germany.

Moreover, throughout the forty-year existence of the GDR, authorities there showed every sign of being fully aware of the basic seesaw pattern of exit and voice. This is apparent from their frequent attempts to manipulate and exploit it. Particularly after they had substantially reduced exit by building the Wall, they realized that they could weaken internal

opposition by a selective policy of either permitting certain people to exit or outright expelling critical voices considered to be dangerous or obnoxious. The best-known instance of such conscious manipulation of the exit-voice seesaw was the withdrawal of citizenship from the satirical poet and chansonnier Wolf Biermann while he was on tour in West Germany. This act, done on November 16, 1976, left Biermann unable to return home. Thus, a critical, ironic voice that was gathering a growing group of enthusiastic admirers was in effect expelled. The banning of Biermann gave rise to a rare voice event: twelve of the GDR’s most prominent writers, artists, and intellectuals signed a declaration protesting the official action and asking for reconsideration, and in the following days the document was endorsed by another hundred signatories.

The episode marked the end of any hope that Erich Honecker, who had succeeded the hard-line regime of Walter Ulbricht in 1971, would be more tolerant of criticism and dissent. In the following years the authorities systematically used forced exit to reduce voice. The special term *abschieben* (pushing out or pushing over the border) came into use to denote the decision to get rid of certain critics by allowing, encouraging, or obliging them to leave for the Federal Republic. In the caustic formulation of Günter de Bruyn:

The most creative, most critical or simply most adventurous people moved, often at the risk of their lives, across the German-German border and thereby contributed to the consolidation of stagnation and mediocrity [in the East]. Only when groups of dissidents started to advocate change in the GDR instead of simply leaving it, did the leaders of the country, who had long been aware of the damaging impact of the exodus on the economy, understand that it did contribute to political stability, with the result that they now resorted to Abschiebung as a sedative. In this way they also revealed that the mediocrity of the country matched their own to a fault.\(^{15}\)

Among the prominent people who were thus pushed out were many well-known writers (for example, Jurek Becker, Erich Loest, Sarah Kirsch, and Monika Maron), as well as actors (Manfred Krug) and composers (Thilo Medek).\(^{16}\)

In this manner the GDR authorities continuously beheaded oppositional groups in their early stages and eliminated dissenting voices *without* having to resort to overt acts of heightened domestic repression at a

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 36–37.

\(^{16}\) Hermann Weber, *DDR: Grundriss der Geschichte, 1945–1990* (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1991), 170. This is a good general guide to the history of the GDR; other principal sources of information are the journal *Deutschland-Archiv* and Bundesministerium für innerdeutsche Beziehungen, *Texte zur Deutschlandpolitik*; Christoph Links and Hannes Bahrmann, *Wir sind das Volk: Die DDR im Aufbruch* (We are the people: The GDR is breaking up) (Berlin: Aufbau, 1990).
time of increasing international monitoring of human rights violations. They also found a way to get rid of many political opponents who did land in prison: soon after the Wall was built, the GDR systematically “sold” such people to the Federal Republic, which was willing to pay good ransom money for them. With the price per head often said to be as much as DM 40,000, this conversion of voice into exit became a valuable source of hard currency for the GDR. As Table 1 shows, this unsavory trade peaked in the mid-1980s.

These various forms of manipulating the exit-voice seesaw were attractive to the GDR for yet another reason. The people who were ransomed, expelled, “let go,” or cajoled into leaving did not constitute compact, plotting, and therefore threatening exile communities on the model of nineteenth-century Italian or Russian exiles in Paris or London. Those writers and intellectuals who left settled easily in a variety of locations in the Federal Republic; they tended to blend into their new environments and did not maintain much cohesion as an émigré group. In the short term, the East German powerholders could justifiably feel that their policy of selective pushing out was both riskless and effective in reducing unwanted voice.

In the longer run, of course, the policy was to prove disastrous for the survival of the GDR. The comparison with Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary—where there was no exit alternative to speak of—is again instructive. Here dissenters stayed put. Even when, as was often the case, they started out as “deviationists” (that is, as communists unhappy with the party line), they eventually came to occupy a wide spectrum of points of view, from nationalism to liberalism to various social democratic tendencies. Hence, a pluralistic political discourse could evolve in these countries after the breakup of the communist regimes in 1989. Not so in the GDR; here most vocal opponents of the regime had been pushed out to the Federal Republic, where they had joined the existing political groups and had little interest in returning to the GDR. What dissident voices were to be heard in the GDR in 1988–89 came largely from a narrow band of reform-minded communists that had remained inside the party (SED) and criticized the “really existing socialism” exclusively in the name of some “true” Marxism or socialism. As the well-known dissident Bärbel Bohley said as late as mid-1989, in comparing the GDR and Czech situations: “Here change from below is out of the question. . . . Too many of those who would be in a position to take on political responsibility have left.”17 The resulting exit-induced vacuum of leader-

ship and of political life explains a good deal about the eventual collapse of the GDR as an independent entity and its easy absorption by the Federal Republic.

**Exit and Voice as Confederates:**

**The Collapse of the Communist Regime in 1989**

The exit-voice seesaw was a sturdy reality with multiple aspects and extensive consequences throughout the first thirty-nine years of the short life of the GDR. So what happened in the final climactic year of 1989 when the seesaw of exit and voice suddenly turned into a joint grave-digging act?

