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# Youth against hunger: service, activism and the mobilisation of young humanitarians in 1960s Britain

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## ABSTRACT

Youth have been a malleable resource in the fight against hunger, variously conceived as volunteers, political activists, global citizens and financial donors. This article uncovers competing (and sometimes complementary) visions for the participation of British youth in Youth Against Hunger, part of the United Nations Freedom from Hunger Campaign. In doing so, it makes two key contributions to the field. First, by uncovering the professionals and commentators who sought to involve adolescents in humanitarian activity, it accounts for the agency of a more diverse range of non-state participants and experts than are usually included in histories of humanitarianism. Second, in highlighting the pragmatic difficulties in aligning humanitarian and youth-work contexts, it illustrates how domestic concerns about British youth actively shaped the development of the humanitarian sector in this period.

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## Introduction

Youth engagement has been at the heart of non-governmental organisations' donor-focused work since the emergence of the modern humanitarian movement in the post-war period.<sup>1</sup> Yet, despite the scale of youth operations undertaken in this period, the history of adolescent humanitarians remains relatively unexplored. Attention to young people has instead focused on two main areas: the representation of children as victims in need of aid; and activist youth movements made up primarily of university students.<sup>2</sup> These polarised discourses map onto broader debates within the humanitarian sector in 1960s Britain: should organisations prioritise relief (and in doing so rely on simplistic imagery of recipients as innocent, passive victims), or should they promote a politically engaged model of development targeted at structural inequality?<sup>3</sup> Ideas of young people as passive victims and engaged activists did inform how adolescents were encouraged to participate in humanitarian activity, but they cannot capture the complexity of youth involvement, not least because they leave little room for understanding the place of recalcitrant teenagers and the tireless adult organisers who sought to engage them. The humanitarian sector has always had to work alongside diverse

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and often competing interests at a local level; youth work offers a window onto how these relationships shaped its activity. This article uses the British Youth Against Hunger campaign to talk about why humanitarian organisations sought to engage with adolescents in the 1960s, the visions that they and the wider public had for the mobilisation of young British humanitarians, and the difficulties they faced in realising these visions.

In 1965 the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) launched the Young World Mobilization Appeal (YWMA) to involve youth in educational and operational activities associated with the international Freedom from Hunger Campaign (FFHC). Like its adult counterpart, the YWMA aimed to build financial and political support for long-term agricultural development projects in order to 'help the hungry to help themselves'. Both parts of the campaign explicitly differentiated their work from relief or charity and emphasised instead the co-operative participation of UN member-states, whether developed or not. While the FAO provided an infrastructure for the YWMA, the great majority of youth work was organised at a national level in concert with national FFHC campaigns. In the UK, this took the form of Youth Against Hunger (YAH).<sup>4</sup> What began as a 21-week push soon morphed into a long-term project to involve young people in a technical and agricultural vision of overseas development. Existing humanitarian NGOs – such as Christian Aid and Oxfam – ran YAH activities alongside their own educational and promotional work, and non-humanitarian associations – such as the Boy Scouts and church groups – found ways to introduce YAH to their broader remit of social activities.

While YAH shared considerable ground with the FFHC, it was not simply a fresher-faced reflection of the adult campaign. It had its own objectives, held its own assumptions, offered its own possibilities, and faced its own organisational dilemmas. To understand how humanitarian organisations interacted with their donor publics we must pay attention to the geopolitical and domestic contexts that determined their local practices. In the case of YAH, imperial decline, the international ascendancy of the teenager, and the national reassessment of youth services that took place in Britain in the early 1960s all played important roles. Various conceived as educated fundraisers, volunteers, and activists, young people were treated as a malleable resource in the fight against hunger, though they by no means always conformed to the wishes of their adult counterparts. This article uncovers the ways adults shaped the campaign (and attempted to shape the adolescents who participated in it) according to their own diagnoses of the 'health' of 1960s British youth, their convictions about the purpose of humanitarianism and their concerns about Britain's shifting international status. The first section of this article establishes the discursive context in which the UK Youth Against Hunger campaign took shape, focusing in particular on the symbolic work to which young humanitarians were put in public and political discussions about Britain's post-imperial future. The second section discusses the difficulties of realising these visions, the pragmatic realities of organising the campaign, and debates about the most effective forms of youth participation.

### **Panic, optimism and the operationalisation of youth**

Over the course of the 1960s, Margaret Bywater, an Area Secretary for Christian Aid and tireless enthusiast for local organising, gave hundreds of talks to communities across the South of England. In attendance at one of these talks, given in a Southbourne church in

1963, was a small group of teenagers whom Bywater described as 'local Teddy Boys'. They were so disorderly, Bywater suggests, that she had to 'shout at the top of [her] voice to make [herself] heard'. The local vicar, though happier to see them indoors than causing trouble elsewhere, dismissed the boys as a 'gang that went around breaking windows and damaging cars'. But Bywater expressed hope that by sitting through her talk the boys did 'take something of value away with them'.<sup>5</sup> Bywater's optimism may have been unfounded, but this moment is significant not for what it might say about this particular group of boys, but for what it does say about the humanitarian organisations that sought to engage and mobilise them. It is the notion of 'value' that is so revealing here: Bywater was not simply judging what Christian Aid could get out of young people, but what young people could get out of Christian Aid. And she was not alone in thinking in this way.

