

EDITED BY
DOUGLAS BOURN AND RICHARD PALSER

Span the World with Friendship

PROGRESSIVE EDUCATION, INTERNATIONALISM
AND THE WOODCRAFT FOLK



 **UCLPRESS**

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Douglas Bourn and Richard Palser

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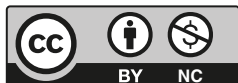
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List of abbreviations

ANC	African National Congress
BYC	British Youth Council
CIMEA	Comite Internationale des Mouvements d'Enfants et d'Adolescents (International Federation of Children's and Young People's Movements)
CCC	Connect, Challenge, Change
CND	Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament
DEA	Development Education Association
DF	District Fellows
DfE	Department for Education
EFDSS	English Folk Dance and Song Society
IFM	International Falcon Movement
NCS	National Citizens Service
RACS	Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society
WMA	Workers' Music Association
YCL	Young Communist League

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1

Introduction

Douglas Bourn and Richard Palser

Why this book?

Why would a book on the history of the Woodcraft Folk be of interest beyond its present and former members? This is a reasonable question to ask given the size of this organisation compared to other voluntary organisations for children and young people in the UK. Today, the Scouts and Guides have a combined membership that is at least 35 times bigger than that of the Woodcraft Folk, and Woodcraft's geographical spread is patchy at best. More importantly, it has never played the role that these other organisations have played ever since their formation in helping to shape the outlook of a significant minority of each new UK generation. Furthermore, in and of itself, the 100-year longevity of the Woodcraft Folk does not call for it being paid special attention – it may have reached its centenary in 2025, but the Scouts and Guides are now well into their second century.

However, this 100-year continuity does take on a greater significance when we place it alongside the distinctive educational role that the organisation has sought to play since its inception. Like those children and youth organisations that have always had both a far greater membership and left a greater social footprint, the Woodcraft Folk always saw its recreational activities as a means of carrying out informal education with children and young people. Unlike the aforementioned organisations, however, it was not established with the intention that this informal education should buttress and promote what their founders considered to be the strengths of society as it then existed, but rather that this informal education should contribute to the bringing about of social change. What is significant about the Woodcraft Folk's 100-year history is

that it represents a century of experimentation in finding the methods and practices that not only prepared young people to respond to societal changes they would meet as adults, but which also responded to social movements of the day in a manner that aimed to empower young people to contribute to social change themselves.

It is in this sense that we are using the term ‘progressive education’ in the title of this book. In the early twentieth century, educationalists in Europe and North America began to theorise and experiment with ways in which education could contribute to social change, and as ideas and experience began to be shared this developed into an international discourse. Sometimes this took on an organisational expression in conferences and associations; at other times it developed through study tours and journals and sometimes merely through books published independently in different countries. However, in one form or another, a diverse current of thought that was, and is, international in character has continued to compare and contrast theories and practices in what we here term progressive education.

The Woodcraft Folk could be termed an ‘outlier’ part of this current and discourse. It lay outside of the mainstream not only because its focus was on informal education rather than formal schooling but also in that it remained largely outside of the organised channels of communication of the progressive education current. Its contact with their debates was often mediated (and, it could be argued, limited) through its international affiliation to the Socialist Educational International and later the International Falcon Movement, as well as the direct contacts it developed with like-minded children and youth organisations in other countries – including those in the ‘communist bloc’. Yet this outlier relationship to the broader current of ideas on progressive education is itself a reason for studying the organisation’s educational activities more closely. This was an organisation made up of volunteers without the largesse of mass political parties or state governments with which to resource its activities, and with no base in the academy or in the independent school sector that would legitimise its theory and practice. It was an organisation of lay people united by a desire to contribute to social change through the education of children and young people – people who looked beyond themselves and drew on the ideas of progressive educationalists wherever possible but who primarily had to rely upon their own experience and resources to advance their practice.

Yet there is another feature still of this century-long continuity which singles the Woodcraft Folk out for more detailed study: the

internationalism that has been a feature of the organisation's collective outlook since its formation. This internationalism has taken different forms in the course of the century, and these are explored in this volume, but a constant feature of the change towards which it sought to educate children was that of an end to war and a world at peace. It adopted as its motto 'Span the World with Friendship' shortly after the Second World War and continues to use it today. If direct contact and exchanges with children of other countries provided a practical means of 'spanning the world with friendship', so too it provided the main channel through which the organisation's adult leaders could encounter the educational ideas and practices of informal educators in other countries. Most important of all, it also brought the wider world – its concerns, its conflicts, its differing outlooks – into the Woodcraft Folk, and the organisation's consequent openness to responding to international issues and movements was a major factor shaping its development over the century and its understanding of 'education for social change'.

This is therefore a book about the history of the Woodcraft Folk, but it is not an attempt at a narrative history.¹ Rather, the volume aims to explore specific aspects of the organisation's 'education for social change' as it developed at different points in its history but also looked at from different perspectives. This is reflected in the disciplines that form the background of the various contributors. Their main disciplines include politics, political and social history, cultural history, anthropology, educational theory and youth work theory. All but one of the contributors have had first-hand knowledge of the Woodcraft Folk at some point in their lives – whether as members, leaders or officials – and the insights into the life of the organisation this has furnished have undoubtedly influenced the aspects of its activities on which they have chosen to focus. All have drawn on the scholarly methods of their respective academic disciplines to research and interrogate the available primary sources, whether letters, minutes, publications, images, artefacts or oral testimonies. The next ten chapters can therefore be seen to some extent as standalone essays, each covering a particular aspect of the organisation's attempts at 'education for social change'. Yet there are also areas which overlap and even complement each other, and the editors have encouraged the contributors to indicate where this is the case where possible. It should also be said that this collection does not cover all aspects of the organisation's history or its educational activities – something which we will return to in the conclusion. Rather it addresses four themes, and these are the sections into which we have divided the book.

In the rest of this introduction, we will outline these four themes and the specific contribution of each chapter within them. When doing so, we will briefly contextualise them both within the narrative history of the organisation and in relation to the existing literature on the Woodcraft Folk.