Before addressing this critical question, I first go back to a remaining puzzle of the previous period. I have argued that, in contrast to the situation in the three neighboring Soviet-controlled countries, exit in the GDR remained a live option throughout the postwar years, whether such exit was a realistic project, a matter of hope and fantasy or a crude stratagem for the authorities. From the point of view of the citizens, nevertheless, the building of the Wall in 1961 represented a considerable shift from exit as a feasible project to exit as hope and fantasy. Would one not expect such a shift to reinforce voice in line with the seesaw or hydraulic exit-voice model?

Some such response can actually be noted. A few critical voices arose, particularly in the late 1960s and the 1970s. As already mentioned, the best-known case was that of chansonnier Wolf Biermann and the ensuing protest of leading GDR intellectuals following his banishment in 1976. But viewed against the sustained oppositional movements in Poland and Czechoslovakia, the absence of a crescendo in criticism or dissent in the years following 1961 was striking. It rather looks as though the brutal repression of exit signaled by the erection of the Wall was also understood as a further repression of voice. Formulated in these terms, the absence of the seesaw in this instance has a certain plausibility. The decision to tear the city of Berlin asunder with a 165-kilometer-long Wall, turning it into two noncommunicating halves, was an extraordinary affirmation of state power that signaled the GDR’s general readiness to be more aggressive against “state enemies.” In other words, not only did the building of the Wall restrain exit, but it also projected an enhanced willingness to rein in voice. Under the conditions, the increase in voice that might normally be expected when exit alone is curtailed did not and could not occur.
The simultaneous repression of exit and voice in 1961 was to have its counterpart twenty-eight years later, when exit and voice exploded jointly and brought down the whole edifice of the GDR. In a first cut, the events of 1989 look like the exact inverse of what happened, or failed to happen, after August 1961. The inability of the GDR, starting in the spring 1989, to prevent a large-scale flight of its citizens to West Germany, via Hungary, Poland, or Czechoslovakia, signaled a novel, serious, and general decline in state authority. It was thus taken to imply a similar decline in the ability and readiness to repress voice—with the result that citizens started to demonstrate against the regime for the first time since June 1953. Precisely because the East German regime had made the repression of exit into the touchstone of its authority, its sudden incapacity to enforce its writ in this area meant a huge loss of face that emboldened people to other kinds of transgression.

This account of the collaboration of voice and exit in 1989 follows the lines of reasoning that have already been laid out in the introductory section. There I suggested that when previously unavailable opportunities to exit are forced open, people may experience new feelings of empowerment. They might then consider or reconsider other options, including that of reacting to an odious state of affairs by a direct attempt at change—through voice—instead of by moving away from it. This sort of conjunction of exit and voice turned out to be exceptionally powerful in the German case and took some striking forms. It will now be traced in some detail.\footnote{The following account is based in part on the sources cited in fn. 16, in part on other publications cited here. See in particular Gerhard Rein, ed., Die Opposition in der DDR (Berlin: Wichern, 1989); and the Chronik der Ereignisse in der DDR (August 1989–May 1990), Edition Deutschland Archiv (1990). Interviews with Gerhard and Gudrun Rein and with Detlef Pollack in Berlin in early 1991 were most helpful. In May 1992 I spent several days in Leipzig and Dresden and talked with a number of participants in the 1989 events. I am greatly indebted to all of them and in particular to Hagen Findeis in Leipzig.}

Initially, exit played the lead part in the drama. Already in 1988 the pressure to leave the GDR is clearly on the increase, as a record thirty-nine thousand people manage to leave as compared with an average twenty-two thousand for the three preceding years (see Table 1). As is shown in the monthly figures of Table 2, the coming of spring heightens exit activity in 1989, particularly after Hungary decides on May 2 to take down the barbed wire fence on its frontier with Austria. This means that East Germans coming to Hungary as “tourists” can now slip into Austria and then reach West Germany with a much smaller risk of being stopped than before. Numerous GDR citizens soon take advantage of this opening, and on August 19, on the occasion of a meeting of the Pan-
Table 2
MIGRANTS FROM EAST TO WEST GERMANY, 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>January</td>
<td>4,627</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>5,008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>5,671</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April</td>
<td>5,887</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>10,642</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>12,428</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July</td>
<td>11,707</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>20,955</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September</td>
<td>33,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October</td>
<td>57,024</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>133,429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>43,221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>343,854</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


European Union in Hungary, over six hundred East Germans make it to Austria. At the same time, the West German embassies in Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, and East Berlin are filling up with hundreds of East Germans looking for asylum and hoping somehow to be allowed to move to the West.