Persuading young people to participate in YAH was considerably more labour intensive than securing financial donations from British adults for the FFHC. For YAH to be worth this extra effort, it needed to be about more than money. As one campaign advisor, Eric Bourne, admitted: 'I am at least as much concerned with the effects the campaign had on our young people as with what our young people could give to the campaign.'<sup>6</sup> To meet these needs, YAH looked beyond the humanitarian sector to seek out expertise on youth service and education. One committee briefing included, for example, a discussion of a successful scheme at Howard University in Washington D.C. designed to rehabilitate anti-social youth through volunteer work.<sup>7</sup> These kinds of professional knowledge drove the expansion of the non-state sector in the post-war period.<sup>8</sup> But what is striking about many of the discussions that took place around YAH is not simply the presence, nor even the diversity, of expertise within humanitarian campaigns, but the segregation of different interests. Though many came to YAH through their involvement in humanitarian causes, others were interested in the campaign only to the extent that it might serve the needs of youth within Britain. As a result, debates about young humanitarians were often not about humanitarianism at all. In fact, the consequences of failing effectively to involve British youth in YAH were often discussed without the slightest reference to the populations of developing countries the campaign was designed to assist.

In March 1965, nine months before the launch of YAH, Lord Robertson gave a speech to the House of Lords on the subject of 'Youth and Social Responsibilities'. 'Never [...] was so much written and so much said about youth', he remarked, succinctly capturing the preoccupation with adolescence and young adulthood in this period.<sup>9</sup> The 1960s began with the publication of the much-discussed Albemarle Report into the inadequacy of youth services in the UK; in 1964 clashes between Mods and Rockers in the seaside towns of Brighton, Clacton, Hastings and Margate gave these debates renewed urgency; and, at the end of the decade, there was widespread concern at the apparent radicalisation of students represented by the outbreak of protests across the country.<sup>10</sup> Britain suffered no shortage of adult commentators willing to diagnose the 'baby-boomer' generation, and youths of this period were discussed as both troubling and potentially redemptive. While some commentators focused entirely on domestic matters – most often the perceived ill effects of affluent society – many others drew causal links between the state of youth and Britain's global standing. These causal connections were established in multiple directions: by those who argued that the idealistic fervour of youth should be used to shape Britain's global role, as well as those who saw youth unrest as a direct outcome of British decline. They were central to the discursive context in which campaigns like YAH took shape.

But if sometimes, as above, discussions regarding the role of young people in humanitarian projects put the emphasis on youth, at other times the emphasis was placed more firmly on humanitarianism. A 1968 parliamentary debate on overseas aid and development illustrates some of the key ways in which the language of youth was operationalised to discuss international concerns. The motion, tabled by Labour MP George Wallace, urged the government to meet the target of 1% of gross domestic product (GDP) for international transfer of resources that had been set by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. It spurred a three-hour debate in which MPs discussed Britain's international responsibilities in the wake of decolonisation and sought to determine the most appropriate strategies to assist the developing world. In his opening remarks, Wallace explained that the motion had been inspired by young members of the Norwich World Poverty Action Group who had recently delivered a petition to Norwich City Hall calling for increased aid to developing countries. Led by 'a young and attractive girl' who would soon be carrying out voluntary service in Ceylon, the group pledged to 'give whatever we are able for various world services and causes'. This, Wallace was convinced, was 'the voice of today's youth', and the 'vision, dedication, and personal service' of groups like this one was 'one of the most significant and hopeful signs for tomorrow's world and the world of today'.<sup>11</sup> Wallace was clearly impressed by the passion of these young people but, more importantly, in raising their story in the House of Commons, he mobilised a powerful range of associations around youthful idealism to argue for a bill that was not itself directly related to British youth.

In the post-war era, youth was charged with particular symbolic significance. As Honeck and Rosenberg discuss, the faith placed in the young and their generational differences 'underwrote narratives of national and international progress' on both sides of the Iron Curtain.<sup>12</sup> Although Wallace's motion on Government spending did not win unanimous support, his optimism about youth was enthusiastically endorsed by all parties. Seven out of 14 speakers made explicit reference to the potential of youth, including David Steel, who stated that: 'One of the hopeful signs among the members of the younger generation is that they are far more broad-minded in matters of this kind'.<sup>13</sup> According to Parliament, young people were 'restless', 'impatient' and 'idealistic'. Discussions such as these did not entirely discount the disruptive potential of youth but, rather than demonising adolescents as apathetic, aimless or angry, they instead emphasised the positive contributions that young people might make to society. As Lord Balniel had complained in an earlier Commons debate, 'so much of our time is taken in considering the bad effects of the material affluence which we have in this country [...] it is good to be reminded that among our young people there is a widespread desire to be of service to others'.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the international ascendancy of youth, the precise way in which their symbolic potential was harnessed depended on nationally specific contexts. In Britain, much of the discussion about youthful idealism hinged on the extent to which young people were felt to provide the country with a fresh start. Discussions about youth participation became a way to articulate wider concerns about Britain's changing international role in relation to the rapidly expanding fields of humanitarianism, aid and development. In the Commons debate, Dr Hugh Gray, MP for Yarmouth, celebrated the fact that young people were much more likely to support the enlargement of the aid budget than adults. This was because they 'did not hold the narrow, nationalist views of their elders' but instead thought 'in a much larger and more objective way'.<sup>15</sup> When YAH was launched in 1965, British youth stood at a threshold. Many 18-year-old school leavers had been born in 1947, the year

of Indian independence, making this a generation that had largely grown up in an era of decolonisation. This, as well as the broader impact of globalisation, was felt to have a significant impact on their outlook.<sup>16</sup> As Dick Bird described it, this was the moment when 'a generation that probably felt overall regret at the passing of empire was succeeded by a generation ready to recognise not just the inevitability, but the excitement, and yes, the justice of self-determination'.<sup>17</sup> The World Council of Churches discussed youth participation in YAH in very similar terms: 'The older generations of our time have grown up in circumstances stressing the differences and similarities between races, creeds, nations and classes.' The younger generation, by contrast, had had their horizons broadened 'by the revolution in technology and communications which had followed the Second World War'.<sup>18</sup> Generational difference fed into debates about development and humanitarianism as young people came to symbolise the possibility of a positive global role for Britain, one untainted by difficult colonial legacies.<sup>19</sup>