Part I: Emergence and development of a progressive youth movement

The roots of the Woodcraft Folk can be found within the splintering from the Scouting movement of leaders and young people whose reaction to the realities of the First World War led them to question what they saw as Scouting's military ethos. This led in turn to the formation of the Order of Woodcraft Chivalry in 1916, the Kibbo Kift Kindred in 1920 and the Woodcraft Folk in late 1925. All three organisations shared a desire to maintain aspects of Scouting, as they saw the pursuit of rigorous outdoor pursuits as an antidote to the 'soft' and enfeebling life in the city; as such, the organisations emphasised the ideas of Ernest Thompson Seton who applied aspects of an idealised Native American culture to outdoor living. It was from Seton's *The Book of Woodcraft and Indian Lore* that they derived the term 'woodcraft' as meaning the crafts and skills of living in the woods and outdoors. The Woodcraft Folk used totems, wigwams and tom-toms as symbols of its outdoor life, adopted 'woodcraft' names based on the birds, animals and plants of the countryside, and wove allusions to 'Indian' culture into their songs and ceremonies. Another shared source of ideas was psychologist Stanley Hall's 'recapitulation theory', which suggested that the child's psychological development recapitulated the different stages of humanity's evolution from hunter-gatherer to civilisation and that the child should not be prevented from passing through each stage. All three organisations claimed that industrialisation and urbanisation created an unnatural environment, an environment which interfered with the process of recapitulation and so stunted childhood development. Only in 'woodcraft' could this natural and necessary process of recapitulation be adequately facilitated. The main distinguishing feature of the Woodcraft Folk was its coupling of these ideas to a commitment to working for some form of 'Co-operative Commonwealth', a term they used interchangeably with socialism. Through the 'tribal training' in its 'fellowships', camps and outdoor pursuits, young people who were 'fit in mind and body' would bring a new vitality to the labour movement.

The woodcraft splinters from the Scouts first drew the attention of historians in the late 1960s as a consequence of the youth radicalisation that became apparent at that time. As John Springhall pointed out in 1971:

In the 1960's academic attention became increasingly focused, in many cases of necessity, on the forms taken by student protest and, partly in conjunction with this, there appeared almost simultaneously a corresponding upsurge of interest in the history of organised international youth movements, many of them with their origins in the late nineteenth and early 20th centuries.²

The *Journal of Contemporary History* published a series of essays on the theme 'Generations in Conflict' in 1969–70 which reflected this new academic interest in youth movements.³ However, the mass membership organisations formed around the turn of the twentieth century – the Scouts and Boys Brigade – were the main focus of attention, and the 'woodcraft' splinters were examined largely in that context. Springhall's study of Scouting published in 1977 devoted a chapter to the English woodcraft movements which 'criticised the Scout movement for being tied to the intellectual environment of the 1900s' while being 'equally products of the fashionable non-conformist educational and political ideas of the 1920s'. Describing the Woodcraft Folk specifically, he notes:

The Woodcraft Folk's programme was a synthesis of 'recapitulation' theory, pacifism, internationalism, socialism and the eugenic ideal, as propounded in the prolific journalism of Leslie Paul. In his *The Folk Trail* (1929), for example, the emphasis is on camp life as an antidote to the evils of industrialism: the pursuit of arts and crafts; tribal organisation and training; and the teaching of world history and evolution. Yet the Woodcraft Folk never really reconciled their grandiose ideals of social reconstruction and spiritual regeneration with the more modest aim of training children in woodcraft activities.⁴

Part I of this volume helps us to unravel some of these features of the early Woodcraft Folk listed by Springhall. As he points out, it was the 'prolific journalism' of the Woodcraft Folk's first 'Head Man' that was chiefly responsible for the presentation of these ideas. Paul had left the Scouts to join Kibbo Kift when it was formed, and in turn had withdrawn from that organisation as part of the 1924 exodus of the 'co-operative tribes'

associated with the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society (RACS). While working closely with Joseph Reeves, secretary of the RACS Education Committee, Paul was the author of the most important early publications of the Woodcraft Folk. Even when he gradually withdrew from hands-on leadership of the organisation in the 1930s he continued to play that role – perhaps his most important contribution being *The Republic of Children* published in 1938. Only in 1941, upon joining the armed forces, did he cease to play a leading role in the Woodcraft Folk.

In [Chapter 2](#), Annebella Pollen explores Leslie Paul's outlook and interests both within and beyond the Woodcraft Folk so as to, in the words of the chapter title, situate him within the 'progressive cultures' of interwar Britain. Pointing out that in the interwar years the term 'progressive' was not only used to signal a political position on the left but also 'regularly used in the period as a synonym for "advanced" thinking', she traces how Paul came to embrace many such 'experiments in eating, living, loving and dressing'. Despite the volume of his published work and his prominent public role in his later years, most of his non-fiction books 'mostly languish in obscurity', as Pollen puts it. This chapter breaks new ground in examining those books and other writings to trace the influences upon, and changes in, his outlook over the course of his lifetime. In fact, the chapter traces his evolution well beyond the interwar years, demonstrating his disillusionment with socialism, atheism, pacifism and the plethora of 'progressive' ideas that he had embraced during the interwar years. In doing so it highlights how, as an individual, he was constantly searching for new ideas that might provide answers to his unease about the post-war world in which he had come of age. Paul was of a generation who grew up in the shadow of the suffering of the 'Great War', a war that shattered any romantic myths of chivalry in warfare, and which prompted the search for other ways of living and other ways of organising society. Pollen warns against too readily assuming that Paul's ideas and views were representative of the Woodcraft Folk's membership as a whole, but at the same time gives us an insight into how those ideas – ideas that may well seem wildly out of place in the Woodcraft Folk of today – could have been more widely shared at that time.

[Chapter 3](#) by Will Searby examines in more detail how Paul's yearning for a youth movement similar in nature to the pre-war German Wandervögel influenced the Woodcraft Folk in its first decade. He argues that from its foundation the organisation was 'animated by a curious, almost messianic' concept of 'youth'. This framing of youth, he argues, provided the early Woodcraft Folk with 'a mobilising ideology which helped to explain both the meaning of the organisation's

practical day-to-day activity and a theory of how the movement would achieve social change'. This 'youth ideology', as he terms it, was central to bringing together the different political strands which made up the early organisation – it 'acted as the glue which bound socialists, educationalists and pacifists together in a precarious unity'. Searby's approach is entirely at odds with the way historians have previously approached it. He suggests that a distinctive feature of the organisation when it was first formed was that it was an organisation *of* youth – rather than an organisation run by adults *for* youth. In this it was quite distinct from the Scouts and the other 'uniformed' children and youth organisations – in this sense, these were not 'youth movements' at all.

His chapter takes us into the 1930s when the Woodcraft Folk's links with similar organisations in Europe grew, and there were the first international exchanges with children's groups linked to European social democratic parties. When the rise of fascism in Central Europe called a halt to the links that had developed with the largest of these organisations (those in Germany and Austria), the Woodcraft Folk joined and helped maintain the Socialist Educational International. The 1930s also saw closer links being established with the co-operative movement and the production of a special leaflet for the Labour Party entitled 'Labour's Youngsters'. Although the growth of the organisation in the 1930s was not spectacular, it had reached over 5,000 members by 1939. Searby argues that the 'youth ideology' that had dominated the Woodcraft Folk was in contradiction to these efforts. 'Just as this youth ideology helped to express something of the unique appeal of the Woodcraft Folk, it also served to isolate the organisation from the forces of the left with which many members sought to align, and involved an internal logic often contradictory to the socialist politics many in the Woodcraft Folk sought to evangelise'.