International and media attention is focused on the human drama and mass flight that is shaping up just as the East German regime is preparing for a Gorbachev visit and the celebration of the fortieth anniversary of its founding. On September 10 the Hungarian government further facilitates exit by officially authorizing all East Germans on its territory to pass into Austria. By the end of September over twenty-five thousand Ausreiser (outward-bound travelers) will have taken advantage of this escape route. In the meantime the situation in the embassies becomes increasingly unmanageable, as thousands of refugees keep crowding into them. As a result of high-level talks between the foreign ministers of the two German states, an agreement is reached to transport them by train to West Germany. The one face-saving "concession" obtained by the East Germans is that the trains are routed through its territory, so that the East German state is seen to let go officially and expel its alienated citizens—an insistence that, as will be noted shortly, was to have remarkable unintended consequences. Special sealed trains thus bring some fourteen thousand Ausreiser from Poland and Czechoslovakia to West Germany on October 1, 4, and 5, giving a grotesque cast to the fortieth anniversary celebrations on October 6 and 7. In one more month,
marked now primarily by ever more massive demonstrations, the Berlin Wall would come down.

Such, in briefest outline, is the chronicle of exit from the GDR in 1989. Let me now try a similarly concise review of the course of voice. As in the case of exit, premonitory signs of future explosions of voice stand out in retrospect. From the early 1980s on, the Nikolaikirche, a church in the center of Leipzig, served on Monday afternoons as a meeting point for “peace prayers.” In 1988 these occasions become a rallying point for Ausreiser or Ausreisewillige—people who wish to leave and are waiting for the official permit. On January 15, 1989, an unauthorized silent march (Schweigemarsch) takes place in Leipzig on the occasion of the seventieth anniversary of the assassination of Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg (who had become something of a hero to the counterculture largely because of her saying “Freedom always means freedom for those who think differently”); 150 participants are taken into custody by the police. On May 7 municipal elections are held; when a 98 percent victory for the ruling party is announced, unprecedented, widely scattered protests break out against irregularities and forgeries, and 120 arrests are made in East Berlin alone. In May–June the regular Monday meetings at the Nikolaikirche in Leipzig increasingly turn into protest meetings, with ever larger groups of Ausreiser participating. Even in the presence of a considerable police force they often chant their slogan: “Wir wollen raus” (we want out).

In June, after the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing, the Honecker government vows not to give an inch, by declaring its unconditional solidarity with the Chinese communist regime. But at the same time, the mass exodus via Hungary becomes widely known. This leads to a loss of authority for the GDR, which comes to be referred to derivatively as Der Dumme Rest (= DDR), or “the dumb remainder.”

After a brief summer recess the Monday church meetings resume in Leipzig, and on September 4 a single shout of “Ich bleibe hier” (I’m staying here) is heard for the first time, in response to the chant (“we want out”) of the Ausreiser. This turns into the collective “Wir bleiben hier” (we’re staying here) on September 11 and becomes a rival rallying cry. According to participant observers, there were a number of meanings implied: “We’re staying so as to make sure that things will not stay as they are”; or “We’re staying even though we don’t like things here”;

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19 For the events in Leipzig, see in particular Grabner (fn. 3); Neues Forum Leipzig, Jetzt oder nie: Demokratie (Munich: Bertelsmann, 1990).
20 Albrecht Dönert and Paulus Rummel, “Die Leipziger Montagsdemonstrationen,” in Grabner (fn. 3), 149.
or “You won’t be able to get rid of us.”21 Despite the pervasive tension and fear, the back and forth of the two slogans—“we want out” and “we’re staying here”—introduces an element of entertaining street theater into the demonstration, which now emerges from the church and spills over into the adjoining streets. There it is met and dissolved by massed police forces, which use force and make numerous arrests.

For a while the Ausreiser, the partisans of exit, and the Bleiber, the partisans of voice, form separate, even somewhat antagonistic, groups.22 Eventually they merge under the slogan “Wir sind das Volk” (we are the people), which, particularly when the first word is accented, trenchantly denies the basic tenet of the communist state structure and ideology: that there is a complete identity of views and interests between the ruling Communist Party and the population. This arresting slogan also seems to echo Bertolt Brecht’s poem on the insurrection of June 17, 1953, with its final caustic suggestion that the government may wish to dissolve the people and elect another.23

Another important pole of voice is the city of Dresden,24 where the number of would-be Ausreiser is especially large. According to one (paradoxical) explanation this is so because West German television did not reach the low-lying Dresden area, which was therefore referred to as the Tal der Ahnungslosen (valley of those who are out of it). The local people are thus unaware of some of the unpleasant realities of life in the West—unemployment, hard work, and so forth—while they routinely disbelieve the propaganda emanating from the radio and television programs of the GDR! But another aspect of Dresden’s geographical position is more important in explaining the presence of many would-be emigrants. The city was the GDR’s major rail and road gateway to Czechoslovakia, and from there to Hungary and the West. In September it fills up with many people from points west and north in the GDR—people who are plan-

21 The first meaning is noted in Peter Schütt, “Bleiben, damit es nicht so bleibt, wie es ist,” Deutschland-Archiv 22 (1989), 1209–13. The other interpretations (“Wir bleiben, obwohl’s uns nicht gefällt” and “Uns werdet Ihr nicht los”) were reported by activists in interviews held in May 1992 in Leipzig.


23 At the end of his poem “Die Lösung” (The solution), Brecht asks: “Would it in that case / Not be simpler if the Government / Dissolved the People / And elected another?” [Wäre es da / Nicht doch einfacher, die Regierung / Löste das Volk auf und / Wählte ein anderes?] See Bertolt Brecht, Werke, Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe, ed. Werner Hecht et al. (Berlin: Aufbau, 1988; and Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1988), 12:310.

