

# THE RENEGADE IN POLITICS<sup>1</sup>

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‘One can never be radical enough; that is, one must always try to be as radical as reality itself’ (Lenin, cited in Keach 1998, 149).

## INTRODUCTION

The renegade has been a prominent actor on the political stage throughout history. Perhaps the best-known example is the Italian socialist turned fascist Benito Mussolini. Yet, numerous others joined Mussolini around the period of WWI (Loughlin 2003, 516). A significant number of American Trotskyites and Marxists (the so-called ‘New York Intellectuals’) active in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century later became conservatives, neo-conservatives or anti-communists. Some former 1960s radicals were to find themselves ensconced in parts of the establishment in various countries, as the years of rebellion and resistance became an increasingly distant memory. Renegades are a sufficiently common species for the Italian politician Ignazio Silone to predict that the ‘final struggle will be between the communists and the ex-communists’ (cited in Deutscher 1969, 9).

The propensity for radicals to undergo the most striking metamorphoses and emerge as anti-radicals has yet to be properly explained. The question is an important one, for if individuals who stand for radical political ideals are inevitably bound to renounce these views and become captured by the system they once abhorred, there would seem little hope for radicalism. Many renegades were at one time gifted intellectuals whose loss to the conservative side of politics is immeasurable. The talents of American Bolshevik supporter Max Eastman, who translated Leon Trotsky’s *The History of the Russian Revolution* (see Eastman 1997), alas, were eventually put to the service of McCarthyism. In addition, radicals’ changing allegiances have undoubtedly made history: What would have happened had Mussolini not made his historic break with the Italian Socialist Party during WWI, before becoming a fascist ruler and allying his country to Nazi Germany? Perhaps there are lessons to be drawn from this survey of renegades, such as identifying any political programs or policies better equipped to withstand pressures to acquiesce.

Yet, the question as to why radicals become renegades thus far has been paid scant attention. The few renegades subjected to any analysis at all tend to be seen in isolation, without the accompanying comparative work that would enable us to generalise about the problem. An obvious impediment to any discussion of the question is our selection of cases: undoubtedly there are many radicals and ex-radicals whose experiences we cannot draw on for the purposes of positing explanations. But as Christopher Hill argued in his book on the English

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revolution's defeated radicals, *The Experience of Defeat*, we are reliant on those who left some record of what they did and why, rather than those who withdrew quietly into passivity (Hill 1984, 17). In any case, because they often remain vituperative political protagonists, renegades tend to be more likely to document, explain, and sometimes vigorously justify, their shifting alliances. Even then, however, for the sake of brevity we are restricted here to discussing a sample of illustrative cases.

## FROM RADICAL TO RENEGADE

The term 'radical' historically is associated with going 'to the root', or identifying the systems, ideologies and power underlying individual phenomena (Engler 2004). Where liberals see problems such as racism and crime as separate and capable of being remedied through legislative change, radicals see these as part of a wider 'system' – namely capitalist social relations – that transcends acts of Parliament (Gordon & Osmond, 1970, 4, 5). One of its hallmarks, seeing things in totality, is reflected in Howe's (1983, 10) observation that radicalism's appeal to the young in 1930s America flowed from its ability to offer 'coherence, only radicalism could provide a unified view of the world'.

As well as relating seemingly disconnected events, radicalism is about achieving systemic change through challenging political structures and institutions whose legitimacy is assumed in wider society. Fry (1983, x, xi) argues that radicals have tended to question 'dominant beliefs and policies' and have 'confronted the powerful authorities of their day'. Scruton (1982, 391) highlights more broadly radicals' hostility to 'the status quo' and their dissatisfaction with anything less than 'sweeping changes'. Similarly, according to Love (1988, 151), radicalism strives for a 'fundamental change in the pattern of social relationships'.