In [Chapter 4](#) Richard Palser focuses on a different element of the early Woodcraft Folk's outlook. This was Paul's scheme of 'positive eugenics' that had been carried over from John Hargrave and Kibbo Kift. In contrast to Searby's view that 'youth ideology' was the glue holding together the different strands of the Woodcraft Folk, Palser sees their eugenic ideas as tying together the threads of 'woodcraft', recapitulation theory and its socialist objective in the organisation's thinking. Palser is not the first to analyse in more detail the role that eugenics played in the thinking of the early Woodcraft Folk. The 1980s saw the first articles by historians specifically on the Woodcraft Folk, and now their focus was on its links with the labour movement.⁵ John Attfield devoted a chapter in his centenary history of the Education Committee of RACS to the

Woodcraft Folk, and outlined how in the year leading up to the formation of the organisation Leslie Paul published a series of articles in the RACS magazine which proclaimed woodcraft as the only philosophy that unites eugenics and socialism. Palser builds on Attfeld's work, exploring how this became the framework for its educational activity in the early years but suggests a different reason for the abandonment of both eugenics and recapitulation theory in the late 1930s. His chapter concludes by illustrating how, in *The Republic of Children*, Paul theorises a new approach to education for social change, one that was influenced both by the Socialist Educational International and the New Education movement.⁶

Part II: Internationalism

The outbreak of the Second World War placed great strains on the organisation, and not only because of the destruction, shortages and disruption of everyday life. This was an organisation that had come to pride itself on its internationalism and its opposition to war, but once war arrived it was divided over how to respond. By avoiding taking a position either in support of the war or in opposition to it, it was able to maintain its unity around the conviction that when peace finally came its internationalism would once again come into its own. As soon as the war ended it put a strong emphasis on rebuilding its international links. In 1946 it hosted a major international camp near Brighton that acted to enthuse its membership as well as providing the basis for reviving its international contacts. It was a founder member of the International Falcon Movement (IFM), the children's network linked to social democratic parties which adopted at its founding conference the motto 'Span the World with Friendship'. During the Cold War period it developed links with the emerging pioneer movements in Eastern Europe. Although this caused some political difficulties with both the IFM and the co-operative movement, this belief in a spirit of international friendship through exchanges, pen pals and seminars became an important element of the Woodcraft Folk from the 1950s onwards.

In the 1950s, with the organisation now led by Basil Rawson with Margaret White as General Secretary, there was an increased emphasis on developing the Woodcraft Folk's educational programme, leading to the production of *The Woodcraft Way*. This outlined a structured approach to learning within groups and at camps, with an increased emphasis on the awarding of badges. The emergence of a major peace movement in the 1960s committed to nuclear disarmament helped to increase

membership and vitality within the organisation. Songs from the peace movement became popular within groups, and organised contingents of Woodcraft Folk members were visible at many CND demonstrations. The other major changes during this period were the increased links the organisation was making at national and local levels with the broader youth services, resulting in the Woodcraft Folk gaining government funding for being a mainstream voluntary youth organisation. This recognition was seen as important for both its status and as a way of combating criticisms of the Woodcraft Folk's links with organisations in Eastern Europe.

There is surprisingly little literature discussing the Woodcraft Folk during these post-war Cold War years, and none that specifically discusses the nature of its internationalism.⁷ In this section of the volume, two contributions suggest that the Woodcraft Folk's understanding of internationalism changed over time. In [Chapter 5](#) Richard Palser examines the international camps organised by the Woodcraft Folk and the International Falcon Movement as a means of exploring the form that internationalism took from 1945 until 1970. He argues that the organisation now placed its main emphasis on children getting to know and form friendships with children from other countries, so that a peaceful world would come out of understanding each other better. The chapter looks at different aspects of the camping communities that were constructed – the ways of sharing the work of keeping the camp going, the cultural life and ceremonies of the camp, the different views of how camping in the countryside could contribute to social change in the cities, and the mechanisms for involving young people in decision-making. It briefly examines how this approach also informed its exchanges with Eastern Europe.

By the mid-1970s, the Woodcraft Folk had about 15,000 members, but many of these were in London and the south of England. There were pockets of activity in the Midlands, the north and Scotland but with little sign of growth in these areas. As a consequence, in 1977 the Woodcraft Folk made a major policy decision to focus much more directly on expansion. This resulted in the opening of a Northern Office in Leeds and the production of a major strategy paper. Helped by a resurgence in the peace movement in the early 1980s and significant interest from many middle-class families, the Woodcraft Folk's size doubled during this period. Seen as a means of responding to the 'worst excesses of Thatcherism', the Woodcraft Folk became a very popular organisation for families seeking an alternative to existing youth organisations. This growth in popularity was helped by significant funding from the Greater London Council in the 1980s, which included the production of a cinema advert, appointment

of regional staff for the Midlands, Scotland and Wales, and specialist projects on development education and the environment.

In [Chapter 6](#) Douglas Bourn suggests that there was a further shift in the organisation's understanding of internationalism in the 1980s. He traces how this began with an increased involvement in activity in opposition to apartheid in South Africa, dovetailed with a growing awareness that the organisation needed to address how it was approaching the involvement of ethnic minorities in the Woodcraft Folk and the need to develop a conscious anti-racist policy. Bourn argues that this was taken further when the organisation became centrally involved in producing a 'Development Education Pack', which provided a theoretical framework for its international educational work not merely at camps but in also in weekly group activities. He summarises these changes as moving from international friendship to international solidarity.

Part III: Woodcraft Folk culture

This section is concerned with exploring the distinct 'culture' of the Woodcraft Folk, how this was connected to its educational activities and how this too changed over time. From 1925 onwards, the organisation placed great emphasis on how all of its songs, ceremonies, symbols, dances, dramas, costumes and even vocabulary contributed to the 'atmosphere' of Woodcraft – a sense of belonging to something bigger than themselves individually, a sense of a shared identity. Some of these aspects were more explicit than others in conveying the values and goals of the organisation. Others were primarily tools for recreation or to create a public image of the organisation.

In [Chapter 7](#) Susanne Rappe-Weber looks at the Woodcraft Folk's interactions with continental youth movements, and how a process of exchange – of 'borrowing' and 'lending' – of each other's cultural productions came about. Focusing particularly on the German youth organisations, and starting with the Wandervögel, she discusses how contacts and exchanges developed with youth organisations in the UK. Using songbooks that can be found in the youth movement archives in Germany, including a post-war Woodcraft Folk songbook, she demonstrates the 'cultural interweavings of the English and German youth movements'.

