

Democrats had still failed to break through in the opinion polls. (At the time of writing, they still have not.) This suggested that the party faced challenges that were bigger and more fundamental

than anything relating to the campaign it ran for the 2017 general election.

Neil Stockley is a member of the Liberal Democrat History Group executive.

Reviews

A truly remarkable man – but not a universal man

Richard Davenport-Hines, *Universal Man: The Seven Lives of John Maynard Keynes* (William Collins, 2015)

Review by **Ed Randall**

KEYNES LIVED A truly exciting and eventful life; one that had a huge impact on his fellow human beings, not just those who were part of his immediate and extensive social circle (many of whom he knew intimately), but vast numbers of people he could never have known personally. This book does more to convey that excitement and eventfulness to a general readership than any other I have read about John Maynard Keynes. No doubt that is because Richard Davenport-Hines did not set out to write another intellectual biography of Keynes.

If Davenport-Hines had wanted to enter that market he would (as he clearly appreciates) have found a crowded field, populated with works by genuine authorities on economic ideas. Not least, he would have entered a field dominated by Robert Skidelsky's magisterial, three-volume account of Keynes' life. Skidelsky offers unmatched intellectual insights to readers who want help making sense of Keynes' very active and extraordinary participation in – as well as commentary on – the world-shattering events of the first half of the twentieth century. Skidelsky also happens to have been especially well equipped, when the opportunity arose, to make the most of an unprecedented opportunity (in his *Return of the Master* (Allen Lane, 2009)), to extol and celebrate the economic thought of his hero. Keynes may have been dethroned by many in the Economics profession from his lofty position as father of macroeconomics, but he appeared, after

the Crash of 2008, to have been restored to a place atop an Economics Olympus.

Davenport-Hines' mission, in *Universal Man*, was to share his sense and appreciation of a life lived to the full and more often than not for a greater good. For Keynes, his academic discipline of Economics was never the most important thing. Regarded by some as a kind of intellectual Hercules, Keynes himself anticipated a time when Economics would be a subject for technicians and specialists; they might make a worthwhile but necessarily modest contribution to humanity. In his essay *Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren*, published in the shadow of the Great Crash of 1929, Keynes wrote:

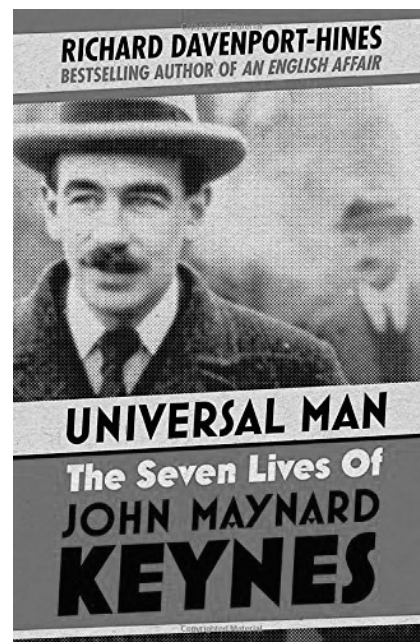
... do not let us overestimate the importance of the economic problem, or sacrifice to its supposed necessities other matters of greater and more permanent significance. It should be a matter for specialists ... If economists could manage to get themselves thought of as humble, competent people, on a level with dentists, that would be splendid!

So Davenport-Hines (who quotes Keynes' statement about the limitations of economic ideas and economists) sets out to convince his readers that Keynes' joie de vivre, and his engagement with his own and other people's humanity, had much less to do with the development of economic theory than it did with the huge pleasure he derived from his activities: as a benefactor, what

Davenport-Hines refers to as an *altruist*; as a man – especially young man – of curiosity, what Davenport-Hines calls a *boy-prodigy*; as a public official or civil servant, an *official*; as a *public man* (or what we nowadays often refer to as a public intellectual); as a *lover*; as a *connoisseur*; and, last, but by no means least, as an *envoy* – an able person committed to representing the culture to which they belong to the very best of their ability.

Let us start, as Davenport-Hines does, with the benefactor and philanthropist – a man who could have made and kept a huge private fortune. Keynes certainly made fortunes (and on occasion lost them), but he inevitably invested a great part of the money he made into the things he loved so that they would benefit others. That included the Cambridge Arts Theatre, to which Keynes lent a prodigious sum. But, more important still, he gave the theatre, and many other projects, his time and energy. In 1934, Davenport-Hines records, Keynes made 'eight speeches altogether' (in one day, in support of the Cambridge Theatre scheme). Keynes himself believed '... they must have got tired of me! But the scheme went through.' Giving his time and energy to the things he believed in – whether a theatre project, Kings College (Cambridge), or representing his nation in the US at the close of the Second World War – was the hallmark of a man willing to commit vastly more than his money to the things he loved and believed in.

Keynes' curiosity, as a young man, was not just expressed in his intellectual



pursuits and academic achievements, it was a very personal quest of self-discovery too. Davenport-Hines gives a fascinating account, based on information that Keynes himself ‘compiled and preserved’, about sexual encounters with ‘young men off the streets’ and amongst his own set. And, in this regard, Davenport-Hines refers to Keynes’ ‘principle of intelligent compartmentalisation’. It was an openness to new experiences, and a capacity to defy others’ expectations and to undertake a journey that did not follow an easily predictable course, but so far as possible a carefully managed one.