Both these latter definitions are arguably deficient by virtue of their failure to specify what sort of change is being sought. Nevertheless, because of the association of conservatism with resistance to change, these definitions are presumed to relate to leftwing radicalism. Often regarded as coterminous with 'extremism', some will argue that radicalism can also be found on the far right (Labeledz 1999, 723). Yet, even if we accept this position, the term itself can be originally traced to the far-left section of the English liberals (Tansey 2004, 79, 80). It is not only for this reason, however, that we are primarily interested in leftwing radicals, who have generally been defined by their commitment to equality (Bobbio 1996, 29-31): as Finkelstein (n.d.) notes, renegades generally move in the direction of left to right rather than vice-versa.

Leftwingers who move to the right and abandon their radical politics become renegades (also sometimes called 'apostates'). The renegade does more than merely change their opinions. In fact, they assume a form virtually unrecognisable from their radical parent. Thompson (1969, 152, 153) thus describes apostasy as 'a mutilation of the writer's own previous existential being'. In this sense, the renegade is usually distinct from the left-leaning politician who compromises their principles under the pressure of governing the capitalist state: witness the case of British Labour's Tony Benn who as a Cabinet Minister under the Harold Wilson and James Callaghan governments in the 1970s went along with cuts to social spending and the closure of power stations (Cliff and Gluckstein 1996, 341, 343), only to emerge in the 1990s as one of the leading leftwing critics of the Blair New Labour Government. The renegade, in contrast, tends to take on a more permanent disposition. The process can be a gradual, step-by-step evolution or, as we shall see in the case of Mussolini, it can hinge on a single decision. The renegade does not always go to the far right, but generally any residual opposition to capitalism is discarded (Deutscher 1969, 15, 10).

## **The Experience of Defeat**

The renegade's origins have often been located in structural changes, in particular the decline of great movements for change. In *The Experience of Defeat*, Hill writes of the demoralising impact of the defeat of the English revolution in 1660 on radicals, many of whom subsequently made their peace with the restored monarchy (Hill 1984). Borrowing from Hill, Ali points to the many former 1960s radicals who cast off their revolutionary politics and moved to the right in the context of the defeat of social movements and capitalism's stabilisation in the 1970s and 1980s (Ali 2005, Ch.11). Along similar lines, Harman analyses the failure of the strategy of some militants who employed individualist tactics of violence against the state. Some of these activists reacted to defeat by opting for what Rudi Dutschke dubbed 'the long march through the institutions' and accepting the capitalist mode of production and the structures of the state (Harman 2001).

An additional consequence of defeat for radicals is a much less hospitable political terrain. Harman writes of the despair and pessimism that set in around the mid-1970s as the anti-Vietnam War movement ended, capitalism survived, and political machinations in China and Pol Pot's Cambodia (backed by China) resulted in deep disillusionment (Harman 1988, 346-349). Inevitably during such political downturns there is a shift in the balance of forces against radicals. Wald suggests that the transformation of many New York Intellectuals was indicative of the profound changes in the international and domestic political climates, including the booming post-war economy, the failure of revolutionary movements in Western Europe, and a Cold War context of harassment and infiltration by state authorities (Wald 1987, 290). In such circumstances, Thompson (1969) asks, is it possible for radicals to retain their aspirations for social change when all hope of realising them appears lost?

What unites these different commentaries is an emphasis on the deterioration in radicals' political environments. Such an approach is insightful: most renegades succumb during times of growing conservatism and setbacks for those pitted against the status quo. Yet, the 'experience of defeat' explanation raises the question as to how '60s radicals such as Ali and Harman weathered the darker times of the 1980s and 1990s without losing their anti-capitalist politics. Some radicals do not give up, even when all hope appears lost.