24 The events in Dresden are chronicled in Eckhard Bahr, Sieben Tage im Oktober: Aufbruch in Dresden (Seven days in October: Upheaval in Dresden) (Leipzig: Forum, 1990).
ning to leave the country. Then, two major events occur in rapid succession. On October 3, the official East German news agency announces that the frontier with Czechoslovakia is being closed “temporarily,” except to GDR citizens with passports and valid visas. (Up to then, GDR citizens could travel freely to Czechoslovakia, which, with its hard-line regime, was considered to be the most “fraternal” of all socialist countries.) As a result, many people are blocked in Dresden as well as intensely frustrated over being shut in (eingesperrt). The next day, October 4, the news circulates that sealed trains with East German Ausreiser from the Federal Republic embassies in Prague and Warsaw are about to pass through the city on their way to West Germany. As a result, large groups of would-be Ausreiser congregate in and around the main railroad station in hopes of somehow boarding these trains. The police are alerted and brutally clear the station area. This, in turn, leads to resistance, rioting, considerable damage to the station, and further demonstrations during which, once again, shouts of both “Wir wollen raus” and “Wir bleiben hier” are heard.

There is also a second story about the origin of the rallying cry “Wir bleiben hier” during those days. Before the police intervened, a railway official—a woman—apparently attempted to get the crowd of Ausreiser to leave the Dresden station by telling them: “Citizens, go home—we promise you that all of you will be permitted to emigrate [ausreisen].” Whereupon a good many in the crowd, disbelieving such promises and unwilling to vacate the station, shouted back: “Wir bleiben hier”—we’re staying right here!25 Only later, according to this account, did the meaning of the slogan change to the more sophisticated concept “we want to change things by staying.” Hence, voice may have arisen out of intended exit not as a result of opposition to exit as such, but through linguistic ambiguity and slippage.26

Whatever the case, the riots at the Dresden station are followed by daily protest demonstrations that draw up to ten thousand people. They take place in the midst of the fortieth anniversary celebrations of October


26 A correspondingly literal use of the opposite slogan “Wir wollen raus” was reported to me during my visit to Leipzig in 1992. In October 1989, when groups of demonstrators found themselves cut off on all sides by mobile police forces, they would shout “Wir wollen raus” simply to indicate their demand to break out of the police trap. But in this case the wider meaning (we want to be free to leave the GDR) certainly antedated the narrower one. Well known by then, the wider meaning probably inspired the demonstrators to use the slogan in the narrow sense. By contrast, in the case of “we’re staying here,” it is possible that, at least in Dresden, the narrow meaning preceded the wider one.
7; perhaps not to mar that occasion too badly, police violence remains sporadic. Then, on October 8 a large group of protesters stages a sit-down in a square in the vicinity of the station, and a young priest manages to obtain approval from a police official for the crowd to appoint representatives who will negotiate its demands with the authorities. Delegates are somehow selected, and as they stand up, they are applauded by the seated crowd by way of investiture. Thus is born the Dresden “group of twenty,” which actually convenes with the mayor of Dresden the next day and works out concessions that lead to a relaxation of tensions. In the short span of five days, the Dresden crowd will have traveled all the way from a desperate push for exit to organized voice, complete with representation and delegation.

At this stage, Berlin’s voice is lagging behind those of Dresden and Leipzig, but on October 7, after the official celebrations, several hundred young people gather on Alexanderplatz and, for the first time there, the slogan “Wir bleiben hier” is heard in response to the initial “Wir wollen raus” of those who simply want to leave. The whole group then marches in the direction of the nearby Palace of the Republic, where Gorbachev and other high-ranking special guests from the “fraternal” communist countries are being entertained. Another widely heard, significant cry is “Gorbi hilf uns” (Gorbi help us) as well as, more simply, “Gorbi, Gorbi.”

The watershed event is the next Monday demonstration in Leipzig, on October 9, frequently referred to since as Schicksalsdag—the fateful day. During the preceding days there are ominous rumors—no doubt officially inspired—of an imminent “Chinese solution.” The most widely read daily newspaper, the Leipziger Volkszeitung, publishes a virulent declaration by a group of militant communists; the group attacks the “counterrevolutionary actions,” which must be “stopped once and for all, if need be with weapons in hand.”27 Stories circulate about hospital floors being emptied of their occupants, in anticipation of a flood of new arrivals, and about supplies of frozen blood being readied. So great is the apprehension that six prominent citizens, including three high functionaries of the SED and the symphony director Kurt Masur issue an urgent appeal for moderation and dialogue among all parties.28 Then, issuing not only, as on previous Mondays, from the Nikolaikirche, but converging by advance arrangement from three other inner-city churches as well, the biggest demonstration ever takes place on the afternoon of October 9. Some seventy thousand participate in a peaceful march, with the principal shouts being “Wir sind das Volk” and “Keine Gewalt” (no violence). Another slogan expressing the hope for avoidance of violence

27 Links and Bahrmann (fn. 16), 16.
28 Neues Forum Leipzig (fn. 19), 82.
is “Widerrede ist nicht Widerstand,” which can be translated as “to voice does not mean to resist.” For all the tension of the situation on that Monday afternoon, the police do not intervene, no blood is shed—and the authority of the GDR is shattered forever. As one eyewitness put it later: “In the late evening of October 9, the GDR had become something different. This was obvious to all participants.”