Young participants embraced this image and emphasised the generation gap, using it to assert their significance to the campaign. At an international level, the manifesto of the Young World Assembly declared that 'our generation has the power and the knowledge that no previous generation has ever had'.<sup>20</sup> In Britain, a young organiser by the name of Nigel Lloyd rallied his peers with the claim that 'we are the most privileged age group and are not yet full of prejudice and as such form the greatest hope of preventing universal hunger'.<sup>21</sup> Sixteen-year-old Alison Bond wrote a letter to 'my generation', urging them to get involved, because increasingly this categorisation seemed to be the most pressing and important.<sup>22</sup> In talking about their contributions, these young people established a field of exclusivity in which age, rather than class or nationality, was the determining factor. For one thing, this generation, swollen by the post-war boom, was simply larger, more affluent, and more vocal than the ones that preceded it (the number of Britons under 20 grew from three million in 1951 to more than four million in 1966).<sup>23</sup> For another, this group really did appear to be more interested than their parents in overseas aid and development. A survey carried out in Manchester on behalf of the FFHC found that 25% of 16–24-year-olds ranked hunger and famine in overseas countries as their first priority (from a list of six humanitarian causes), while just 8% of over-45-year-olds did the same.<sup>24</sup>

This positive narrative about the fresh start represented in the idealism of the new generation did not, however, go unchallenged. As much as the 'guts and gumption' of idealistic youth were seen as a source of optimism, they could simultaneously instil considerable anxiety in the adult population. To many YAH commentators, youthful idealism was something that needed to be harnessed and directed. At the Young World Assembly, Director of the FAO B.R. Sen argued that 'idealism is the essence of youth, but unless there is opportunity for the idealism to be expressed in concrete action, it often turns to anger and revolt'.<sup>25</sup> In Britain, many of these debates were centred on the youth unrest that had taken place in seaside towns in 1964. The clashes had been particularly concerning at the time because those involved did not hail from marginal groups on the fringes of society, but from the employed and relatively affluent working and lower-middle classes.<sup>26</sup> Speaking in the House of Commons, William Molloy was critical of the harsh police response to the unrest since, as he put it: '[Not] all the Mods and Rockers [...] come into the categories referred to by magistrates and some of our national newspapers.' Rather their behaviour was an 'oversplash [of vitality that] happen[ed] to take a spin in the wrong direction.'<sup>27</sup>



Many shared the conviction that young people lacked sufficient positive outlets for their energies and this provided considerable impetus for the youth work of humanitarian organisations. As Bourne, County Youth Officer for Derbyshire and advisor to the YAH committee, outlined:

We have a chance to employ young people's idealism in the attainment of objectives which are not only exciting in themselves but which also cater for the great sympathy which young people have for the underdog [...] With much, but by no means all, poverty and misery banished from this country, the developing nations seem to be an obvious target for the compassion which young people are able to extend to anyone whom they feel hard done by.<sup>28</sup>

Humanitarianism was particularly appealing to those engaged in youth services because the activities encouraged by NGOs appeared to offer something that 'orthodox' domestic youth services did not: a way of harnessing forces of a specifically 'emotional nature'. In doing so, many humanitarian activities provided an unthreatening, socially sanctioned outlet for what was seen as youthful idealism gone wrong (whether in the form of anti-establishment protests, sexually permissive counter-culture or wide-scale disengagement).

Concerns about unharnessed idealism were generally, as above, articulated in ways that responded to a broader sense of an emergent international youth movement. But for many they were also tightly bound to the post-war context of decolonisation. Not everyone involved in youth services and humanitarianism wanted a clean break from Britain's imperial past. Other commentators identified the same symptoms of youthful exuberance as Molloy, Bourne, et al., but emphasised Britain's shrinking global role, rather than affluence, as the underlying cause. Empire had long been understood as providing Britain both an outlet and a purpose. Writing for *Corona: the Journal of Her Majesty's Overseas Service* in 1962, Hilary Blood explained that the end of Overseas Service 'shut off another of the important and rewarding avenues along which the youth of Great Britain could go out adventuring into life.' 'Youth,' he warned, 'will in the end not be denied its avenues to adventure. [...] What will be the break through?'<sup>29</sup> Picking up on this idea in his history of the first 10 years of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), Michael Adams looked back favourably in 1968 on the extraordinary range of opportunities that the imperial age had offered to the 'enterprising Englishman':

From the sub-continent of India to the smallest island dependency in the West Indies, there was a constant and reassuring demand for British administrators, judges, clergymen, clerks, police officers and all the assorted instruments of colonial rule [...]. No one with ambition, a sense of purpose or a simple taste for adventure could fail to find, somewhere on that imperial globe, an outlet for his energies or a chance to make his fortune.<sup>30</sup>

Using the same vocabulary as Molloy, Bourne, et al., Adams went on to describe a 'general upsurge of youth everywhere, rebellious, critical, irreverent, self-confident, impatient of the old nostrums and of those who peddled them.'<sup>31</sup>