## **Flawed Radicals?**

The influence of subjective factors thus needs to be considered, including theoretical weaknesses or flaws on the part of the disaffected radicals. The ease with which many flip over to anti-radicalism raises questions about the courage of their radical convictions in the first place. It may even be possible that some renegades sewed the seeds of their conservatism during their earlier phase. For instance, the 'arch-turncoat of history', Benito Mussolini, shifted from opposing Italian involvement in WW1 to supporting intervention very abruptly in October, 1914 (Stewart 1928, 844). Formerly a leading member of the PSI and editor of its newspaper *Avanti!*, Mussolini substituted fascism and nationalism for socialism and internationalism. Doriot Pels' simplistic argument about fascism's 'inimical proximity' to socialism as an explanation for Mussolini's actions ignores the empirically observable breaks that he made, the outrage and bewilderment these shifts provoked among Italian socialists, and his subsequent repression of socialists such as erstwhile PSI colleague

Antonio Gramsci (Pels 1993, 76). The notion of a ‘U-shaped’ political spectrum – where the far right and far left eventually cohabit – shares the weaknesses of ‘totalitarian’ theory, devoid as it often is of any historical or ideological analysis of communism vis-à-vis fascism (see Kershaw 2000, Ch.2).

One does not have to accept the argument that fascism and socialism are ‘brothers under the skin’ (Podhoretz 1999, 144) to concede that Mussolini’s brand of ‘socialism’ may have prefigured his later politics. Contrary to others who have depicted Mussolini as well versed in Marxist literature (James Gregor 1979, 41), his former comrade in the PSI Angelica Balabanoff (1968, 45, 46) recalls *Il Duce* as having read only the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*. So far as she was concerned he was always autocratic in his approach and condescending towards the masses. As early as 1903 Mussolini had described himself as an ‘authoritarian communist’ (cited in Mack Smith 1981, 7). While by no means the first socialist accused of authoritarian tendencies, it was clear in Mussolini’s case that ideas were subordinate to power and ambition. He floated easily between Marx, Sorel, Nietzsche, and revolutionary syndicalist and anarchist thought, dispensing with each of them after a time (Woolf 1966, 190; MacGregor-Hastie 1963, 29). His lack of ideology or core belief left him vulnerable to shifting sands, in this case the outbreak of WWI and European socialist parties’ unexpected rallying to nationalism and warmongering (De Felice, cited in Woolf 1966, 190; Renzi 1971, 206). Thus the ‘radical’ Mussolini who combined a slippery grasp of theory and ideology with a raw desire for power and authoritarian tendencies was the precursor to the fascist Mussolini.

We can also see with other renegades how their trajectory may have been shaped by characteristics they displayed as radicals. Eldridge Cleaver, for instance, was a leader of the Black Panther Party that not only fought for emancipation of Black Americans but also rejected the capitalist economic system it saw as responsible for their enslavement. In time Cleaver would be reconciled with some of the most pro-capitalist institutions, such as the church and the Republican Party he had so derided as a Panther (Kimball 2000, 214; Cleaver 1970, 9). Yet, Cleaver showed during the time when he was the Party’s Minister of Information from 1967-1971 and one of its leading members, that he was comfortable with hierarchy, an essential – though not sufficient – condition for his later association with the Republicans and elite party politics. Top-down leadership and corruption marred the Panthers: by 1969 any party member who resisted the leadership’s dictates was dismissed as an informer or ‘an enemy of the people’ (Pearson 1994, 165). Consistent with their top-down methods was party leaders’ attraction to Maoism, whose emphasis on militarism and violence appealed to lumpen-proletarians such as Cleaver, a convicted rapist and attempter murder (Pearson 1994, 113; Chang and Halliday 2005; Kimball 2000, 215). In one sentence in his book *Soul on Ice*, Cleaver pays homage to Mao by repeating his name 14 times (Cleaver 1968, 19). A willing participant in authoritarian and undemocratic politics, Cleaver upon his return from a trip to Vietnam fabricated the story that he had been authorised to act as mediator in all communications between the Vietnamese and American anti-war and anti-racist movements, insisting that without his imprimatur visits to Vietnam were impermissible (Dellinger 1993, 255). Cleaver was even alleged to have participated in the torture of another Black Panther member, who subsequently required psychiatric treatment (Pearson 1994, 162, 163). A misogynist who kept his wife Kathleen in virtual captivity – another reason for him being at home among Republicans and Christian fundamentalists! – Cleaver was also a self-confessed rapist (Jezer 1992, 218, 219; Cleaver 1968, 14, 15).