In [Chapter 8](#) Richard Palser and Douglas Bourn examine the different songs that were included in the Woodcraft Folk songbooks from 1928 to the end of the century. Their aim is to illustrate how contact with different social movements over time influenced their choices over which

songs to include and which songs were no longer considered relevant or appropriate. They show that in addition to writing their own songs, the Woodcraft Folk drew at different times from such varied sources as the English Folk Dance and Song Society, the Socialist Educational International, the Workers' Music Association, the International Falcon Movement, the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, the Folk revival of the 1960s and the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp.

The chapters in this section depart somewhat from what initially seemed like a chronological sequence – beginning with the interwar years in [Part I](#) and proceeding to the post-war years in [Part II](#). The next section returns to that chronological sequence and discusses the ways in which the role of young people in the organisation changed, and how this impacted the educational work of the organisation more generally.

Part IV: Changing role of young people

Literature on the more recent history of the Woodcraft Folk is rare. There are references in the volume produced by Mary Davis mentioned in note 1 of this chapter. Several articles were published in academic and professional journals in the 1980s linked to the growth of the organisation.⁸ What was evident, however, during this period was its heightened profile. For example, for its sixtieth anniversary major adverts were produced for left-wing magazines. At this anniversary, a history workshop style conference was also held in London, at which Leslie Paul gave what turned out to be his final public address.⁹

The expansion that began in the late 1970s and 1980s was not plain sailing for the Woodcraft Folk. It resulted in major tensions within the organisation between those who feared that the Woodcraft Folk was becoming a very different organisation to that they grew up in and those who saw the need to align the body to the growing social movements around peace, the environment and feminism. The consequence of these tensions was an emergency conference. Although technically related to the suspension of a member of staff, it became the touchstone for what could have been a split within the Woodcraft Folk. The conference overwhelmingly voted for moving the organisation forward, and for the rest of the decade and into the 1990s, the Woodcraft Folk remained a strong voluntary children's and youth movement engaged in a range of social, environmental, cultural and political activities.

In the early 2000s, despite having a Labour government in power, the Woodcraft Folk lost its direct funding from the Department for

Education. Although funding from other sources continued to ensure not only the continuation of the organisation but also its consolidation, it was not in a position to sustain its growth from the 1980s. From the 1980s onwards there were also several other significant changes. Firstly, its international work began to move beyond links and exchanges with groups in Europe to include movements in Central America, South Africa, the Middle East and Asia. Its support from the co-operative movement, which had long been the bedrock of the Woodcraft Folk's finances at both local and national levels, became even more central as its strap-line became 'a co-operative children's and young people's organisation'. Thirdly, there was a new focus on developing activities not only involving young people but giving them a greater say in the running of the organisation. This trend developed into the 2000s as young people became more directly involved in the decision-making of policies and events such as international camps.

These themes of broadening international work, increased emphasis on co-operation and, most significant of all, the role young people played in the development of the organisation are central to [Chapters 9, 10 and 11](#). [Chapter 9](#) by Delilah Wallbank, entitled 'Youth is not wasted on the young', situates the increasing influential role within the organisation of the 16- to 20-year-old age group, the District Fellows, within a discussion of Shulamith Firestone's conception of youth. Reflecting the ideas of Firestone, Wallbank suggests that what is meant by youth should always be contested to recognise that it is a socially constructed term and that adults and children should be seen as being on a co-learning journey rather than as separate and distinct. The chapter discusses how this District Fellowship category developed from the 1970s to the present day in terms of both its organisational leadership and themes that emerged from its activities, including emotional and mental wellbeing, sexuality and social activism.

The changing role of young people within the organisation is also the main feature of [Chapter 10](#) where Douglas Bourn, through the concept of global youth work, analyses the ways in which the Woodcraft Folk's international work, particularly its camps from the 1990s onwards, became much more led by young people. Influenced by changes within the wider youth service and the impact of its own development education project from the 1980s, the Woodcraft Folk's educational programme in the 1990s put more emphasis on social and environmental issues. International camps throughout the Woodcraft Folk's history have been the laboratory for testing out new ideas and approaches. This was the case with its major international camps in the 1990s and 2000s. The

chapter shows how with access to new funding, the international camps were able to provide a range of participatory educational approaches which put young people at the heart of decision-making processes. The camps also provided opportunities for young people to take their learning forward to forms of social and political activism, including, in 2002, to the World Sustainability Summit in Johannesburg.

The Woodcraft Folk from the 1990s onwards did not forget its strong family roots; many groups led by voluntary leaders were often part of wider family groupings. This strong family basis was one of the reasons for the organisation deciding to invest in a new age grouping for under-sixes, the 'Woodchips'. Following the launch of its new strategy in 1998 called 'Dancing to a Stronger Beat', a revised programme was produced in 2002 called 'The Beat Goes On'. The theme of education for social change which had emerged in policy documents in the 1980s took on increased importance in these strategies.

Throughout the first two decades of the twenty-first century, the Woodcraft Folk continued to diversify its activities through a range of specialist projects linked to local development, the environment or peer group support.¹⁰ Unfortunately, the global pandemic and Covid-19 resulted for a period of time in the closure of all groups, and it took some time for the group numbers to recover. These themes are explored in [Chapter 11](#) by Deborah McCahon, the current Chief Executive of the Woodcraft Folk. Her chapter continues the themes noted in earlier chapters of increased participation by young people and situating many of its activities within broader social movements around anti-racist work, climate justice and children's rights. Evidence from recent research within the organisation is discussed which shows the value young people have put in the organisation. The research, however, also shows the struggles many voluntary youth organisations have in recruiting and retaining voluntary leaders. However, the Woodcraft Folk continued to invest in and support innovatory projects related to themes such as peer education, mediation and partnerships with a range of organisations, particularly in the field of disability.

Like many youth organisations, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the Woodcraft Folk was considerable. Although the Dreams at Home project was regarded as a success, it has taken some time for the membership to reach its pre-pandemic levels.

The commitment the organisation has had to international work, including international camps, has been retained. This culminated in a very successful international camp, Common Ground, in 2022 where young people played a central role in determining both its structure and content.

The volume ends with a short concluding chapter from the editors which offers some suggestions about its distinctiveness and contribution to broader debates about social history, what is meant by internationalism and the engagement of young people in changing society.