Since the loss of empire was seen as partly responsible for the problem of youthful rebellion, it also had to be addressed in the search for a solution to that problem. For these empire-minded adults, humanitarianism more broadly and overseas volunteering more specifically offered 'something of a safety valve' not because they were symbols of a new post-imperial world, but because they were seen to share many of the principles of imperial benevolence and trusteeship. At the heart of this was an altogether imperial notion of service.<sup>32</sup> As Blood set out, even without the Empire, there would still be a 'striving' for 'something less commercial, less self-seeking; something more idealistic, more humanitarian

and above all more adventurous.<sup>33</sup> In the Commons Debate on the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, Conservative James Scott-Hopkins described how

in past generations we built our place in history as a country by our young people going overseas, making their fortunes, and meeting the challenge of our times, which in those days was very great. We face the same sort of challenge today. Our young people will benefit from it, and as a country we will benefit.<sup>34</sup>

Under the guise of the Freedom from Hunger Campaign, he went on, young people would 'go out as our forefathers did in years gone by, not to conquer those countries, but to bring them up to the same standard of living, or prosperity and sophistication which we enjoy in this country'.<sup>35</sup> Such statements not only echoed official discourses of trusteeship and colonial development, they also tapped into the long-standing connection between British youth and imperial service fostered in associational organisations such as the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides.<sup>36</sup>

Even if it was not always the priority of YAH organisers, as the next section will illustrate, service overseas had a tendency to dominate parliamentary and press discussions about young humanitarians into the mid 1960s. Part of the reason VSO attracted so much attention – particularly when compared to the domestic activities of humanitarian youth committees – was because its champions promoted it as a diplomatic tool perfectly suited for an era of decolonisation. As Lord Balniel set out: 'Many people in the under-developed countries will gain their picture of Britain from those people and not through the medium of propaganda.' 'The more [volunteers] we can send the better, so that we can fill the gap left through the exodus of the expatriates who have been coming back over the last years.'<sup>37</sup> Discussed in these terms, overseas youth service could quite easily be presented as a continuation of Britain's long history of expansive foreign intervention.<sup>38</sup> It offered, as Jordanna Bailkin has described, 'a way of revitalising the imperial mission in a postimperial age'.<sup>39</sup>

Focusing on VSO, Bailkin argues that the idea that overseas aid could redress Britain's own discontents receded in the mid 1960s.<sup>40</sup> As Bailkin identifies, government spending on overseas aid and development did decline in the second half of the decade. This was not, however, accompanied by a corresponding drop in the non-state sector. YAH (and the FFHC more broadly) represent the continuing ascendancy of the humanitarian movement in this period. While there was, as Bailkin suggests, increased scepticism about overseas *service* (particularly in light of its once celebrated imperial connections), YAH reveals that broader links between humanitarianism and British youth were still common in the second half of the decade. This is because young humanitarianism remained a malleable construct. Dependent on who was speaking, youth campaigns like YAH could be a forward-looking embodiment of a new global order or a comforting link to the imperial past, adapted to suit the perceived needs of idealistic British youth.<sup>41</sup> Despite their disagreements, most commentators shared a belief that Britain's future rested on the ability to raise a generation of civically minded, outward-facing young people. Whereas the sum of adults' financial contributions tended to overshadow the circumstances in which they were collected, for YAH the nature of their donors' involvement in the campaign was often the most important factor. As Christian Aid described it, YAH was 'a total programme rather than a money raising venture'.<sup>42</sup>



## Charity, service and activism: the practicalities of young humanitarianism

Whatever purposes they believed it should be put to, many commentators spoke about youthful open-mindedness and enthusiasm as a *fait accompli*. Matthew James Bunch argues that the FAO designed the YWMA specifically in order to 'piggy back' on the growing international youth movement. To this effect, he cites Charles H. Weitz's suggestion that Sen viewed involvement with youth as 'an opportunity to "mine" or take advantage of a whole new element or group, to get them involved in the dialogue and discussion on the issues that [FAO] wanted'.<sup>43</sup> This was certainly the tone of British parliamentary debates on youth and overseas service, where, for example, Mr Hamling commented on the 'natural instinct' that young people had for this kind of work.<sup>44</sup> The reality, however, did not always live up to the rhetoric. Indeed, it is telling that the most optimistic accounts of youth's readiness to take up the Freedom from Hunger cause tended to come from those with little direct experience of youth service and no immediate responsibility for getting young people involved. As in the case of Margaret Bywater and Christian Aid, those in the field regularly dealt with adolescents who seemed to lack this 'natural instinct'.

In stark contrast to the optimism of the Parliamentary debate, the 1960 Albemarle Report had identified 'a kind of selfishness' in British youth that would not 'yield itself to any demand outside its own immediately felt needs'.<sup>45</sup> YAH organisers had to engage in pragmatic terms with this less optimistic vision of youth. Dr Cyril Smith, brought in from the Department of Youth Work at Manchester University to advise campaign organisers, warned that 'the kinds of values that are contained in the youth culture [...] are very difficult to reconcile with the more responsible, serious attitudes which you are likely to put across in your campaign'.<sup>46</sup> Even more sceptical than Smith, Christian Aid Youth Secretary, Miss Shears, concluded that: 'Even if you got the Rolling Stones coming along, I would still think you would not find very much happening'.<sup>47</sup> While teenage recalcitrance may not be surprising, the fact that YAH organisers persevered in spite of these difficulties is significant. YAH did not simply seek to capitalise on existing organisation and momentum; it represented a broader effort to engage those outside of the existing youth movement because it saw value in their participation beyond that which was of immediate use to the campaign itself.<sup>48</sup>