A closer inspection of the radical's politics may thus reveal important continuities, or at least flaws in their politics and practices that in different contexts might lead to conservatism. In other cases, some renegades' past radicalism is simply overstated. For instance, Norman Podhoretz, one of the most touted of American neo-conservative renegades, started out in life not as a radical but as a liberal (Podhoretz 1979, 16). The British renegade Oswald Mosley was a Conservative Party politician before moving to the left and joining the Labour Party. His decision to leave the Labour Party when it did not accede to his radical Keynesian-style economic policies at the 1930 party conference, and his later formation of his own fascist movement, must therefore be viewed in this context of Conservative lineage (Cross 1961, 9, 11; Mosley 1968).

Yet, as an ultimate explanation, the method of highlighting the flaws and continuities in radicals is insufficient, in part because it is often the pressure of events – in Mussolini's case, the outbreak of WW1 – that put people's ideas to the test. In the absence of such events, their trajectories potentially would have been rather different. More importantly, some individuals in the same movement, sharing very similar politics, went in completely different directions: numerous American radicals from the 1930s onwards, for instance, followed opposing paths despite initially sharing Trotskyist political frameworks (Callinicos 1990, Ch.4).

### **‘Cashing in on Earthly Pleasures’?**

Perhaps one explanation for radicals with similar politics setting off in dramatically different directions is the temptations of money and power, which tend to mount during ebbs in radical movements as pressures to conform increase. This is a factor surprisingly understated in the work on political renegades, notwithstanding Finkelstein's (n.d.) claim that political apostasy is invariably driven by a desire 'to cash in, or keep cashing in, on earthly pleasures'. This observation underlies Finkelstein's argument (cited earlier) that the renegade invariably shifts from left to right rather than vice-versa, as there is almost no material incentive to radicalisation.

This explanation may be relevant in the case of Mussolini. Speculation about his motives has in part been fuelled by the abruptness of his switch to supporting the war and subsequent exit from the PSI. Prior to his shock desertion he was reported to have entered into discussions with the wealthy landowner Naldi, who later bankrolled Mussolini's new publication, *Il Popolo d'Italia*. Mussolini received money from the French and British governments, both of whose interests were vested in Italian entry into the war against Germany (Bosworth 2002, 106, 107). For similar reasons, it has also been alleged that his paper may have been funded by Russian and American sources (Mack Smith 1981, 25). On the other hand, it cannot clearly be said whether the first payment Mussolini received was prior to or after he published his new stance on the war in October, 1914 (Kirkpatrick 1964, 63). Yet, what is beyond doubt is that he was the beneficiary of substantial advertising revenues as the circulation of his paper rose (Mack Smith 1981, 32). Mussolini's lifestyle also changed, and he began to indulge in meals at expensive restaurants, horse-riding, and later driving a car (Bosworth 2002, 109).

It may, however, have been a lust for something other than money that stimulated him: power (Megaro 1938, 192, 324). It was common among Mussolini's enemies to attribute his

treachery simply to ‘time-serving ambition’ (Stewart 1928, 844). One biographer writes of his ‘ambition to rise’ and how this prevented Mussolini from being a dedicated follower of any one school of thought (Bosworth 2002, 65). The Russian socialist Leon Trotsky viewed Mussolini’s conversion as largely a self-seeking act of greed for power and success (Trotsky 1941, 413).