Early in 1922, Keynes arranged for the Russian ballerina Lydia Lopokova, whom he had met for the first time in 1918, to move into rooms in Gordon Square, just ‘a few doors away from ... where he lived’. In the course of Davenport-Hines’ account of Keynes’ sexual evolution, he notes that, by the time Keynes was set on marrying Lydia, he was also urging fellow Liberals to: ‘... break bounds by public discussion of “sex questions” ... [which are] widely discussed in private.’ One reason Keynes gave for talking more openly and honestly about sex was that ‘there are no subjects about which the general public is more interested ... [adding that it should not be doubted that] sex questions are about to enter the political arena.’

As Davenport-Hines reports, Keynes regarded himself as physically repulsive. Virginia Woolf compared him to ‘a gorged seal, [with] double chin, ledge of red lip, little eyes, sensual, brutal [and] unimaginative’. Yet, Virginia Woolf also wrote of Keynes: ‘[He seemed to be] a blank wall of disapproval; till I kissed him, [when] he talked of Lydia, having a book about the ballet, in his eager stammering way’.

In this review I have preferred the term public servant, to Davenport-Hines’ label – ‘Official’ – for one of Keynes’ seven lives; terminology can be very important! Indeed, Davenport-Hines quotes Sir Richard Hopkins, a Treasury mandarin who knew Keynes well, as observing of Keynes that: ‘He was not a minister, but he was a friend of ministers. He was not a civil servant, but he was a friend of civil servants. He was also a critic of both, and, if need be, a castigator.’ Keynes was, in his public service, exceptionally hard working and extraordinarily committed, once he had decided in favour of what he believed to be a good cause. *Universal Man* is full of

winning illustrations and accounts of the efforts that followed. But Keynes most remarkable skill was his unsurpassed ability to persuade. His life as a persuader marks him out as one of the most talented and successful communicators of the twentieth century. Keynes investment and engagement in trying to change minds often began with him changing his own mind.

One of Davenport-Hines’ best anecdotes is about Keynes’ success in changing Lloyd George’s mind at the beginning of the First World War. Keynes – then in his mid-thirties, and one of the youngest senior public servants in Whitehall – is portrayed as he sets out to convince Lloyd George to change his mind on a great issue of finance. And, change Lloyd George’s mind (about how the UK government should manage international and domestic banking debts and the UK’s stocks of gold) Keynes did. Yet, by the end of the war, his relationship with the Welsh Wizard had changed. As international leaders, including Lloyd George, met at Versailles, to agree the terms of the peace, Keynes – a British delegate to the talks – concluded that those leaders, including Lloyd George, were by far the greatest threat to world peace. He decided to write what is probably the most powerful, and certainly the most influential, polemic against the Versailles Treaty (and its ‘statesmen’ authors, including Lloyd George). His book, *The Economic Consequences of the Peace*, became a best seller. Keynes left the government service and was more or less immediately recognised for his extraordinary gifts as a public communicator and as one of the foremost controversialists of his day. Davenport-Hines tells the story very well.

Davenport-Hines has something very particular in mind when he refers to Keynes as a connoisseur. ‘Connoisseurs ... adopt or reject people and tastes according to a patrician sensibility [ignoring] the worlds of productivity and profit. Money is esteemed as a means to acquire what they value, but despised as a provider of power, showiness, luxury, over-eating and barbarous hobbies.’ This biography is full of engaging stories about Keynes’ love of collecting. He took considerable efforts to acquire works for his own collection of paintings (which he bequeathed to Kings College, Cambridge), and for the nation. The biography not only recounts stories

about Keynes’ collecting, it explores his motivations as a collector of books and paintings. At one point Davenport-Hines compares Keynes to Sir Kenneth Clark (‘Clark of Civilisation’) – they knew one another quite well and got on well. The former ‘had signalled his wish to democratise access to the arts by opening [the National Gallery] on Cup Final Day’ and, as Davenport-Hines puts it: ‘both felt, [they were] fighting for European arts and intellect against barbarism [and] believed that the arts intensified people’s appreciation of life.’ In July 1945 Keynes said, in the course of a BBC broadcast dealing with the foundation of the Arts Council of Great Britain, that the establishment of the Arts Council had ‘happened in a very English, informal, unostentatious way’. And, despite very limited funds, it was a very public recognition that there was an ‘unsatisfied demand ... for serious and fine entertainment’.