Five months before the official launch of YAH, the FAO sent out an 'Aide-Memoire' to campaign organisers detailing the forms of participation in which young people in developed countries should be encouraged to take part.<sup>49</sup> These were grouped according to two broad categories: participation through learning and participation through service. The latter included overseas volunteering (such as VSO), work-projects at home and fundraising for projects overseas. The explicit inclusion of volunteering as a form of service differentiated YAH from the adult-focused activities of the FFHC, which concentrated their efforts on fundraising. As public discussions about youth unrest indicate, this decision was born as much from a desire to encourage young people to value service as it was a pragmatic recognition that adolescents were richer in time than they were in money. In YAH's name young people organised a 'Fireworks Party'; reconstructed a derelict church hall as an international centre; ate a 'Soup and Bread' dinner while watching a film on ancient Chinese culture; went on sponsored walks; helped their elderly neighbours with their shopping; took part in a 'Developing World Quiz'; and volunteered overseas through VSO.<sup>50</sup>

Not all YAH activity followed this model, however, and many other forms of participation placed considerably more emphasis on the political nature of aid and development.

This was a reflection of the interests of UK organisers as well as those at the FAO. Less than two years after the campaign was launched, the Second Session of the FAO's Young World Promotion Group published a report that added a third category of participation: 'political or civic involvement'.<sup>51</sup> It repackaged what the 1965 'Aide Memoire' had called 'service' as 'action projects' and declared that the FFHC should be viewed as 'no less than a world revolution'. This shift towards political or civic participation reflected a broader trend within the humanitarian sector, but it also mirrored changes taking place in other kinds of youth voluntary action. As Georgina Brewis has shown, many members of the National Union of Students at this time were dissatisfied with the fun-focused, short-term objectives of Rag fundraising and pushed for more engaged forms of community action.<sup>52</sup>

Guided by this increasingly politicised model, British adolescents supporting YAH attended 'teach-ins' on aid and development; organised fasting demonstrations; signed petitions; sent out letters to MPs, trade unions and industry; and protested with placards in Trafalgar Square. In 1968, YAH sponsored an all-party letter-writing campaign in which the youth movements of the Labour, Liberal and Conservative parties pressed for more equitable trading terms, an increase in Government aid to a300 million a year by 1970, and for industry to preserve the career prospects of qualified volunteers serving overseas.<sup>53</sup> Political engagement was also facilitated at an international level by the FAO, which invited young people to participate in international conferences in 'a dynamic and earnest fashion'.<sup>54</sup> As a report in the *Guardian* explained, activities such as these were designed to help 'create a political climate in which Government aid could be steadily increased'.<sup>55</sup>

As these two sets of FAO recommendations make clear, youth involvement in the FFHC had a broad, flexible and fluid remit. The UK YAH committee functioned primarily as a co-ordinating body and clearing house. While the FAO, YWMA and YAH could promote and encourage particular forms of participation, they had no direct control over local activities. The diverse range of activity able to take place in the name of the FFHC was key to the broad international appeal of the campaign. Within Britain, this malleability helped YAH to secure the participation of a diverse range of youth groups and humanitarian NGOs, including: the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides; the Cooperative Youth Movement; the Friends Service Council; Jewish Youth Voluntary Service; the Methodist Association of Youth Clubs; the National Students' Union; Voluntary Service Overseas; Oxfam; Christian Aid; and War on Want. But the flexibility of YAH could also be a source of frustration and led to friction between some organisers and advisors. Dr Cyril Smith, exasperated by a discussion on youth participation, interrupted his colleagues to ask for clarification: 'I was talking about protest movements against world issues that mattered and then you talk about voluntary service in terms of serving old people'.<sup>56</sup>

Smith's frustration was two-fold. He was concerned not only with the nature of humanitarianism itself and the kind of international goals it ought to pursue, but also with the kind of activity most likely to interest youth. Smith explained that 'voluntary service, like many of our well intentioned efforts as adults to help the young, makes it very difficult to combine their desire to be idealistic with their desire to reject the adult generation.' The small minority of youth who were actively concerned with voluntary work – 'who set themselves out to be moral mentors, who take around a collecting box and shake it' – warned Smith, were 'likely to find themselves socially unacceptable to their peers'.<sup>57</sup> Miss Tylden, who worked with rural youth, echoed these warnings by describing letters she had received from young people saying 'I don't want other people to know I am so interested'.<sup>58</sup> The FAO were similarly

cautious on this front, lamenting that the 'issues raised by the challenge of "freedom from hunger" leave the majority of youth apathetic.' This, they argued, might be because 'freedom from hunger' had traditionally been presented as a charitable exercise—a sacrifice made by people in developed regions because of some high sense of moral humanitarianism to assist people in less-developed countries.<sup>59</sup>

If voluntary service was associated with middle-class do-gooding, and charity was no better, what could be done to direct youthful idealism away from harmful outbursts? Whatever it was, it needed to offer something that orthodox youth services with their emphasis on physical recreation and expenditure on 'new buildings and pleasant furnishings' could not. Youth's desire to 'do something, anything, ostentatiously, noisily and even dangerously in support of any cause at all' would not be satisfied 'in the making of a canoe or in a game of table tennis.'<sup>60</sup> For some, the solution lay in political action. Alan Brash, Director of Christian Aid, observed that 'many young people' had been impatient with the organisation's fund-raising in the 1960s because 'they thought that in asking for their money we were evading the basic question of economic injustice.'<sup>61</sup> As a whole, the adult British FFHC campaign tended to depoliticise development by shifting responsibility from governments to individuals and NGOs.<sup>62</sup> YAH pushed against this. Frank Judd, YAH chairman, set out the organisation's stall against what he saw as concerning tendencies towards depoliticisation: 'The government in its five-year plan has announced that we've been expanding our aid too fast [...]. It is for this reason that YAH will continue to put itself at the disposal of those who are trying to formulate an articulate public opinion in favour of sanity.'<sup>63</sup> 'It is futile,' the YWA group pointed out, 'to involve young people in any country in fundraising ventures or small scale projects, no matter how successful they were, if, at the same time, the level of their governments' overall contribution to international development was cut back.'<sup>64</sup>