Trotsky had seen something similar at work much closer to home. Around the same time as Mussolini made his move, a one-time collaborator of Trotsky’s, the Russian Marxist Alexander Israel Helphand (‘Parvus’), who became one of Germany’s richest men as a result of abandoning his anti-imperialist politics to be a war profiteer and a secret agent for the Hapsburgs during WW1 (Zeman and Scharlau 1965). As well as being on the receiving end of German money for political purposes, the ‘Marxist millionaire’ became fabulously wealthy in his own endeavours: he emerged at the end of the war as one of that country’s richest men and a noted *bon vivant*. He enjoyed accommodation in luxurious hotels, and engaged in conspicuous consumption of the finest cuisine, champagne and cigars, as well as surrounding himself with glamorous women (Zeman and Scharlau 1965, 156, 157, 281). No doubt acting as an emissary for the German state and being at the centre of all the accompanying diplomatic intrigue also gave Parvus a tremendous sense of his own power.

Not every radical who becomes a renegade is actuated by wealth and power. But the most prominent renegades certainly find themselves climbing the social ladder. Numerous American ex-radicals from the 1930s, the so-called Jewish ‘New York Intellectuals’, jettisoned their socialist politics to become influential conservatives. As Wald argues, in a period of declining living standards and state-enforced austerity for the poor and the working class, many of these newborn conservatives were handsomely rewarded for their ‘loyal services as publicists, legitimators, and ideologists of American expansionism’ (Wald 1987, 363).

Undoubtedly many other renegades have benefited materially from rapprochement with the status quo. Yet, this explanation has its weaknesses, including its ignorance of many of the complexities in the different cases of renegades irreducible to ambition or careerism. It also raises the question as to why some radicals were tempted while others were not.

### **A Renegade ‘Mentality’?**

Perhaps the only explanation for this lies in personality differences and other factors specific to the individual in question. Indeed, many renegades exhibit similar characteristics. Kirkpatrick (1964, 70) referred to the ‘mentality of a renegade’ taken on by Mussolini following his betrayal of old comrades. Many renegades do evince a certain ‘mentality’, though not necessarily in the same sense implied by Kirkpatrick. Renegades tend to be erratic, mercurial and unpredictable, and as a result are sometimes described as political ‘adventurers’. Their attachment to causes can be rather fleeting, and they are prone to changing their minds when it appears to suit them. Finkelstein observes that the apostate enjoys ‘the shock value of an occasional, wildly inconsistent outburst’. It is sometimes thought that renegades must – in order to be capable of such revolutions in their political thinking – be psychologically damaged or personally flawed (Loughlin 2003, 516, 517).

There is certainly evidence for this in the case of Mussolini. For his onetime colleague Angelica Balabanoff, Mussolini's treachery was inexplicable except according to psychosocial factors, in particular his narcissistic and ego-driven desire for 'personal recognition and prestige' in the context of a troubled childhood marred by violent behaviour (Balabanoff 1968, 315; Kirkpatrick 1964, 33; Mack Smith 1981, 28). The swiftness of Mussolini's *volte-face* might indeed raise questions about his stability. Kirkpatrick writes of Mussolini's 'fluid, kaleidoscopic character... Unpredictable, romantic, and unstable he could play any role' (Kirkpatrick 1964, 195). Over the course of the early part of his career Mussolini, according to Stewart (1928, 849), had displayed 'some rather remarkable veerings of opinion'. These included the shift from internationalist to nationalist, from socialist to conservative, and from republican to monarchist. Mack Smith attributes this less to theoretical confusion to 'a search for striking headlines and a wish to become all things to all men' (Mack Smith 1981, 33).

Psychosocial factors are also likely to be part of any explanation for the actions of Parvus, who like his contemporary Mussolini also was an unstable and hot-tempered individual, prone to fits of rage and conflict, and capable of remarkable political elasticity (Zeman and Scharlau 1965, 33). When Parvus, for instance, followed up his withering attack on Bernstein's famous revisionist socialist arguments around the turn of the century with a statement of support for the latter's proposal that the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) accept the position of Vice-President of the Reichstag, observers were flabbergasted (Zeman and Scharlau 1965, 38-44). In this vein Trotsky described Parvus as a 'political Falstaff' (cited in Deutscher 1954, 220), after the chameleon-like character Sir John Falstaff in Shakespeare's *Henry IV*.