Thereafter, while thousands continue to flee to the West (the prohibition of exit via Czechoslovakia that was imposed in early October is lifted in the middle of the month), events accelerate and the center of the stage moves to East Berlin. By October 18, the Central Committee of the SED has become sufficiently concerned about the future of the regime and the immobility of the party leadership to force Erich Honecker to resign as secretary and all-powerful government leader. On November 4 the largest voice event on record, a huge protest demonstration with over half a million people, takes place in East Berlin. It is followed in short order by the most spectacular exit event: with the opening of the Berlin Wall on November 9, millions of Easterners cross into West Berlin to enjoy their newly won Freizügigkeit (freedom to move).

As in many other demonstrations throughout East Germany, the two principal demands of the November demonstration in Berlin were free elections (more voice) and freedom to travel (free exit). The latter is achieved directly with the opening of the Wall and the subsequent abolition of other border controls. It takes a little longer to organize free elections; they are held on March 18, 1990, with shattering results for the SED.

In the year following the opening of the Wall, the state structure of the GDR disintegrates rapidly. As one East German commentator wryly noted, the famous “final stage of communism” in which the state is supposed to “wither away” is virtually reached in those months during which the GDR, along with its once formidable police, slowly expires. The GDR ceases to exist on October 3, 1990, when its territory is incorporated as five new provinces (Länder) into the Federal Republic.

Interpretation

The foregoing account, with its close intertwining and mutual stimulation of exit and voice, may not strike the reader as particularly problematic. It becomes more so, however, when the year 1989 is contrasted with

30 Friedrich Dieckmann, Glockenläuten und offene Fragen (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1991), 205.
the previous thirty-nine-year period. During those years, as shown earlier, exit took place by and large at the expense of voice and was often engineered “from above” for that very purpose. That classical hydraulic pattern still put in a fleeting, if influential, appearance during the 1989 events, when the closing of the Czech border on October 3—the prohibition of exit—contributed a great deal to the powerful development of voice in and about the Dresden railway station. But on the whole it was the confluence of the two forces that characterized their interaction in 1989. To appreciate the peculiarity of this situation it is helpful, first of all, to recall a few distinguishing conceptual properties of exit and voice.

Exit—be it the decision to look for and go over to a more satisfactory supplier of goods and services or the decision to emigrate, to leave for a more satisfactory country—is essentially a private and also typically a silent decision and activity. One can do it alone: there is no need to talk it over with anyone. Exit is therefore a minimalist way of expressing dissent—one does not act in concert with others and leaves without noise, “under the cover of night.” Nobody can exit for you, however: the fact that others exit may influence one’s decision to do likewise, but it can never substitute for that decision. Thus exit is not only a private decision; it is also a private good in that it cannot be had through the exertions of others, as a result of some sort of free ride.

The characteristics of voice could not be more different. Voice is typically a public activity. Though it does not indispensably require organization, action in concert with others, delegation, and all the other features of collective action, it thrives on it. Voice activities such as petitions and demonstrations are therefore subject to the well-known liabilities of free riding—even though, as I have amply argued elsewhere, these liabilities can on occasion turn into assets.

According to this brief recapitulation, exit and voice have very different impulses and are likely to arise in very different circumstances—they would seem to inhabit quite different worlds. How then did the two come to be so intimately bound up together during the events of 1989?

Now it must be pointed out that exit—experienced in East Germany as departure for the West—initially ran true to the form just described. For example, during the exit wave of 1984, when an unusually large number of requests for emigration, mostly of young people, was granted by GDR authorities, Heinrich Rathke, the Protestant bishop for the province of Mecklenburg, declared: “Precisely in these weeks large numbers of people are leaving us secretly, softly, and silently” (heimlich, still und leise). At the same time, another pastor lamented the “loss of speech”
of the young. This loss of speech (Verlust der Sprache, or Sprachlosigkeit, "speechlessness") is also a much noted characteristic of those who left via Hungary or Czechoslovakia in the spring of 1989. Robert Darnton witnessed a silent exit scene near the West German embassy in Prague:

I was especially struck by a young couple who arrived with a baby in a taxi. The mother stepped out. She lifted a pram from the taxi's trunk, unfolded it, and placed the baby inside. Then she pushed the pram ahead of her, while her husband carried two large suitcases, looking grimly at the embassy door. When they stopped in front of it, she suddenly burst into tears. I nearly did, too.

Others were similarly shaken. Fearing, Cassandra-like, that events might take a disastrous turn, Christa Wolf, the prominent writer, managed to slip into West Berlin for a radio interview with Gerhard Rein on the eve of the October 9 demonstration in Leipzig. It was a last-minute attempt to help avert another Tiananmen Square. She began by speaking at length about the deep distress (Erschütterung) she and her friends had experienced during the preceding weeks over the images of so many young people leaving the GDR:

These last days, in conversing with people, I have always come up against questions that are also my own: Do we really know these young people? Why do they leave so easily? Why are they in part so speechless [sprachlos]? Why do they find it so difficult to articulate what they dislike here and what they look for elsewhere? . . . During the last four or five weeks we in the GDR were all dominated by these images, couldn't sleep, were in despair.