Campaign material designed by and for young people was much more likely to use combative language than FFHC publicity as a whole. 'The fight is against man's oldest, deadliest enemies. Hunger. Disease. Poverty. Ignorance' announced a YAH pamphlet published in 1965, and 'the young people of the world are mobilising for the war.'<sup>65</sup> But despite the inflammatory language, there was often a disconnect between the call-to-arms rhetoric of these pamphlets and the type of 'action' they encouraged youth to take. A list of 'ways you can help now' included signing a pledge, taking a quiz, joining the whispering campaign to spread the truth about underdevelopment, and sending books to developing countries through the English Speaking Union. In what stood as a none too subtle reinforcement of traditional gender roles, young girls were encouraged to turn 10 shillings into five pounds by buying ingredients for cakes or material for sewing, while the same pamphlet encouraged young boys to set themselves up as car cleaners, part-time gardeners and bicycle repairmen.<sup>66</sup>

Those who did favour activism often put forward the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND) as a model for successful youthful political engagement. Organisers recognised that while poverty could be understood within a broader framework of global justice and equality, 'freedom from hunger' might be a difficult sell because it was not straightforwardly against something in the way that CND and anti-Vietnam protests were. 'What's more important than the bomb?' asked a pamphlet put together by Christian Aid to promote YAH. 'Poverty, Disease, Ignorance? Possibly. Thousands marched in protest against the bomb. Hunger threatens millions. But who protests?'<sup>67</sup> The statement was no doubt intended to be rousing, but it did rather hit the nail on the head. CND caught people's imagination because it painted a 'vast great picture of the world being blown up.'<sup>68</sup> While YAH's diverse

scope guaranteed the participation of a wide range of organisations from across the political spectrum, its desire for young people to recognise the complexity of hunger, and the multifaceted solutions necessary to address it, made it harder for participants to mobilise behind a clear cause. As Smith explained: 'The important thing is that it needs to be against something [...] It is not at all clear what your young people are against. Of course, you are against hunger, disease, poverty, but this never made a movement.'<sup>69</sup>

If the call for 'freedom from hunger' did not itself politicise or radicalise British youth, the campaign nevertheless acted as an important forum for a wider array of youth politics that found its driving force elsewhere. Youth campaigning approached 'freedom from hunger' in a much more holistic manner than the adult campaign. Events for teenagers explicitly encouraged young people to grapple with issues of international governance, nuclear disarmament and racial inequality. As the FAO described, youth tended to view international development as 'one problem', combining its agricultural, economic, social, educational and political aspects.<sup>70</sup> Issues addressed in relation to YAH included population growth, literacy, the value of multilateral (as opposed to politically tied) aid, the conversion from spending on armaments to spending on development, social justice, the 'elimination of the breeding grounds of conflict', and efforts to combat racism within Britain.<sup>71</sup> One example of how this holistic approach could work in practice was a Christian Aid quiz aimed at raising awareness among secondary-school-aged children. Based on the range of questions asked, it seems that the well-rounded young citizen should know: the population sizes of capital cities; the main achievements of reformers and humanitarians ranging from William Wilberforce to Kier Hardie; how to raise a good crop of vegetables; that Dusty Springfield cancelled a tour to apartheid South Africa; and why the Sharks fought the Jets in *A West Side Story*.<sup>72</sup> Though it is not clear exactly how schoolchildren were supposed to feed this knowledge back into YAH, the eclectic set of questions does reveal how humanitarian campaigns could be used as vehicles for broader education in global issues.

This close connection between humanitarian organisations and education in global citizenship was not new. In the interwar period, the Save the Children Fund pioneered initiatives designed to involve British children in humanitarian internationalism; these included pen-friendship schemes, child-adoption programmes and the provision of educational information packs.<sup>73</sup> There are also similarities between YAH's activities and the early work carried out by the international Junior Red Cross to engage children as 'active citizens in their own communities' through projects that promoted international conversation and collaboration.<sup>74</sup> The 1960s may have been an important transitional phase for British humanitarianism (characterised both by the development of a professionalised aid industry and by the increased lobbying activities of humanitarian NGOs), but humanitarian youth work makes clear that there were also significant continuities in the way the sector worked, particularly in its relationships with donors and existing associational networks.