Instability and unpredictability were evident, too, in the case of the gifted New York Intellectual Max Eastman, who was capable of drafting a brilliant polemic one moment and then completely withdrawing from defining political battles out of disinterest the next (Wald 1987, 112). Eastman's transition from Trotskyism to eventual McCarthyism, according to another renegade Sidney Hook, was akin to a 'religious conversion', and many of his friends simply shrugged their shoulders at yet another instance of his ever-changing loyalties (Hook 1987, 141). Former Socialist Workers Party (SWP(US)) member Felix Morrow pledged at the party's 1946 convention his life-long commitment to the organisation, only to end up consulting for the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and publishing books on the occult and selling pornography. After returning to politics for a hiatus, in the 1980s he would go on to work for the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) and spend his weekends in a 'spiritual community called Center for the Living Force' (Wald 1987, 287-289). Podhoretz moved from liberalism to radicalism and then to conservatism all within the space of the 1960s.

Renegades' often rootless character betrays a certain lack of political stamina. The Australian radical Jim McClelland shed his revolutionary Trotskyite politics in 1948 to become a rightwing member of the Australian Labor Party (ALP). Anatol Kagan argued that intellectuals such as McClelland often possess significant talents and can thrive in the climes of radical upsurges, but lack the patience and determination to ride out political 'recession' (cited in Greenland 1998, 179, 180). A very similar point was made about the former Communist Party of Australia (CPA) leading member turned anti-Communist and fascist Adela Pankhurst Walsh, whom Pugh notes was most comfortable in the heat of the political battle, but was not cut out for 'the slow and unrewarding work that was necessary for a revolutionary movement' (Pugh 2001, 371).

There is a sense here in which the renegade is a rather superficial character, lacking solidness in their methodology. Thompson writes of the way in which an apostate's 'rejoining' of the mainstream is often accompanied by a disclaiming of responsibility for problems and the sheeting home of blame to 'some set of principles or party, some "Naked God" or "God that Failed"' (Thompson 1969, 173). Many of the socialists who became virulently anti-socialist in the aftermath of Stalinism were in this category, unable to interpret one of the decisive events of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century other than in the simplistic terms of the 'failure of socialism'. One might be tempted to look for some personal failings that might account for why these ex-radicals so readily accepted the equation of Stalinism with the socialism to which they had dedicated, in some cases, much of their life.

Renegades lack credibility precisely because they condemn what they once believed with equal fervour. As Jezer notes, in 1971 Jerry Rubin was in the process of embracing the 'human potential movement', and with as much zeal as he had promoted the Yippie cause he now argued that '*this* was the road to revolution' (Jezer 1992, 240; emphasis in original). In the years 1971-75 Rubin experimented with an exhaustive array of cures and treatments, including gestalt therapy, bioenergetics, rolfing, massage, jogging, health foods, tai chi, Esalen, hypnotism, modern dance, meditation, Silva Mind Control, Arica, acupuncture, sex therapy, and Reichian therapy (Rubin 1976, 20). From proselytising for the 'human potential movement', Rubin became an evangelist for the 'Yuppie' way of life (Jezer 1992, 291). There are some commonalities here with the American communist turned anti-Communist Arthur Koestler. As Christopher Hitchens argued (perhaps ironically, given his own changing status from radical journalist to neoconservative sponsor after the September 11 atrocities), Koestler was 'a man not merely convinced but actively enthused by practically any intellectual or political or mental scheme that came his way'. In his last two decades, Koestler was seduced by theories of levitation, extrasensory perception, telepathy, UFOs, the cause of Timothy Leary, and the spoon-bender Uri Geller (Hitchens 2009, 5).