Later on in the interview, she lodged an impassioned protest against the official reaction of the SED leadership to the mass exodus:

There should not be any mockery. No one has the right to come out with this sentence that has been tremendously upsetting for many people, including myself: "We do not shed a single tear over those who leave." [Wir weinen denjenigen, die weggehen, keine Träne nach]. That is awful [schrecklich]. It is absolutely awful to say such a thing while forty thousand young people leave our country.

Christoph Hein, another major writer of the GDR, spoke in similar terms as early as mid-September. He too was indignant at the "not a single tear" statement and affirmed, to the contrary, that to live in a

31 Wolfgang Büscher, "Warum bleibe ich eigentlich? Reaktionen der evangelischen Kirchen in der DDR auf die Ausreisewelle" (Why do I stay? Reactions of the evangelical church in the GDR to the emigration wave), Deutschland-Archiv 17 (July 1984), 684–85.
33 Wolf (fn. 13), 77.
34 Ibid., 83.
country that is constantly being abandoned by its citizens made him “physically and emotionally sick.”35 Jens Reich, a principal founder of the citizens’ movement “New Forum” in September 1989, put it this way: “This out-migration torments [quält] us already for many years . . . for various reasons we have lost many friends . . . that was so bitter, this feeling of sitting in the waiting room of a railroad station and everything around you is breaking loose. In the end it was unbearable.”36

There was something particularly devastating about these silent, private exits—they drove some of the more conscientious remaining citizens, such as Christa Wolf, Jens Reich, and Christoph Hein, to a passionate voicing of their concern and despair. It is not too daring a conjecture that we touch here also on the backdrop to a major, still largely unexplained nondecision of these months. Why did the hardest and most rigid communist regime in the East not follow the Chinese example that it had hailed just a few weeks earlier? Why did it fail to defend itself “weapons in hand” (mit der Waffe in der Hand) as it had many times boasted it would? Among the explanations that have been offered, the most prominent has been the assumption of a deus ex machina—Gorbachev was thought to have discouraged any such course during his October visit. But I find it plausible that not only Christa Wolf and her friends were devastated by the mass exodus of the summer: the communist rulers themselves may well have suffered self-doubt and a loss of nerve and were in the end unable or unwilling to perpetrate yet another Schrecklichkeit.

In fact, Günter Schabowski, the member of the Politburo of the SED who was later to give the signal, perhaps unwittingly, for the breaching of the Berlin Wall on November 9, speaks in his recollections about the exodus in terms quite similar to those of Christa Wolf and Jens Reich: he calls the resulting situation “tormenting” (quälend) and “most deeply shaming” (zutiefst beschämend).37 According to his account, moreover, the opposition to Honecker and the other hard-liners that arose within the Politburo in September–October and led to the ouster of Honecker on October 18 had really gotten under way when Krenz and Schabowski agreed to circulate a position paper criticizing the “not a single tear” statement. (The statement had appeared in the party newspaper Neues Deutschland of October 2 and was widely attributed to Honecker.) Their position paper stressed, to the contrary, that the exodus was a matter of

36 Rein (fn. 18), 27.
37 Schabowski, Das Politbüro (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1990), 62.
great concern for the GDR and that every departure must be felt as a loss.\textsuperscript{38}

This story provides a first way of understanding how public voice was stimulated by private exit in the fall of 1989, instead of being undermined by it, as had been the case previously. A closer look reveals the sequence of events to be a variant of the usual way exit is supposed to work in alerting “management” to its failings. The normal pattern is as follows: when customers take their business away from a firm or members desert a political party, the managers of these organizations soon become aware of declining sales or other evidence that something is wrong; they then search for the reasons and take steps to repair whatever lapses are responsible for the customers’ or members’ evident unhappiness.\textsuperscript{39} In the case of the GDR, this straightforward feedback mechanism worked very poorly, because the managers of the GDR had inured themselves to it—note the “not a single tear” phrase—and were in general an insensitive and inflexible bunch. But the mass exodus did sufficiently impress, depress, and alert some of the more loyal citizens, those who had no thought of exiting, so that they finally decided to speak out. The mobilization and voice of these citizens can thus be seen as a substitute for the failed response of the GDR managers or as a second wake-up call for them. The normal sequence of events that is supposed to be set off by exit has simply become more roundabout.

The collaboration of exit and voice during the events of 1989 can also be explained by an appeal to the concept of loyalty, as discussed in my book.\textsuperscript{40} Here, loyalty was shown to delay exit (as well as voice) when there is a decline in the performance of an organization to which one belongs. In counterpart, when that decline passes a certain threshold, the voice of the loyal members tends to become particularly vigorous. All along, however, I had made the simplifying assumption that at any one time, organizations (families, political parties, nations, and so forth) ordinarily evoke a specific degree of loyalty among their members (or that characteristics such as loyalty have some sort of normal distribution around a specific mean intensity). If we now complicate this assumption and imagine an organization with two very different kinds of members, those with a great deal of loyalty and those with little or none, reactions to deterioration will take two distinct forms: those who are unburdened by feelings of loyalty will be prone to exit, while the loyalists will resort to voice. The former are the Ausreiser, the latter the Bleiber. Although

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 81.
\textsuperscript{39} Hirschman (fn. 1), 21–25.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., chap. 7.
the concurrent emergence of these two distinct groups could thus have been predicted from an elementary complication of my loyalty model, in fact, the inventiveness of history was needed to suggest the complication and to reveal its importance.

