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Katja Havemann, Joachim Widmann. *Robert Havemann oder Wie die DDR sich erledigte.* Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2003. 480 S. EUR 24.00 (broschiert), ISBN 978-3-550-07570-4.

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In 2003, the newly-created regional broadcaster RBB (Radio Berlin-Brandenburg) compared the knowledge about the GDR of sixteen-year old schoolchildren in western Berlin and the city of Potsdam. The results were woeful. When asked who Robert Havemann was, silence ensued in both classes. Only one pupil in western Berlin was willing to volunteer an answer: "Wasn't he the soldier who jumped over the Berlin wall when it was being built?" This biography of the GDR's most prominent dissident fulfills an important purpose, and it would be churlish to measure it simply in light of scholarly debate. For this book, written in sometimes gripping prose, addresses not just an academic, but also a popular audience.

In the first part, the book charts Robert Havemann's career. The communist resistance fighter organized the hiding of Jews from persecution in the Third Reich, but Havemann was soon discovered and imprisoned. He only narrowly avoided the consummation of his death sentence. The physicist came into his own in the years after 1945. He worked for the NKVD in West Berlin, but in 1949 Havemann became a member of the East German "people's chamber," and in 1950 he took up a professorship at the Humboldt University in East Berlin. In the following years, Havemann was a stalwart pillar of the GDR. His service for the state peaked on February 24, 1956, when he became an unofficial employee ("IM") of the secret service, the Stasi. Indeed, the book acknowledges the possibility that Havemann may have betrayed an academic colleague who had planned to flee to the West.

>From the late 1950s Havemann became more critical, but the break with the SED did not come until 1963 when, in a lecture series, he noted that true progressiveness included a willingness to tolerate freedom. Havemann's fame spread rapidly through the university and beyond, and he now became a subject of observation for his erstwhile friends, the Stasi. He lost his position at the Humboldt University the following year, and from 1965 the Stasi decided to isolate him by exerting pressure on friends and erstwhile colleagues to cease all contact with him.

In this period, Havemann learned who his real friends were. Two stood out among the few who stuck by him. Devoid of any professional obligation, Havemann had an abundance of time to spend with his young friend, Wolfgang Biermann. He also mustered up the energy, in 1970, to woo Katja Grafe, thirty-eight years his junior. She bore his child in 1973, and the following year they were married.

If the first six decades of Havemann's life are described in about sixty pages, the book takes a much more leisurely pace to describe the unfolding events from 1974 to 1982, the last eight years of Havemann's life. It intro-

duces his circle of friends and dissidents (the two were inevitably synonymous), and discusses Havemann's strategy of dealing with the Stasi by seeking maximum publicity in the West German media. The book also depicts everyday life at Gruenheide, Havemann's main residence just outside Berlin. The core of the book, however, deals with Havemann's persecution by the GDR's system of "justice," notably his house arrest which lasted from November 26, 1976 to April 13, 1979, and the subsequent trial on the spurious charges of hard-currency smuggling.

Havemann's house arrest, which began ten days after Biermann's exclusion from the GDR, was the central, but not the only, measure taken by the state to break up the circle of opposition which had formed around Biermann and Havemann. It was accompanied by systematic pressure executed by the "cockroaches," as Havemann's cricle called the Stasi, on Havemann's friends and sympathizers. Eventually, most of them agreed to leave the country. Interstingly, this resulted in a phyrric victory for the state. It forced Havemann, after the end of his house arrest, to overcome his private isolation by seeking contact with a new generation of activists around Rainer Eppelmann and Baerbel Bohley. Havemann was able to provide these figures with the legitimacy and notoriety which these young activists needed to withstand state pressure, and many of them went on to become pivotal figures of the peace movement of the 1980s.

It is unfortunate that only one sixth of the book is devoted to a cursory description to the first sixty-four years of Havemann's life, interesting as these were. As a result, one barely gets a sense of why exactly Havemann began to challenge the SED, and what this process must have meant for his own world view. However, this is a small price to pay for this peculiar book, because this is not a biography of Havemann pure and simple, it is principally his biography as experienced by his second wife, Katja.

This book gains its value through the intimacy with which the co-author recounts the climax of Havemann's oppositional life. The description of the years immediately preceding the house arrest and during it leave a deep impression upon the reader. They bring to life, for instance, the treacherous dealings of the Stasi, evidenced in the betrayal of Havemann's trusted friend and physician, Herbert Landmann. Landmann wrote regular reports about his patient's emotional and physical health, informed the Stasi about his plans of action, and even tried to assist in the breakup of Havemann's marriage.

During the house arrest, Havemann's movements were controlled by three hundred Stasi officials, who guarded his property round the clock . Havemann was only rarely allowed to leave the house, and then only with a trail of three cars filled with Stasi officials behind him. As importantly, visitors' access to the property was strictly controlled, and all but his inner circle of friends were turned away. Katja Havemann's account of this period is striking in part for the normality that even such a life could bring. Even before the house arrest, when the state gradually increased the pressure on Havemann and his friends, life in Havemann's house at Gruenheide was often characterized by frivolity, and an uncomplicated, almost bohemian lifestyle, which like-minded people were welcome to share. This was, of course, the "normality" of those with little left to lose.

What about Havemann allowed him to live life in this way, and emerge from his confrontation with the Stasi essentially victorious? It is clear that Havemann knew how to fight a good battle. He was aware, at all times, of the importance of links with the Western, and especially West German, media. For as long as he managed to remain in the public eye, he counted on the inability of the East German authorities to withstand the intense international and domestic embarassment in the long run. Havemann could thus spend much of his time spent in house arrest thinking about new ways of smuggling comments, articles and even book-length manuscripts from Gruenheide to the West. Crucially, Havemann also had a personal character that suited his role. In the words of his closest friend, Wolfgang Biermann, "Havemann understood politics better, he had proven himself in life, he also understood women better than me, he could drink more alcohol and was in an essential matter my opposite: he chronically considered himself to be wonderful. Every morning he congratulated the World that he existed" (p. 43).

The authors' central argument, indicated in the subtitle, is that with each step undertaken by the Stasi against Havemann, the GDR regime undermined and discredited itself until, in 1989, it crumbled in the face of those who sought to follow Havemann's legacy. This is one possible interpretation, but the book allows another one. The book also suggests that the GDR was a state which, even before 1989, was reluctant to "go for the kill." The state could have imprisoned Havemann like so many unknown dissidents. It did not do so. The state could have isolated Havemann in his house completely. It did not do so. If the brutal Stasi methods exposed it as a totalitarian state, the GDR desperately pretended not to be one. In this way, the state was its own worst enemy, limiting

itself in ways Havemann knew how to exploit.

It is doubtful that the GDR crumbled in 1989 solely, or even mainly, because of the continued resistence of the GDR opposition around Baerbel Bohley, Rainer Eppelmann, and other friends of Katja Havemann, who had been inspired in crucial ways by her husband. However, they had clearly contributed to the GDR's moral demise, and they exposed the central weaknesses in the ways in which the GDR justified itself. Perhaps even more importantly, these people possessed the intellectual and moral freedom to provide real leadership in the heady days of autumn 1989, inside the "New Forum."

This is a refreshing book that does not turn its protagonists into saints, and which, if anything, underplays their courage and the anguish which they must have endured. For this reason, it gives an invaluable account of Havemann and the oppositional milieu around him, one which deserves to be read by historian and non-historian alike.

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