Eldridge Cleaver, for whom it is interesting to note Rubin had mutual affection (see Cleaver 1970, 7, and Rubin 1970, 245), also was particularly adventurous. Eldridge Cleaver's alleged participation in torture and his confession to being a rapist (see above) suggest a damaged individual to say the least. Kimber argues that Cleaver was a 'serial extremist' whose only enduring feature was 'fanaticism' (Kimball 2000, 222). He notes that he was, at various times, 'a born-again Christian, a flower of the Rev. Sun Myung Moon, a Mormon, a crack cocaine addict, a designer of men's trousers featuring a codpiece, and even, finally, a Republican' (cited in Kimball 2000, 214). Cleaver was also, prior to his Panther days, a devout Catholic, although he says he became so initially for pragmatic reasons: in a California Youth Authority at the time, he wished to mix with the Blacks and Mexicans rather than the white Protestants (Cleaver 1968, 30). On the other hand, this may be an early indicator of his chameleon qualities. Indeed, as early as 1965 he had written of his arrival to prison as a different Eldridge Cleaver:

I was very familiar with the Eldridge who came to prison, but that Eldridge no longer exists. And the one I am now is in some ways a stranger to me. You may find this difficult to understand but it is very easy for one in prison to lose his sense of self. And if he has been undergoing all kinds of extreme, involved, and unregulated changes, then he ends up not knowing who he is (Cleaver 1968, 16).

This is a prime example of the at times chameleon-like characteristics of the renegade. Coleman speculates that Pankhurst Walsh's tendency to embrace new and exciting



movements was a consequence of being reared in a socialist family and her experiences as a young activist, which instilled in her the constant need to rebel and to experience the thrill of the political contest (Coleman 1996, 169). Hence the conversion to Catholicism towards the end of her life (Cannon 2002, 264).

## CONCLUSION

There is no single explanation for the phenomenon of the political renegade. The 'experience of defeat' approach offers a very powerful account of numerous activists' jettisoning of their radical politics in darker times when their ideas have fallen foul of the depressed political mood and mounting pressures to conform. It is worth recalling Marx's famous comment that individuals make decisions, but in circumstances well beyond their purview. Some radicals may have 'chosen' to become renegades, but they did so in circumstances dictated to them. In some cases, the lure of money and power proved irresistible.

But the structural explanation for apostasy has its weaknesses. As we have seen, some stay dedicated to the cause that many of their peers have deserted, persevering even when the political weight of the universe appears to be ranged against them. There is, then, nothing automatic about the emergence of the renegade. While the politics of some renegades were undoubtedly flawed even during their so-called 'radical' phases, there is no set of politics that can inoculate a radical against going over to the side. Indeed, individual radicals with very similar politics can go in completely different directions.

The ultimate explanation, therefore, is likely to lie somewhere in the complex interaction of agency and structure. Indeed, even among the renegades discussed here, they were united only by their abandonment of radicalism, with their ultimate destination differing quite significantly from case to case: some went to the far right, others to right wing social democracy, while others simply settled their differences with the system. Only the vast interplay of social forces, personalities and preferences can account for these diverging stories. Pankhurst Walsh's sympathy for the Nazis, for instance, was in part bound up with her support for the Axis powers during the war and her advocacy of a 'real Anglo-Saxon alliance' between Britain and Germany on quasi-eugenics grounds – her racism was a constant throughout the phases of her life – as well as her belief that the Brownshirts offered the greatest bulwark against communism (see Lavelle 2010).

Ultimately, decisions to renege are made by individuals rather than parties, movements or societies. Therefore we must start with the person. A firmer explanation for the preponderance of the renegade in politics will be reachable only after a more thoroughgoing study of cases across countries and time periods. But in order to understand each case, what is required is careful analysis of the political and economic context in which the renegade emerges, combined with an understanding of the characteristics of each individual and the circumstances of their own peculiar milieu, and how people attempt to shape the world around them.

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