It may look as though the conjunction of exit and voice during 1989 in the GDR has been adequately explained by the two considerations that have just been put forward. In the process, as expected, the theory has already been enriched by the historical events themselves. Nevertheless, the intimate fusion of exit and voice that was so characteristic of the protest movement in the GDR requires further comment.

The real mystery of the 1989 events is the transformation of what started and was intended as a purely private activity—the effort of scattered individuals to move from East to West—into a broad movement of public protest. How and when did public elements intrude upon the private sphere? How and when did they overwhelm the original intentions of the actors? The answer is contained in the historical account that has been presented. Originally the 1989 Ausreiser conceived their departure from the GDR as a totally private affair: as in 1984, they were intent on leaving heimlich, still und leise—in secret, silently, on tiptoe. But these intentions were frustrated by two circumstances: too many people had the same idea, and, as a result of external events such as the relaxation of frontier controls between Hungary and Austria, their moves were too successful to remain secret and private. Pictures of the exodus soon flooded the TV screens, with the result not just of causing established critics like Christa Wolf and Jens Reich to sharpen their criticism but also of making activists out of long-passive average citizens. As a Protestant pastor of Leipzig said in November 1989, looking back on the crucial September events in that city:

[As] the others fled West, the folks here said: . . . We won't go along [mitmachen] any longer. People who are forty-five, fifty, fifty-five years old, who previously never raised a finger, who were totally indifferent, who have perhaps been cussing and saw clearly how everything went to the dogs—they now got worried about seeing their own children waving at them on TV the next day from Prague or Budapest. That's what motivated them.41

Exit also ignited voice in another, more direct way. As the Ausreiser themselves converged at key points (border crossings, railroad stations, embassies), they realized they were no longer alone, recognized each other as being of similar mind, and rejoiced in the community they had

41 Rein (fn. 18), 180.
unwittingly forged. The most remarkable episode of this sort was the massive occupation of the Dresden railroad station by would-be Ausreiser hoping to board the refugee-laden trains that would pass through. Upon looking at each other and particularly upon being told to clear the station, those erstwhile private Dresden Ausreiser went public. The very chant, “Wir wollen raus,” turned them instantly from private to public citizens with a common cause. At this point those in the crowd who had no thought of leaving felt obliged to manifest their position in turn: their contrary chant, “Wir bleiben hier,” became inevitable, irresistible, as one East German writer put it.\(^{42}\) Thus private exit turned into public exit, which in turn generated public voice and even organized delegation and negotiation with the authorities—all within a matter of days.

At first the “Wir bleiben hier” chant may have been a mere reflex, a clever linguistic invention, an automatic reply, initially without much content, to the rallying cry of the Ausreiser. Whereas the latter knew exactly what they wanted, namely, “out,” those who viscerally disagreed with that solution had no such certainties. Having asserted their will to stay they now had to come up with some good reasons for doing so. Their rallying cry rather slowly and haltingly took on reformist meanings and messages. Perhaps “Wir bleiben hier” was an effective slogan just because of its vagueness and ambiguity—everyone who intoned it could endow it with his or her own content.

This linguistic interpretation of the chant carries considerable conviction. It is actually intermediate between the two earlier interpretations: (1) that the chant had a definite reformist message from the start and (2) that it arose totally by happenstance, initially expressing nothing more than the refusal of demonstrators to obey an order to vacate the Dresden railroad station and was later misunderstood or reinterpreted to assume a broader political meaning.

Seeing “Wir bleiben hier” as a purely verbal reply-reflex to the “Wir wollen raus” of the Ausreiser gains plausibility from the slogan “Wir sind das Volk” (we are the people) that eventually supplanted the two warring pro-exit and pro-voice slogans. “Wir sind das Volk” inherited the ambiguity of “Wir bleiben hier” and was similarly enigmatic and vaguely threatening. So much ambiguity could not be sustained for long, however. In the end, as is well known, a slight variation in wording endowed the Volk motto with a quite concrete and down-to-earth meaning. Just as “Wir wollen raus” led to “Wir bleiben hier,” so did “Wir sind das Volk” turn into “Wir sind \textit{ein} Volk” (we are \textit{one} people)—a slogan that

\(^{42}\) Dieckmann (fn. 30), 64.
asked for the merger of the two Germanys and, implicitly, for the obliteration of the GDR.

This outcome is yet another aspect of the 1989 events that must confront my original script and in particular its happy-end scenario. My book had been written with the “constructive” purpose of exploring how exit and voice could help restore or nurture a faltering organization back to tolerable performance and health. Both exit and voice were seen primarily as mechanisms that would “alert management to its failings” after a “repairable lapse.” Yet the possibility that an organization might actually fail to recover and instead succumb to the blows inflicted on it by exit and voice (as well as by its own weaknesses) was not entirely ruled out. I had argued that exit and voice would yield the desired constructive results only if they came forth with moderation, thereby not only alerting “management” but also giving it the time needed to mend its ways.