Notes

1. The only narrative history currently available is Mary Davis, *Fashioning a New World: A History of the Woodcraft Folk* (Loughborough: Holyoake Books, 2000). For an alternative view of its treatment of the 1970s onwards, see Richard Palser, “‘Learn by Doing, Teach by Being’: The Children of 1968 and the Woodcraft Folk”, *Socialist History Journal* 26 (2004): 1–24. Aspects of the history of the organisation can be seen in Phineas Harper, *A People’s History of Woodcraft Folk* (London: Woodcraft Folk, 2016). This volume is a series of short articles with visual materials mainly covering areas such as costume, badges and songs, with short sections on recent international camps. This volume was linked to a major Heritage Funded project which resulted in a large number of interviews with former and current members and a Heritage website: <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/home/>.
2. John O. Springhall, ‘The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements’, *International Review of Social History* 16, no. 2 (1971): 125–58, 125.
3. See Paul Wilkinson, ‘English Youth Movements 1908–30’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 4, no. 2 (1969): 3–23; Brian Morris, ‘Ernest Thompson Seton and the Origins of the Woodcraft Movement’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): 183–94; and J. L. Finlay, ‘John Hargrave, The Green Shirts, and Social Credit’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 1 (1970): 53–71.
4. Springhall, ‘The Boy Scouts’, 116–17.
5. See John Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge: A Hundred Years of Education in the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1877–1977* (London: Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Journeyman Press, 1981); David Prynne, ‘The Woodcraft Folk and the Labour Movement 1925–70’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 18, no. 1 (1983): 79–95, 84–85; and Bruce W. Leslie, ‘Creating a Socialist Scout Movement: The Woodcraft Folk 1924–42’, *History of Education* 13, no. 4 (1984): 299–311.
6. For a fuller exposition of Palser’s argument, see Richard Palser, *Education for Social Change: The Politics and Pedagogy of the Woodcraft Folk in the Inter-war Years* (London: Amazon, 2020).
7. The most recent studies focus on how children and youth organisations have utilised the countryside. See Sarah Mills, ‘“A Powerful Educational Instrument”: The Woodcraft Folk, Indoor/Outdoor Nature and Pedagogical Practice 1925–1975’, in *Informal Education, Childhood and Youth: Geographies, Histories, Practices*, ed. Sarah Mills and Peter Kraftl, 65–78 (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Sian Edwards, *Youth Movements, Citizenship and the English Countryside: Creating Good Citizens, 1930–1960* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).
8. Douglas Bourn, ‘Ideologically Sound Can Be Fun’, *Youth and Policy* 28 (1989): 1–8; Douglas Bourn, ‘The Role of the Woodcraft Folk’, *Journal of Co-operative Studies* 65 (1988): 55–59; Martin Stott, ‘The Woodcraft Folk’, *Marxism Today* 29, no. 3 (1985): 34.
9. Leslie Paul, ‘Founding the Woodcraft Folk’ (1985), www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJv3nU145UI (accessed 27 January 2025).
10. Deborah McCahon, Margaret Fleming, Bob Todd, Paul Fleming and Anne MacGarry, ‘The Woodcraft Folk: Our Approach to STEM and Environmental Learning’, *Environmental Education* 117 (2018): 6–8.

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Part I

Emergence and development of a progressive youth movement

2

Progressive cultures in interwar Britain: situating Leslie Paul

Annebella Pollen

As the Woodcraft Folk's first leader, or 'Head Man', Leslie Paul (1905–85) was undoubtedly the most dominant influence on the policies and practices of the early years of the organisation. He was not, as is commonly claimed, the Woodcraft Folk's sole founder; he had co-founded the organisation in 1925 with the little-remembered Sydney Shaw.¹ Nor – despite revisionist myths to the contrary – had he been the reason for the split from the Kindred of the Kibbo Kift, the pacifist woodcraft group from which many early Woodcraft Folk members came. He also did not lead the Kibbo Kift walkout in 1924; he was just one among 32 others.² Nonetheless, there is a good reason why Paul's name has become synonymous with the early days of the Woodcraft Folk: he was its most vociferous interwar interlocutor. As a very young man – barely 20 at the organisation's founding – with insatiable energy, ambition and a prodigious talent for writing, his personal and political development shaped its emerging direction. As will be discussed, from his first Woodcraft Folk pamphlet, *The Child and the Race* (1926), to his most substantial work of educational theory, *The Republic of Children* (1938), Paul established an intellectual identity and a practical method for the Woodcraft Folk, rooted in his youth experiences in the Boy Scouts and Kibbo Kift, and shaped by his socialist politics.³

In this chapter, I explore Paul's shifting attitudes towards the Woodcraft Folk in the context of his wider writings. During and after his Woodcraft Folk years, Paul published extensively, far beyond education and youth subjects, producing poetry and novels, shorter pieces of journalism and book-length works of social and political theory. Reading Paul's non-fiction works, which now mostly languish in obscurity, provides a

broader view of his personal passions and political attitudes.⁴ Especially through his four autobiographies, from the 1940s to the 1970s, readers can chart Paul's lost faith in pacifism and socialism, as well as his changing perspectives on European youth movements. Reading Paul's wider writings also demonstrates that, for all the organisation's commitment to developing children's autonomy and self-governance, the Woodcraft Folk was partly shaped in Paul's image; its early shifts mirror his ideological vicissitudes.

Paul earned his daily wage during his Woodcraft Folk years as a journalist and an editor, and he described himself and his friends in the interwar years as 'inveterate "joiners"'.⁵ As much as he shaped organisations, he was shaped by them. It is through Paul's contribution to external groups that we can map his wider networks and see how the early Woodcraft Folk was harnessed to broader 'progressive' agendas. In relation to this term in particular, I discuss Paul's membership of the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals, an organisation founded in 1932 by H. G. Wells and C. E. M. Joad to create an alliance of left-wing interests. Its wide-ranging concerns – encompassing reformist ideals in politics, economics, education, sex, architecture and more – encapsulate many positions and tensions that Paul, and others who styled themselves as progressive, inhabited and experienced in the period as a 'structure of feeling'.⁶ The chapter closes by reflecting methodologically on what we might know about an organisation through the prolific writings of one individual, and what we might learn about individuals and organisations by positioning them in wider generational frames.

