

Leaving Work, Theater and the U.S.S.R.

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Выход: exit, withdrawal, outing, secession, entrance, appearance, etc.

As the tanks and troops rehearsing for the Victory Day parade rattle my windows, create traffic jams of diverted cars in my courtyard and terrify my dog, I wonder why I'm in Moscow and not out at the dacha. Oh, right — I guess rain, hail and single-digit temperatures might have something to do with it. But all the same, the notion of exodus is very appealing, which brings us to выход (exit, leaving, outing), the more interesting word in the вход-выход (entrance-exit) pair.

Of course, “interesting” is a euphemism for “confusing.” Выход and its adjective выходной cover a huge swath of lexical territory that includes notions of leaving, entering and even celebrating.

Let's start with the easy stuff. Выход is any kind of exit, like эвакуационный (evacuation) or запасной (emergency exit, escape route, back door). It also describes the act of leaving or

going out. Sometimes in English this is expressed as withdrawing: Сегодня отмечался выход советских войск из Афганистана (The withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan was commemorated today).

In prisons, guards might shout: На выход с вещами! (Pack it up and move it out!; literally, “to the exit with [your] things.”) Today, this phrase is used jokingly when, say, the tour operator wants travelers packed and at the bus to the airport. This is amusing — in a dark sort of way — at 4 a.m. in Antalya, but I guess you have to be there to get the joke.

Выход can refer to an outing: Это первый выход после его болезни (This is the first outing after his illness). Российские космонавты успешно завершили выход в космос (The Russian cosmonauts successfully carried out a space walk).

Or it can refer to quitting an organization or state: Режиссер подписал письмо о выходе из Союза кинематографистов (The director signed a letter resigning from the Filmmakers’ Union). Советская конституция не предусматривала права свободного выхода республик из Союза (The Soviet Constitution didn’t include the right of republics to freely secede from the union).

But then, annoyingly, выход can mean the opposite: an entrance, appearance or access to something. This only makes sense if you think of выход as a form of coming out. For example, выход войск might not be their withdrawal, but rather their deployment or arrival, as in this headline: Нападение Германии на СССР и выход немецких войск к Ленинграду (Germany’s invasion of the U.S.S.R. and the advance of German forces towards Leningrad). Он отложил выход на работу (He put off going back to work). Выход на сцену актёра зрители встретили с овациями стоя (The audience gave a standing ovation when the actor made his entrance). Страна не имела выхода к морю (The country was landlocked; literally, “had no access to the sea”).

In the world of books, выход is the publication date: Издательство объявило выход книги “Инопланетное вторжение. Битва за Россию” (the publishing house announced the publication of “Alien Invasion: The Battle for Russia”). Weird, but possibly a good beach book.

More figuratively, выход is a way out, usually from тупик (a dead end) or some bad ситуация (situation). Мы твёрдо убеждены, что из любого сложного положения есть выход (We firmly believe that you can always find a solution to any complicated problem).

The adjective выходной can modify a noun to mean some form of exit, like выходная дверь (street door) or выходное пособие (severance pay). In reference to clothing, it’s “going out” duds — your party clothes. But выходной is also a day off, that is, when you can “go out of” work. Впереди три дня выходных (We’ve got three days off ahead of us).

To which I can only say: Желаю счастливых выходных! (Have a nice weekend!)

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