Ideals of global citizenship were also born out in other dimensions of YAH. While some shared Cyril Smith's conviction that service and political activism were incompatible behaviours, others found common ground in the language of solidarity, arguing that service could still be a suitable outlet for youthful exuberance. It wasn't the nature of overseas service that presented an issue for these commentators, but its limited scale. Most early VSOs came from public-school backgrounds – Eton contributed the largest number of volunteers between 1958 and 1962 – and almost all returned to places at Oxford and Cambridge.<sup>75</sup> YAH organisers emphasised the need for activities that would engage a much wider spectrum of

school-aged teenagers. Christian Aid, in particular, worked to involve young people who remained in Britain in what they called 'Young Neighbours' Service'. Participants carried out local acts of service without charge for the aged, sick and 'others of restricted means', as well as exchanging their 'hard work' for donations from those who were able to give.<sup>76</sup>

YAH sought to differentiate this domestic voluntary service from simple 'do-gooding'. As Christian Aid explained, service at home could help young people to 'look outward and see some part of the submerged iceberg of social problems in their own community'.<sup>77</sup> 'Young Neighbours' Service' related poverty and need in Britain to the international aims of YAH, with the aim that domestic volunteering would lead to 'increasing sensitivity and awareness of the needs of their neighbours overseas'.<sup>78</sup> British teenagers were also encouraged to make 'demonstrations of positive solidarity with the principles of development' through hunger walks, marches, fasts and vigils.<sup>79</sup> While many of these activities involved a substantial social element, they also evoked 'bodily empathy' with the young people YAH intended to assist.<sup>80</sup> Framed as international solidarity, these volunteering and fundraising activities raise important questions about the kind of relationships youth campaigns fostered between young donors and young recipients.

Humanitarian organisations have long used the plight of children to move donors to give, typically representing children from the developing world as passive, submissive and dependent.<sup>81</sup> This has been true of campaigns in which children are the donors as well as the recipients of aid. For example, Tamara Myers has shown how the Canadian Miles for Millions walkathon racialised the needy child in a way that divided rather than connected North and South, rich and poor.<sup>82</sup> Images of vulnerable children were an important part of the context in which YAH took place, but the campaign also provided more nuanced accounts of youth in the developing world. When Philip Noel-Baker explained the need for the FFHC to the House of Commons, he started with graphic descriptions of suffering children, most vividly a baby with kwashiorkor who, he said, 'lives and soon dies, in tearless, inarticulate misery'.<sup>83</sup> As a whole, however, YAH used surprisingly few images of suffering children, choosing instead to emphasise successful examples of co-operation and self-help. The broader UN YWMA structure meant that the campaign frequently publicised the active participation of developing countries that would normally be identified solely as recipients of aid. At an FAO level, the YWPG declared that it should be a priority to foster 'youth-to-youth' relationships linking young people in developing countries with young people in developed countries.<sup>84</sup> British volunteering was celebrated in YAH alongside the work of young people in the developing world. For example, a promotional pamphlet described how 600 Indian students had given up their autumn vacation to reclaim 45 acres of land, while 20,000 young Egyptians worked alongside 450 overseas volunteers to reclaim desert for agricultural use. There is considerable need for more work on international youth participation in humanitarian causes.<sup>85</sup>

## Conclusion

The youthful performances of solidarity that took place within YAH show that we need to make space in the history of humanitarianism for forms of participation that could be political without necessarily being about protest or activism.<sup>86</sup> As Gattrell describes, campaigns like YAH provided charitable work that 'would enable volunteers to become socially active in ways that prepared them for active citizenship'.<sup>87</sup> For the humanitarian



organisations involved, YAH was not just about creating life-long donors and fundraisers, but about shaping a generation whose understanding of global inequalities would inform the choices that they made throughout their adult lives. It was in this way that YAH also met the hopes of Eric Bourne, who stressed that the object of youth work (whether its focus was on humanitarian causes or not) should be ‘the creation of thinking people, of active people, of socially conscious people in both a national and international context.’<sup>88</sup> While YAH did encourage and make space for protest, it also promoted forms of engagement – most notably fundraising and voluntary service – that did not challenge the status quo. In general, organisers supported a purposeful citizenship that was productive rather than reactive – it was more likely to mean petitions (as in the case of the Norwich Student group celebrated in Parliament) than it was placards (YAH protests in Piccadilly Circus were insignificant when compared to the student protests of 1968). By helping foreign others through humanitarian development schemes like YAH, British young people could harness their idealism, while being engaged in rational forms of recreation, educated in international affairs, and moulded into idealised citizens of a model British society. These aspirations, and the schemes, such as YAH, that grew out of them, show how humanitarianism – ostensibly outward facing, global reaching – could slot into more everyday concerns of British life.

### Note on contributor

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### Notes

1. See, for example, Black, *A Cause for Our Time*, 107–8.
2. For example, Briggs, “Mother, Child, Race, Nation;” Marshall, “The Construction of Children as an Object of International Relations;” Bunch, “All Roads Lead to Rome;” Hoefflerle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties*. Notable exceptions are Myers, “Local Action and Global Imagining;” Baillkin, *The Afterlife of Empire* and Ermisch, “Children, Youth and International Assistance.”
3. Jones, “The Disasters Emergency Committee;” Hilton, “Ken Loach and the Save the Children Film;” O’Sullivan, “Humanitarian Encounters;” Saunders, “British Humanitarian Aid and Development NGOs.”
4. Since its inception in 1961, the UK FFHC worked to improve school education on development issues. While educational activities continued throughout the decade, the launch of YAH marked a shift towards “action.” For discussion of humanitarian youth education see: Ermisch, “Children, Youth and International Assistance;” Harrison, “Oxfam and the Rise of Development Education in England from 1959 to 1979.”
5. Margaret Bywater, Area Secretary Report, May 1963, Christian Aid Archive, School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS: CA2/I/19/3).
6. Eric Bourne, “What are the Prospects of Widening Interest in the Needs and Problems of Developing Countries,” c.1967 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
7. Dr Cyril Smith, “What are the Current Attitudes of Young People and How are they Affected” c.1967 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
8. McKay Hilton, and Crowson, *The Politics of Expertise*, 9–10.
9. HL Deb 03 March 1965, vol. 263, c1138.
10. See Green, *All Dressed Up*; Burkett, *Constructing Post-imperial Britain*; Hoefflerle, *British Student Activism*; Grayson, “Mods, Rockers and Juvenile Delinquency in 1964.”