Paul's early educational precepts: picturesqueness, paganism and politics

Born in Dublin in 1905, Paul grew up in South London among siblings in a two-parent family; his father sold advertising space on Fleet Street. As a youth, he was a keen member of the Scouts but defected to Kibbo Kift in the early 1920s. As a 'poor kid', he did not go to university but earned a wage as a school leaver in his father's firm and via freelance writing and editorial work.⁷ Paul's first publication for the Woodcraft Folk in 1926, entitled *The Child and the Race: An Educational Programme for Use in Woodcraft Fellowships and Other Co-operative Youth Movements*, was a modest 16-page pamphlet complete with naive illustrations by Paul, informed by the existing symbolism of woodcraft groups, especially Kibbo Kift.⁸ The pamphlet's language was also undoubtedly directly

inspired by – if not plagiarised from – the ambitious claims regularly made by John Hargrave, Kibbo Kift's influential Head Man, who Paul had once revered. Indeed, Paul sometimes only changed a few words in his claims; the promise that the programme was an 'art, science and philosophy of life' designed, rather grandly, to mould the primal nature of the child, was straight out of Kibbo Kift's lexicon. Despite the small size of the organisation at this time – barely into the low hundreds – and the fact that children were under his and other leaders' care for two hours a week and a few days in the summer holidays, Paul claimed, 'We are the revolution.'⁹

This was not only a major ambition but also an important term in the reframing of the Woodcraft Folk as a socialist political practice; Paul's updates to an otherwise borrowed programme included educational activities focused on rebels and freedom fighters, working-class art and co-operative concerns.¹⁰ The aim was for nothing less than world peace and a new world order, and the leaflet provided physical, mental and spiritual guidance for what Paul was already describing as a 'movement'. His total vision dealt with psychology and evolutionary biology, diet and physical fitness, sunbathing and self-expression in a primitivist outdoor setting, with the aim of reprogramming the child in an 'alternative environment' to that provided by Mammon, with its tinned food and inauthentic mass pleasures encapsulated by the press, the pub and 'the pictures'.¹¹ A line drawing of Paul, under his woodcraft name of Little Otter, was produced by 'Anoki' for a Woodcraft Folk periodical, *Herald of the Folk*, in 1927; it shows the 22-year-old Head Man as an earnest, bespectacled youth (Figure 2.1).

Paul's next Woodcraft Folk publications, *The Folk Trail: An Outline of the Philosophies and Activities of Woodcraft Fellowships* (1929) and *The Green Company: Pow-Wows on Pioneering for Boys and Girls* (1931), showed a stronger sense of political motivation even if organisational practices were still ensconced in campfire ritual and primitivist pagantry. *The Folk Trail* outlined Woodcraft Folk pedagogy for adult readers; its fundamental premise was that 'woodcraft might be the means of teaching evolution by the picturesque'.¹² Evolution was not just biology but 'world history' sweeping from the origins of life to the present, where the interconnectedness of all living things emphasised collective unity rather than national factionalism; this was the basis for 'world citizenship'. The global concept was, again, lifted from Kibbo Kift practices, who had in turn borrowed it from H. G. Wells; his *Outline of History* provided the guide.¹³ Paul's indebtedness to Wellsian ideas included revoking what the novelist would famously call, in an interview with Paul, the 'elaborate



Figure 2.1 Little Otter – Leslie Paul. *Herald of the Folk*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1927. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/herald-of-the-folk-no-1-vol-1-march/?page=5>.

bloodstained twaddle’ of English imperialism as taught in schools.¹⁴ *The Folk Trail* was not only anti-imperialist but also challenged dominant Christianity in its critique of curricula that denigrated ‘Heathens’.¹⁵ Framing the imperative in socialist terms, Paul stated that such ‘jingoism and blather’ must be counteracted so that ‘youngsters’ would be ‘saved from becoming cannon fodder in capitalist wars’.¹⁶

The Green Company communicated these ideas to children, with picturesqueness, primitivism and pantheistic nature religion sitting alongside a sense of adventurousness designed to appeal to an English child’s imagination. The result mixed an imaginary and homogenised Native American symbolic style, adapted from the models of Ernest Thompson Seton, the founder of Woodcraft Indians in the US, with added home-grown hero myths from Robin Hood to Robinson Crusoe and political education via the Rochdale Pioneers, John Ruskin, William Morris and Kier Hardie.¹⁷ The seams connecting these cultural and political appropriations are awkwardly visible but helpfully reveal the contours of Paul’s early influences, from his own profound adolescent campfire pleasures to his increasing political commitment to communism. In the same year he

published *The Green Company*, he was leading adults in the Co-operative Union on a delegation to Russia. The resulting publication, *Co-operation in the U.S.S.R.*, was produced for a different audience but the resonances are palpable: Paul visited co-operative pedagogical institutes in Moscow and Kyiv, and scrutinised child education practices in USSR crèches, kindergartens and the Pioneer youth movement.¹⁸

Paul announced his retirement as Head Man at the end of 1933 and published a rousing departing essay in the 1934 *Woodcraft Folk Year Book*, where he outlined radical reform plans to make a stronger, larger and less peculiar organisation with opposition to fascism as its central plank.¹⁹ Paul cited poor health, exhaustion and the increasing demands of his literary work as reasons for relinquishing leadership. The latter did seem especially pressing as, in addition to his writings about Russia, Paul had also produced two novels and two books of poetry alongside writing for the Woodcraft Folk. As Paul later reflected of the early days, 'for a small penniless movement, we were extremely articulate'. He phrased this in the collective, but most of the writing was, in fact, his own.²⁰

Basil Rawson took over as Head Man in 1933. Paul took on a new role as President and continued to write abundantly, authoring *The Training of Pioneers: The Educational Programme of the Woodcraft Folk* in 1936, a handbook designed to supersede what Paul was by then recognising as the 'higgle-de-piggledy' philosophy provided by *The Child and the Race*.²¹ In this volume, the Woodcraft Folk's educational aspect is more practical than revolutionary. Acknowledging that the earlier ambitions – to provide a full evolutionary world history from 'primordial slime' to the present – was beyond the capacities of the organisation, Paul's proposal was not to supplant the school curriculum but to supplement it.²² It was still, nonetheless, extraordinarily ambitious: the entire history of life was not required, but a rigorous stage-by-stage knowledge of socialism was expected instead. Paul stated that 'we are a movement seeking social change, and our education should be directed towards social change'.²³ As such, a central focus was on engaging stories and activities based on working-class lives and experiences, past and present. Political talks – dozens and dozens of them – should use 'terms simple and examples concrete'.²⁴

Paul's commitment to youth education continued through the decade, leading to the publication of *The Republic of Children: A Handbook for Teachers of Working-Class Children* in 1938. This was both a comprehensive manual and the fullest development, to that point, of the Woodcraft Folk's educational philosophy. Earlier claims were refined; outmoded ideas were rejected. Woodcraft continued as an important method that

‘grants children an easily understandable form of self-government, an active open-air life, [and] opportunities for self-expression’, but Paul recognised that ‘woodcraft itself is no solution to the world’s ills’.²⁵ Woodcraft was

no longer an adolescent day-dream, a method of escaping the harsh realities of a world in conflict, no longer the Utopia of the week-end, no longer an ark for a few budding Noahs who hope to escape the deluge, but a vigorous and imaginative method of turning out fine bodies and critical minds for the task of building a better society.²⁶