For the survival and recuperation of both business firms and political organizations, a “mixture of alert and inert citizens” or customers would be far better, so I argued, “than either total, permanent activism or total apathy.” 43 This consideration points to one of several reasons why the combination of massive exit and tumultuous voice in 1989 led to the death of the GDR rather than to its rebirth: that twofold “critique,” so long repressed, was simply too devastating to allow for any “recuperation mechanism” to work. Attempts to stay the course were made, notably by the famous November 26 appeal, Führ unser Land (for our country), which was drafted by Christa Wolf and signed by a group of GDR writers and professionals that included several well-known dissidents. 44 It argued for the maintenance of a reformed but socialist and “humanist” GDR as an autonomous entity—and it proved totally ineffectual. The headlong rush to reunification was not to be halted. Indeed, the extinction of the German Democratic Republic can be seen as the ultimate penalty for the long suppression of both exit and voice.

Conclusion

This is the end of my “essay in conceptual history.” I have looked at the GDR and its demise through some special lenses, in hopes of discerning new patterns, significant connections, and improved interpretations. The details of the story are therefore its essence, but two general observations will provide a conclusion.

First, the 1989 upheaval in the GDR represents a reversal of a move-

43 Hirschman (fn. 1), 24, 32.
44 Wolf (fn. 13), 170–71.
ment that has been held to be characteristic—disastrously characteristic—of German history. A great deal has been written about the propensity of Germans in various historical circumstances to retreat from the public domain to the strictly private—to the famous (or infamous) *Innerlichkeit*. This movement is supposed to have come all too easily to Germans, particularly when they were confronted with distasteful and repugnant events in the public domain. The idea, often traced to Luther, that the inner, private sphere is something infinitely precious, pristine, and inviolable may indeed have undercut the emergence of the public citizen who assumes responsibility for the political life of his or her community. From this point of view, the story that has been told here provides a welcome counterpoint: it essentially chronicles how many East Germans found the road back from exit and apathy to voice, from withdrawal and purely private reaction to public action. However unintended this movement was initially, it became nevertheless a powerful and successful citizen movement. Thus, it stands in contrast to the many “failed revolutions” as well as failures to resist tyranny that have marked German history since the Reformation. From this point of view it is perhaps to be regretted that language downgraded the movement from “peaceful revolution” to *Wende* (turn) soon after it was over. Strangely, once Germans had finally succeeded in toppling, at considerable risk but without major bloodshed, an oppressive and ruinous regime, they designated the event with a term that almost deliberately understated it. In this they resemble those persons who, on the basis of their past missteps, have a poor self-image and who, confronted by success in some new endeavor, will strain to reinterpret that unfamiliar experience as yet another failure or, at best, as “nothing to write home about.” By contrast, Richard von Weizsäcker, Germany’s Federal president, showed a better appreciation of the 1989 events, when he said in a recent speech: “With their nonviolent actions, the revolutionaries of the year 1989 have given all Germans a new awareness of liberty. The past is not extinguished in consequence. But a decisive new chapter has been added to our history.”45

My second point reflects on method. I have attempted to give some shape to the story of the short-lived German Democratic Republic by retelling it in terms of the contrasting categories of private exit and public voice. Such an enterprise runs the risk of making too much of a theoretical construct. In 1909 the French anthropologist Robert Hertz published an article about the extravagant extrapolation of the right hand—

left hand dichotomy by language and culture to encompass ever more basic contrasts, such as right-wrong, good-evil, divine-profane, and so forth. For quite some time, then, we have known about the strange proclivity of the human (or Western?) mind to exaggerate differences, to blow up what Hertz called an “almost insignificant asymmetry” into unbridgeable binary oppositions—in short, to make socially constructed mountains out of natural molehills. I, too, may have engaged in this past-time as I collected conclusive evidence for the existence in many realms of a fundamental antagonism between private exit and public voice. Here the German story of 1989 should stand as a reminder of Sportin’ Life’s maxim, “It ain’t necessarily so”—a principle in theoretical modesty that social scientists disregard at their peril. In some momentous constellations, so we have learned, exit can cooperate with voice, voice can emerge from exit, and exit can reinforce voice.

I noted a number of specific ways where the role of exit turned around in this fashion. The German language has a peculiar gift for compact verbs, such as umschlagen and the famous Hegelian aufheben, which endow such turnabouts with seeming reality. I deliberately avoided these terms, as they evoke the famous dialectic, the “negation of the negation,” and similar mysterious, if preordained, processes that dissolve all contrasts and reconcile all opposites. The longing for such reconciliation is of course the exact counterpart of the inordinate fondness for building up dichotomies that was noted by Hertz.

The events of 1989 were not experienced as stemming from an enigmatic turnabout in the functioning of social processes. Those who lived through them were not troubled at all by the fact that exit and voice now worked hand in glove after having undermined each other for four decades. A problem arises only for the social scientist who seeks a deeper understanding and who, in the course of this attempt, fashions a conceptual framework that initially makes it easier, but subsequently can make it more complicated, to understand what is going on. In that case, of course, our analyst may still come out on top by showing how instructive it is that events should have diverged from the original scheme!