Close to the end of his life Keynes became Britain’s most important international negotiator at a series of talks held in the United States about the future of international economic relations. This part of Keynes’ life, as an envoy, is admirably clearly recounted. Keynes, the author of the *Economic Consequences of the Peace*, and the most eminent economist working at the British Treasury, had good reason to believe that his knowledge and experience equipped him to persuade Britain’s most important military ally that peacetime cooperation should and could match that required for prosecuting the war. But Keynes and his small team struggled to get their message across. One of those present, Dean Acheson, asked Lionel Robbins – a member of the UK delegation – why London sent ‘too many Englishman with the wrong sort of accent [to Washington]’. At subsequent talks, those held at Bretton Woods, agreement was finally reached on establishing new international institutions. Keynes contribution was acknowledged, but what was agreed fell far short of what he wanted. Davenport-Hines, in his account, does an excellent job of describing the process and the misunderstandings, which left both the British and the Americans frustrated.

I think it is unfortunate that Davenport-Hines’ title – for a biography of a man with at least seven lives (and the reader cannot escape the idea that it could have been many more) – uses

the phrase *Universal Man* to sum them up. Keynes was not a man for all times nor was he a man for all places. He was most certainly a multi-faceted and multi-talented human being (surely Davenport-Hines' object in deploying the term *universal*), but Keynes was also an Englishman, and an Englishman from a particular era. Keynes was an Edwardian Englishman. He was – as we all are – a product of his place and his times, even if he was often at odds with England's insularity and conservatism. He was the champion of an ethical outlook that was the very antithesis of values that had come to be associated with Victorian Britain, the world into which he had been born. But Keynes' embrace of individualism, his love of the arts and support for the avant-garde, rarely meant he was rejected by his English peers and contemporaries, or that he rejected them. They appear to have accepted him as the possessor of a fine English soul and of great English

sensibilities – even though he often articulated radical notions and endorsed unconventional morals. It is hard to imagine that such a prominent public figure could, in twenty-first-century Britain, have enjoyed the degree of freedom Keynes enjoyed from media curiosity and intrusion.

This is a book about a truly remarkable man, not a renaissance man or a superman or even a universal man. I thoroughly recommend it as a most enjoyable and informative read.

Ed Randall is a retired academic and former Liberal Democrat councillor. His publications include A Union for Health: Strengthening the European Union's role in health; Food, Risk and Politics: Scare, scandal and crisis – insights into the risk politics of food safety; How and How Not to Face the Future: A response to the Liberal Democrats' Facing the Future. He was joint editor of the Dictionary of Liberal Thought with Duncan Brack.

Heath abandoned his antipathy to 'lame ducks' by, in effect, nationalising Rolls Royce within five months of taking office. Benn later enjoyed describing the Labour Party programme of 1972 as 'The most radical and comprehensive programme ever produced by the Labour Party', which guaranteed a great embarrassment to the then deputy leader, Roy Jenkins. According to Harold Wilson, Jenkins held the 'lead position' as the putative leader of the party to follow Wilson until his resignation from the deputy leadership and from the Shadow Cabinet in April 1972. There is long detail on the events leading up to his resignation, with Wilson undermining him by changing his mind over a referendum on the Common Market.

Not all those on the right of the party were followers of Jenkins: there were some who hankered after Antony Crosland, but he never stirred himself to follow up his seminal book, *The Future of Socialism*, and thus disappointed his acolytes. Bill Rodgers – later the most effective operator of the SDP's 'Gang of Four' – applied his organisational and 'fixing' skills to the Campaign for Democratic Socialism in an attempt to make Jenkins' role more effective.

It is interesting that the Liberals do not rate even a footnote in this narrative. In different circumstances, such as during the Lib-Lab Pact of 1977–8, the Liberals might have had influence as a second opposition party making life more difficult for Edward Heath. However, the Liberals had polled just 7.5 per cent at the 1970 general election,

Social democracy versus socialism

Patrick Bell, *The Labour Party in Opposition 1970–1974* (Routledge, 2016)

Review by **Michael Meadowcroft**

PERCEPTIONS OF HOW a party copes with the years of opposition usually rely on statements, interviews and its efforts to present a favourable and united front, illuminated from time to time by leaks and lobbying by dissidents. The value of an examination of the Opposition through a specific parliament is that, if rigorous, it draws aside the curtain and exposes the factions and tensions. Patrick Bell has done a very thorough job of trawling through all the available committee papers and interviewing key individuals. The result is that the reader gets a vivid picture of the deep left-right split at all levels of the party and the great skill of Harold Wilson as leader in keeping the whole show on the road. Bell also shows how senior staff at Labour headquarters were themselves partisan and on occasion resorted to somewhat underhand tactics in the preparation and timing of documents in order to pursue their views.

The roots of the struggle within the Labour Party between social democracy

and hegemonic socialism were planted during its time in opposition. The balance of power within the party shifted significantly from the parliamentary party to the membership and, often separately, to the major trade unions. Patrick Bell painstakingly traces the movement in policy via papers prepared for the national executive committees and, finally, to the party conference. With the accession of Jack Jones to the leadership of the Transport & General Workers' Union – the largest in the country – and with Hugh Scanlon heading up the engineering workers union, there were powerful figures on the left of the party who were ready and able to demonstrate their clout by going direct to the party conference with their block votes rather than participate in the deliberative committee process.

Tony Benn's skilful manoeuvring as de facto leader of the left is traced through his attention to committee detail and his ability to produce the apposite excoriating phrase, as when