Paul also outlined the influences on his approaches to education, drawing on ideas from Johann Pestalozzi, Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori through to Homer Lane, A. S. Neill and Sigmund Freud. Play and voluntary activity was emphasised, and coercion was vetoed. Ceremonial life provided the common bond; group rituals gave the structure to replace the Scouts’ paramilitary regime. Paul reiterated and developed the premises that underpinned his earlier publications. There was to be comradeship between children and adults; children should be trusted and treated with respect and affection; adults must be on the children’s side.²⁷ The form and content of conventional education was also critiqued. In the words of Leah Manning of the National Union of Teachers, the provider of the book’s foreword, the current curriculum created ‘a class bias well-suited to the capitalist system, but little else’.²⁸ Paul declared that the ideological task of the Woodcraft Folk was to ‘correct the bias they may have received at school’ and thus equip children ‘with the resolve to throw their weight on the side of the working class in its struggle for a better society’.²⁹

Post-war reflection and reinvention: Paul’s first autobiographical writings

Paul’s autobiographical writings, produced during and shortly after the Second World War, began three decades of memoirs across a lifetime of ideological repositioning and personal refashioning. *The Living Hedge* (1946) is frequently funny in the telling and sometimes beautiful in its delivery and in the woodcut illustrations by Reynolds Stone.³⁰ In it, Paul returns as an adult to the south London stomping ground of his childhood to find a sprawling housing estate where his beloved fields and lanes once were. With ‘the living hedge’ now uprooted, he pieces together a coming-of-age story that includes his Kibbo Kift years, the meeting therein of the

socialist comrades Gordon Ellis and Joseph Reeves who would awaken him politically, and the path to losing his religion.³¹

In *Heron Lake* (1946), Paul continues to suffer, into the start of the Second World War, from the illness that dogged him when he stood down from the Woodcraft Folk leadership. The malaise is not named (later he would state that he had an enlarged heart brought on by strenuous Woodcraft Folk activities and, later again, diabetes).³² In the opening pages, following a physical breakdown, Paul is miserably housed in army sanatoria in Shoeburyness, Essex, on a milk-only diet. *Heron Lake* offers glimpses of Paul's military training and his wartime duty in the Army Educational Corps, including running a mess shop and attending evening dances with young women. His soldierly role is not the main topic, however. He explains: 'Security forbids me from talking about the unit more than's necessary, but who wants to?'³³ It is merely the backdrop to the main event, which takes the form of a nature diary with woodcuts by Guy Worsdell.

Paul's main viewpoint is from the requisitioned stately home in Norfolk where he is housed in a tin Nissen hut with eleven other men. The lake of the title is in the grounds and visited by a wide range of wildlife that Paul charts in detail. His yearning for an outdoor life, stifled by soulless military duties and procedure, is recompensed by his posting in the country. Reading between the descriptions of swan nests and reed beds, we learn that he lectures (on topics unstated) and runs a capacious library from a former beach hut.³⁴ When the day is done, he plays his flute, sleeps out when he can and swims naked in a millpond. He is recognised as a frustrated intellectual by his company, who mock him for his interests in poetry and classical music. *Heron Lake* also shows us Paul's elitism; despite his humble beginnings and his early commitment to the working class, he can't be attracted to women with regional accents. Like his contemporary George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, he expresses sentimental affection for 'the masses' but remains superior. So too, in his attitude to gender: women are scrutinised as specimens apart. Paul's attitude to race may be typical of the time but is surprising in someone whose politics aimed at inclusivity. Black GIs, for example, are praised for their politeness, smartness and generosity, and hailed as excellent USA ambassadors. Paul warns, however: 'I fear that in ten years' time we shall be startled by the sight of coalblack piccaninnies leaping around the English lanes.'³⁵

Whatever Paul is doing is highly protected; he elliptically mentions being shown Bletchley Park (although he has no understanding of the codebreakers' workings), and he reveals that he has been trained to shoot a machine gun as part of his soldierly duties. This slips out in a conversation with a country child, as part of Paul's attempt to reassure him that he

is not entirely useless as a man who cannot milk a cow or drive a tractor. There is profound loneliness in *Heron Lake* – connection to nature compensates for being cut off from contemporaries and from intimacy – and there are touches of spiritual yearning; the old woodcraft belief in the oneness of the universe is a source of sustenance in dark times. Paul's youth movement days receive little mention, although he gratefully kindles a friendship with a local woman, married to a farmer, who was once involved in woodcraft; together they share cultured conversations and despair at the lack of interest in books and music among farming communities. Paul's once ardent pacifism is conspicuously not mentioned at all.

Annihilation and Terror: Paul's political theory and search for spiritual meaning

A trilogy of books about war – *The Annihilation of Man: A Study of the Crisis in the West* (1944), *The Meaning of Human Existence* (1949) and *The Age of Terror* (1950) – mark Paul's mid-century move into political and spiritual commentary and away from camping, education and nature writing. They punctuate a period when Paul was averaging a book a year and they map the major reorientation of his personal perspectives almost in real time.

The Annihilation of Man begins by noting that much public thinking during wartime is published by those who are too old to serve; those who are in service are taken up with other matters. The result is that a generation is excluded, and the reflections are unrepresentative; Paul's perspective is a corrective. Army time, he notes, gave little time for writing but much for contemplation. He was led during those years by an enormous compulsion: 'to think out afresh my view of society and of my duty to it'.³⁶ This is not only a personal reflection, however, but one that presumes to speak to the needs of a generation 'which has witnessed the collapse of so many theories and assumptions'.³⁷

With giddy ambition, Paul rehearses, in the early chapters, all the social and political reasons given by Britain and Germany for the establishment of war. While never speaking in personal terms, we can locate in it the reasons for his lost pacifism. Paul reasoned that the 1914–18 conflict resulted in 'the universal hatred of war'.³⁸ From this, he details the great flowering of No More War societies, the Peace Pledge Union and the Co-operative Women's Guild, in each of which Paul had once been either a powerful supporter or a central part, although he does not mention it. These and other phenomena – a mass of pacifist novels, memoirs and church activities – 'fanned the flames of a vestal abstinence from

conflict by revelation of war's misery and uselessness'.³⁹ In Paul's estimation, 'A yearning for peace so powerful as this can create in time its own myth'.⁴⁰ A collective belief formed that war was the greatest of all disasters, and that none could want to get close to it again. Concurrently, while public opinion was so pacifist, governments were 'cautious, even timid'; they 'erred on the side of inaction'.⁴¹ This led to wishful thinking and a refusal to see the war-like actions of fascists that were directed towards precisely this end, especially on the side of the left, whom Paul partly blames. In their rejection of a conflict characterised as imperialist and thus seen as objectionable, they threatened, in Paul's view, the war effort so needed to overthrow Hitler.

