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Social Failures of EU Enlargement: A Case of Workers Voting with Their Feet. By Guglielmo Meardi. New York and London: Routledge, 2012. 229 pp. ISBN 978-0415806794, $125 (Cloth).

Guglielmo Meardi's book offers a sobering account of the social consequences of the European Union's eastern enlargement for its new member states. Rather than enjoying the achievements of a "social Europe," workers in the 10 East European countries have experienced stagnating and at times even deteriorating social, working, and employment conditions; seen their collective action capacities being hollowed out; and been marginalized politically.

Meardi structures his analysis under three broad headings. Borrowing and slightly adjusting the central notions from Albert O. Hirschman's *Exit, Voice and Loyalty* (1970), the first section deals with the betrayal of workers' aspirations for a social Europe. Meardi chooses betrayal rather than loyalty because he identifies the failure of EU actors to meet workers' social expectations as a root cause for the latters' lack of loyalty toward supranational and national institutions and firms. He analyzes the failure of the EU's social regulations—such as health and safety standards, working time directive, information and consultation, and equal opportunity—to bring about any visible improvements in the new member states' employment conditions. In a similar vein, the EU's "soft *acquis*," most important its promotion of social dialogue on sectoral, national, and European levels, has also been unable to stop the erosion of the organization and coordination capacities of trade unions and employer associations in the new member states. Furthermore, multinational companies have with few exceptions used their investments in the East to escape the social regulations of their home countries, rather than exporting them to the East.

It is no small wonder then that workers made large scale use of their exit options, as demonstrated in the second part of the book. Meardi finds that in contrast to expectations, East European workers have massively flocked to the West to explore better paid work options. Labor emigration of an unprecedented scale has occurred despite the fact that East European workers typically end up in the most precarious and worst paid jobs in the West. Those who stayed home have engaged in informal forms of resistance, such as organizational misbehavior, absenteeism, or frequent change of jobs. Meardi also extends the analysis of exit strategies to the political sphere, where he argues that citizens, disenchanted with technocratic policymaking in the course of EU accession, have turned to extreme parties or abstain from voting altogether. Following an argument made earlier by David Ost (*The Defeat of Solidarity* 2005), Meardi sees political and trade union elites as responsible for not organizing workers along class lines, therefore making them receptive to illiberal politics.

Overwhelming reliance on exit does not mean, however, that East European workers have been muted entirely. The third section of the book detects burgeoning channels of voice from below by those who stayed home and who are becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their working and social conditions. In some instances, more voice is an unintended consequence of exit, which results in labor shortage and gives trade unions more market or workplace power. In some countries and sectors trade unions have started organization drives to boost their membership. Eastern trade unions have also tried to bank on existing transnational channels of worker representation, such as European Work Councils, to launch cross-border initiatives targeting migrant workers and to form alliances with Western workers against the fallout from the liberalization of services. In addition, Meardi explores the activism by gender and identity movements. Overall, however, none of this amounts to much voice. Union revitalization remains confined to isolated instances; transnational labor cooperation is ripe with tensions and generates very few tangible results, and Meardi acknowledges there is simply little to report on social movements. Seen in a broader context, however, both excessive exit and timid voice bear witness to the fact that the neoliberal strategies pushed by the European Union and local elites alike might not be sustainable in the long run. Building on Karl Polanyi's *Great Transformation* (1944), Meardi concludes by speculating that the stark commodification that East European workers have experienced might lead to a more radical response in the future.

Social Failures of EU Enlargement is an excellent book that addresses critically and engagingly many of the preconceptions surrounding the eastern enlargement of the European Union. Most important, it turns the table on a view predominant in the scholarly debate and

public opinion alike, namely, that it is East European workers who undermine social and welfare standards in West European societies. Meardi demonstrates that East European workers are the losers of market integration and internationalization of production. Their propensity to work long hours under hazardous conditions, to be ultra-flexible, and to choose individual rather than collective forms of protest and exit rather than voice are strategies for survival under the new order imposed by powerful public and private Western actors. This message becomes especially clear when Meardi discusses the free movement of labor as a strategy for EU actors and Western employers to enhance labor market flexibility at home, or when he describes the strategies of multinational companies experimenting with new forms of flexible employment.

The evidence provided by Meardi is very rich. He builds on his long research record on the topic, and includes wide-ranging empirical material—interviews, case studies, statistics, and personal anecdotic observations—and a close familiarity with the region. Moreover, his account is unusually encompassing and multifaceted. If the focus is industrial relations, these are very broadly understood, extending from workplace and labor markets to democratic polities and concerned with questions of economic and social citizenship alike. At times, however, the study reaches some overly general conclusions that are not always backed up by the empirical material. This is due to two interrelated methodological decisions: on the one hand, Meardi treats the region as a whole as distinct from Western Europe, but pays less systematic attention to the diversity within the East. On the other hand, the arguments of some chapters are illustrated by more in-depth treatment of one single case. For instance, the fifth chapter gives the impression that low voter turnout and the vote for extreme parties are due to worker marginalization, and that this claim, which is illustrated with the Polish case, is valid for the whole region. While the validity of such a claim has been contested even for Poland (see the debate on David Ost's book in *Labor History* 48.1, February 2007), I think that important differences in turnout, timing of the emergence (and decline) of extremist parties, and different degrees and forms of worker marginalization invite a more systematic evaluation of political absenteeism and populism across the region.

Finally, I wonder whether a major claim underlying the book, namely that the EU actors' betrayal of East European aspirations for a social Europe can indeed be pinned down as the root cause for the latters' disillusionment with the new economic and political order. On the one hand, why would anyone have expected the European Union to foster a social democratic order in the region, given the neoliberal turn of integration since the European Single Market? Moreover, is it really the case that East European societies expected very much from a social Europe? Or was there a more general, vague and perhaps unrealistic expectation that the introduction of Western-type capitalism and democracy would inevitably lead to increasing wealth, without impairing the inherited safety, and security in people's lives? If the latter is the case, can we really blame the EU for not bringing this about? To put it differently, the book could have made a slightly more nuanced argument that disentangles (un)realistic expectations from traceable failures of enlargement, and could perhaps have spelled out the strategies that could have prevented Eastern disillusionment.

On the other hand, while Meardi makes a convincing claim that we cannot forever blame historical legacies for the contemporary state of civil society, industrial relations, and social and working conditions in the East, it might be as unconvincing to entirely blame the new order. An alternative explanation would focus on the interaction between socialist legacies and the integration into a neoliberal European order to understand the dire social outcomes that Meardi has so convincingly shown.

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