11. HC Deb 2 December 1968, vol. 774, cc1045–151.
12. Honeck and Rosenberg, “Transnational Generations,” 235.
13. HC Deb 2 December 1968, vol. 774, c1060.
14. HC Deb 14 May 1965, vol. 712, c902.
15. HC Deb 2 December 1968, vol. 774, c1072.
16. See Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire* for a discussion of how similar issues affected the development of VSO.
17. Bird, *Never the Same Again*, 14.
18. World Council of Churches Committee for Specialized Assistance to Social Projects, 3 June 1964 (SOAS: CA/I/21/1).
19. Bocking-Welch, “Imperial Legacies and Internationalist Discourses.”
20. Young World Manifesto, Rome, 16 October 1965, discussed in Bunch “All Roads Lead to Rome,” 155.
21. YAH Leaflet, 1967, Youth Against Hunger Miscellaneous Pamphlets, British Library (BL).
22. Ibid.
23. Hoeffler, *British Student Activism*, 15.
24. *Freedom From Hunger Campaign Opinion Survey, Manchester Area*, c.1965.
25. Report of the Young World Assembly, cited in Bunch, “All Roads Lead to Rome,” 153.
26. Grayson, “Mods, Rockers,” 19.
27. HC Deb 14 May 1965, vol. 712, c880.
28. Bourne, “Prospects.”
29. Blood, “The End of an Avenue,” 293.
30. Adams, *Voluntary Service Overseas*, 23–4. For further discussion of VSO and the legacies of Empire see Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*, and Lee, “No Peace Corps for the Commonwealth?”
31. Adams, *Voluntary Service Overseas*, 27. For more on the decolonisation as “lost vocation” see Hartley, “The Lost Vocation.”
32. For links between FFHC and ideas of imperial trusteeship and benevolence see Bocking-Welch, “Imperial Legacies.” For the development of these ideas in the nineteenth and early twentieth century see Grant, *A Civilised Savagery* and Tusan, *Smyrna’s Ashes*.
33. Blood, “The End of an Avenue,” 293.
34. HC Deb 20 March 1963, vol. 674, c437.
35. Ibid.
36. See Alexander, “The Girl Guide Movement and Imperial Internationalism,” Springhall, “The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism.”
37. HC Deb 14 May 1965, vol. 712, c913.
38. Bocking-Welch, “Imperial Legacies.”
39. Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*, 88.
40. Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*, 91.
41. Bocking-Welch, “Imperial Legacies.” See also Bocking-Welch, “The British Public in a Shrinking World.”
42. FJG to Holmes, 21 April 1965 (SOAS: CA/I/13/5).
43. Bunch, “All Roads Lead to Rome,” 151.
44. HC Deb 23 February 1965, vol. 707 c211.
45. *Albamarle Report* (1960): 33–34.
46. Smith, “Current Attitudes.”
47. Discussion of Cyril Smith’s Report, c.1967 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
48. Ermisch, “Children, Youth and International Assistance.”
49. Report on the YAH Campaign, c.1966 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
50. Youth Against Hunger Approximate Assessment of Response (SOAS: CA/I21/5).
51. Young World Promotion Group (YWPG) Second Session Report, February 1967 (SOAS: CA/I/21/1).
52. Brewis, “From Service to Action?” See also Burkett, “The National Union of Students.”
53. *The Times*, 10 April 1968.
54. YWPG Report, 1967.

55. *Guardian*, 22 October 1965.
56. Smith, "Current Attitudes."
57. *Ibid.*
58. Discussion of Smith's Report, c.1967 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
59. YWPG Report, 1967.
60. Bourne, "Prospects."
61. Bocking-Welch, "Imperial Legacies."
62. YAH Leaflet, 1967.
63. YWPG Report, February 1967.
64. Youth Against Hunger: Can We Win the War? 1965, YAH Miscellaneous Pamphlets BL.
65. Youth Against Hunger: Can We Win the War? 1965, YAH Miscellaneous Pamphlets BL.
66. YAH Leaflet, 1967.
67. Youth Against Hunger: The Politics of Aid (SOAS: CA2/I/18/3).
68. Cyril Smith, "Current Attitudes."
69. *Ibid.*
70. YWPG Report, 1967.
71. YWPG Report, 1967; Youth Against Hunger Approximate Assessment of Response (SOAS: CA/I21/5).
72. Christian Aid Quiz on Human Need and the Modern World (SOAS: CA2/I/19/3).
73. Baughan, "Every Citizen of Empire Implored to Save the Children!," 125, 131.
74. Valdes, "I, Being a Member of the Junior Red Cross, Gladly Offered My Services."
75. Bailkin, *Afterlife of Empire*, 73.
76. Christian Aid Bulletin July 1965, no. 3 (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
77. Suggestions as to How to Launch the Campaign Locally (SOAS: CA/I/21/5).
78. *Ibid.*
79. *Ibid.*
80. Myers, "Local Action and Global Imagining," 282.
81. Briggs, "Mother, Child, Race, Nation;" Marshall, "The Construction of Children."
82. Myers, "Local Action and Global Imagining," 292. See also Myers, "Blistered and Bleeding, Tired and Determined."
83. HC Deb 20 March 1963, vol. 674, c410.
84. YWPG Report, February 1967.
85. For an excellent account of the participation of young people in the JRC Gold Coast Branch see Ermisch, "Children, Youth and International Assistance."
86. Matthew Hilton, "Politics is Ordinary."
87. Gatrell, *Free World?*, 42.
88. Bourne, "Prospects."

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