



Danny the Red has now become Danny the Green

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By From Regine Wosnitza Berlin

All his life Daniel Cohn-Bendit has moved between Germany and France. "I am a European bastard," Mr Cohn-Bendit proudly described himself to the JC. "I am a good German-French mixture and I propagate the purity of bastards as a noble race."

Currently a member of the French Greens in the European Parliament, Mr Cohn-Bendit used to work as a journalist and a representative for cultural affairs in Frankfurt-on-Main and - then known as "Danny the Red" - played a leading role in both the French and German student revolts of the late 1960s and 1970s.

His zigzag between the two countries started in Montauban, in southern France, in 1945, where his Jewish parents had opened a home for children whose parents were held in concentration camps or had been killed by the Nazis.

They themselves had fled Berlin when the Reichstag fire endangered their lives as politically active German citizens.

Although he has hardly ever engaged actively in religious Judaism, Mr Cohn-Bendit is fully aware of the impact it has had on his whole life.

"I do not withdraw from my history, and as long as there is anti-Semitism I am a Jew," Mr Cohn-Bendit declared. "And in my political work I decisively defend the European ideal."

When the family returned to Germany and settled in Frankfurt, Mr Cohn-Bendit first met his parents' long-term friend, Hannah Arendt, who was to shape many of his subsequent political beliefs. But after graduating from college in 1966, Mr Cohn-Bendit chose Nanterre University in Paris, where he actively engaged in the students' revolt.

"I had the great pleasure to participate," he said, looking back. "It was an exhilarating time. I was young and we felt we were making history." But Danton - as his friends nicknamed him - could not reap the fruits of the rebellion, because he was expelled from France for his activities.

But he was just in time to join the anti-authoritarian fight that was surfacing in Germany. Together with Joschka Fischer - today Germany's Foreign Minister - Mr Cohn-Bendit spurred on the protests - though, he stressed, rejecting the use of violence and parting ways with the movement when it turned terrorist.

Mr Fischer is currently involved in a fierce political debate on the compatibility of his role at the time and his cabinet post today.

"At long last, there is a German politician who says 'Yes, it was me,'" Mr Cohn-Bendit remarked approvingly of Mr Fischer. "It would have been very good if Social Democratic members had said, 'Yes, I used to be a member of the Communist Party' or a Christian Democrat had said, 'I used to be a member of the Nazi Party.'"

Other history, though, affects Mr Cohn-Bendit just as much. Last year he had to testify in the trial of Hans-Joachim Klein, accused of helping the terrorist Illich Ramirez Sanchez, known as Carlos the Jackal, to attack an OPEC meeting in Vienna in 1975, in which three people were killed. For more than 20 years Mr Cohn-Bendit was among those who helped Mr Klein live under an assumed name in France. But in the end he persuaded him to give himself up.

"My emotional reaction at the trial was connected to my feeling of personal responsibility," Mr Cohn-Bendit said.

This involved not only ensuring Mr Klein would not face a long prison sentence when giving himself up, but also his own failure to keep Mr Klein away from terrorism in the first place.

"We have won socially and have triggered an immense liberalisation, but luckily we lost politically," Mr Cohn-Bendit reflected. "I do not want to go back, and luckily, it's not the only time in my life I enjoyed immensely."

Nonetheless, he has been on the political stage most of his life. And in whatever he did, he considered direct, sometimes confrontational, dialogue with political foes - whether the Islamic Front in Algeria, Joerg Haider in Austria, or the far-right in Germany - as the best means to "take them apart."

Recently he returned to his journalistic profession of the early 1980s, having launched a literary TV magazine, called "Literaturclub," on Swiss television in the autumn of 1999.

"You must not become the slave of political work," he remarked, adding: "The more layers of cultural experience you have the more openly you can behave."