

# George Soros: A Life in Full

Peter L.W. Osnos, Editor

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There has been a resurgence of interest in George Soros as political studies, quantitative and qualitative, explore the mainstreaming of demonising Mr Soros (Santini/Salles/ Barros 2022; Becker/Troschke 2022). What was lacking, however, was a realistic look at the man in question—Now, this gap has been closed by Peter Osnos's book, *George Soros: A Life in Full*. Written by a diverse group of intellectuals, this collection of eight essays sheds new light on Mr Soros's personal and political philosophy.

In what is the book's scene-setting essay, the Polish American intellectual Eva Hoffman (pp. 1-35) takes us back to Fascist Europe and reveals how Mr Soros' eventful childhood and early adolescence in Budapest, including its Nazi occupation, has shaped his worldview; and how the life of Tivadar Soros impacted his son George's ethics of risk-taking. To have Sebastian Mallaby, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, focus next (pp. 37-72) on Soros the financier is illuminating on two accounts. First, because in the wake of Hoffman's starting point it is so clear why Soros has become the bold speculator for which he is known (recall his 1992 bet against the Bank of England). Second, because in today's financial industry full of quants, Mr Soros may be one of last speculators whose trading style is not rooted in impersonal automation but in a genuine Popperian epistemology of reflexivity.

The essay by Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, explains the real significance of Mr Soros's philanthropic commitment to the many victims of daily injustice (pp. 73-96). The political scientist Ivan Krastev, one of the sharpest intellectuals on post-

Soviet liberalism, shows him as a passionate Eastern European mind (pp. 131-55). Michael Ignatieff, the former rector of Central European University, recalls vision and difficulties of running a Soros-founded university in Budapest, Prague, Warsaw, and now in Vienna (pp. 157-88). From Orville Schell, a longstanding authority on China, we get a glimpse into the world of George and Tamiko Soros: that is, into the running of a global network where open society principles and ideas, designed to tackle real-world problems, are everything (pp. 189-211). And speaking of ideas, the book ends with an essay by Bard College president Leon Botstein (pp. 213-57) who portrays Mr Soros as a man who believes—deeply—in the dignity of *all* human beings.

The most intriguing chapter, from a political studies standpoint, is the one by longtime human rights and social justice campaigner Gara LaMarche (pp. 97-130), who until recently served as president of the progressive-minded Democracy Alliance. In a most astute essay, aptly called "Politics with a Purpose," LaMarche's reading how Mr Soros became such a major figure on the friend vs. foe frontlines of American politics is refreshingly realistic. We get to see a man who has come to this prominent political role rather reluctantly; who thinks that big money is too influential in American democracy; who is critical of concentrated power, in markets as in government.

To conclude, there are two ways how to situate this book. One is by reference to previous Soros biographies, many of which written before Europe's migrant crisis of 2015, the year that changed Western politics. By contrast Osnos's thoughtful biography is new, and as thorough

as it can possibly get (as Mr Soros rarely talks about himself). The second way to read the book is political: as a mirror of our time or, one might say, as applied open society theory. For what this book does—is to challenge You and Me, as the real purpose of Mr Soros's politics is *not* the politics: it is rather the upholding of open society values as the basis of democracy. Highly recommended reading for both the lay public and serious students concerned about the state of democracy and human rights in global affairs.

## References

- Becker, Matthias J./Hagen Troschke (2022), How Users of British Websites Make a Bogeyman of George Soros, in: *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism*, vol. 5(1), 49–68, <https://doi.org/10.26613/jca/5.1.100>.
- Santini, Rose Marie/Débora Salles/Carlos Eduardo Barros (2022), We love to hate George Soros: A cross-platform analysis of the Globalism conspiracy theory campaign in Brazil, in: *Convergence*, vol. 28(4), <https://doi.org/10.1177/13548565221085833>.