Paul spends considerable time poking holes in his once-beloved Marxist ideology, questioning the shifting parameters of how class may be defined, the triumph of the proletariat that will inevitably create a new ruling class, and the failure of the working class to unite under revolutionary conditions. Mostly he is frustrated with Marxism as a theology that cannot be questioned: 'it is a closed system which can be accepted and operated but never dissected, never revised save under the charge of heresy'.⁴² A reader familiar with Paul's Woodcraft Folk years will divine frustration with the socialist community of which he was once part. Likewise, Paul denounces the German youth movements who were the Woodcraft Folk's colleagues and inspiration, but whose ideological bases proved to be such fertile ground, in Paul's synthesis, for National Socialist sympathies.⁴³ In a chapter devoted to the subject, Paul admits 'one cannot saddle the Youth Movement with the entire responsibility for Hitlerism, since the future, the end, was not apprehended in the romantic beginnings'. At the same time, however, he claims that 'it is foolish to talk of the betrayal of German youth by Hitlerism for this was the end to which their hunger led, and the evil was contained in it'.⁴⁴

To corroborate these claims, Paul examines the German youth movement's emotional, anti-intellectual, rebellious spirit, its earthy mysticism and its adulation of nature and the body. It was preoccupied, he surmises, with 'blood and soil, beauty and struggle'.⁴⁵ It has been overlooked as a principal seedbed of the Third Reich, Paul states, because of its 'vague, sentimental and amorphous' nature. Because of this, Paul claims, 'historians, especially the economic sort who are more at home with the rise and fall of the mark than of the human spirit, pass it by feeling that it is too crude and untutored to be of importance'.⁴⁶ Paul argues, however, that it 'dominated the German young for over forty years precisely because it possesses and mirrors their own virtues and defects, their idealism and their ignorance, their sentimentality and herd

cruelty, their naiveté, and the sacrificial longing to serve and be used by a power greater than themselves'.⁴⁷ The Woodcraft Folk is not mentioned but in the demolition of youth movements' premises, Paul denounces it by association.

He also spends considerable time outlining the contribution of scientific claims and theories of knowledge to what he calls 'the crisis'; these stretch from Darwinism and behaviourism to Freud. Mostly he concludes that these bodies of knowledge are reductive and nihilist. The destabilisation that occurs from them produces uncertainty: 'the solidity of matter vanishes; the reality of man is problematical; emotions, acts of will or of hope are not what they seem to be, and in the sense in which men believe in them, probably do not exist at all'.⁴⁸ Science, in Paul's estimation, denies aesthetic and spiritual experience, which are centrally important, especially the latter; to Paul, religious experience is the one constant in human history.⁴⁹ In his conceptualisation and phrasing, it makes man part of nature but uniquely conscious of his part.⁵⁰ Rejection of religion, he surmises, has led to spiritual decay.

Paul's renascent Christianity emerges strongly; indeed, it is the conclusion to which the book builds. His is an argument not for the return of religion in general but Christianity in particular, as the 'high watermark of religious evolution'.⁵¹ In a world of rising consumerism, Christianity provides a moral compass. It is the embodiment of 'Freedom, Equality, Brotherhood, Service, Love'.⁵² It is a new idea for our salvation, 'to be sought in the history of the last two thousand years'.⁵³ On the flyleaf of Paul's follow-up book, *The Annihilation of Man* is noted to have proved strikingly popular, running into four editions, which was unexpected for a book of its philosophical type.⁵⁴ *The Meaning of Human Existence* picks up where *Annihilation* left off. Its title is as bold as can be imagined, and one does not have to look far in the book to find its answer. The opening inscription, from Nicholas Berdyaev, a Christian philosopher, states pithily: 'God is the meaning of human existence.'⁵⁵ In this book, social concerns are sidelined. Occasionally, the discussion is hooked to contemporary thought and modern history; for example, the yearning 'to be possessed by something' is 'a passion to be found in our own times'. Paul identifies it in the works of Dostoyevsky and Sartre, the nature mysticism of his former hero Richard Jeffries, the ecstasies sought by the Wandervögel, and the 'irrational modern movements' of revolutionaries and of fascists.⁵⁶ Beyond these real-world citations, however, there is little of the old, materialist Paul; Christian philosophy is centralised.

Two years later, in *The Age of Terror*, Paul again put the world to rights by returning to political analysis. In it, he aims to explore Europe

‘historically, geographically and ideologically’ as the heartland of intellectual ability, humanism, democracy and, ultimately, as the cradle of civilisation.⁵⁷ In this text, progress is debunked. While it was once understood during the Enlightenment to be a consequence of human striving, in more recent times it has become a fetish: ‘not so much the fruit of human effort as the natural motion of human society, as an orbit round the sun is the natural motion of the earth’. This leads to a situation where humanity is divided into ‘progressives’ and ‘reactionaries’; the former claiming to be ‘on the side’ of history and the latter ‘opposing the forward current’.⁵⁸ The last vestiges of Paul’s socialism and Marxism are dismissed in *The Age of Terror* as tyrannies; they are characterised as amoral. Their truths and values are only expedient to the cause they pursue and not to what Paul holds in highest esteem: ‘truths and values of a permanent nature standing above man’.⁵⁹

Like other works in the trilogy, there is little in *Terror* that refers directly to Paul’s own intellectual or political development, but the Wandervögel appear as an exemplar of the problem. Paul again notes in *The Age of Terror* the fertile ground that was established for Hitler’s ideologies by youth who valued instinct over argument and action over intellect, but he also obliquely refers to his own frustrations when he describes how the movement’s members ‘wanted a spiritual life but did not know how to find it outside the brotherhood of the campfire’.⁶⁰ Youth movements’ search for transcendence, he argues, could not be satisfied by their methods; in this we may read that neither could Paul’s. He argues throughout that ‘the earthly salvation of man may not lie at all on the plane of the ideologies, but with the spirit’.⁶¹ By the conclusion he is unequivocal; to rescue the ruin of Europe, a new direction is needed, that is, the spiritual life: ‘It involves the deepest decision of a whole civilisation, and the greatest personal heroism in the will and the heart’.⁶²

‘Another reading of my past’: Paul’s personal revision and political revulsion

By the time *Angry Young Man* appeared in 1951 (Figure 2.2), Paul had published a dozen books, and this was his third directly autobiographical work (another followed in 1977, *First Love: A Journey*, published when Paul was 72 and which positioned his Christian faith as his true origin story). Perhaps his most readable and widely read book, *Angry Young Man* was retrospectively credited with providing the name for the Kitchen Sink playwrights and novelists who emerged as a literary scene

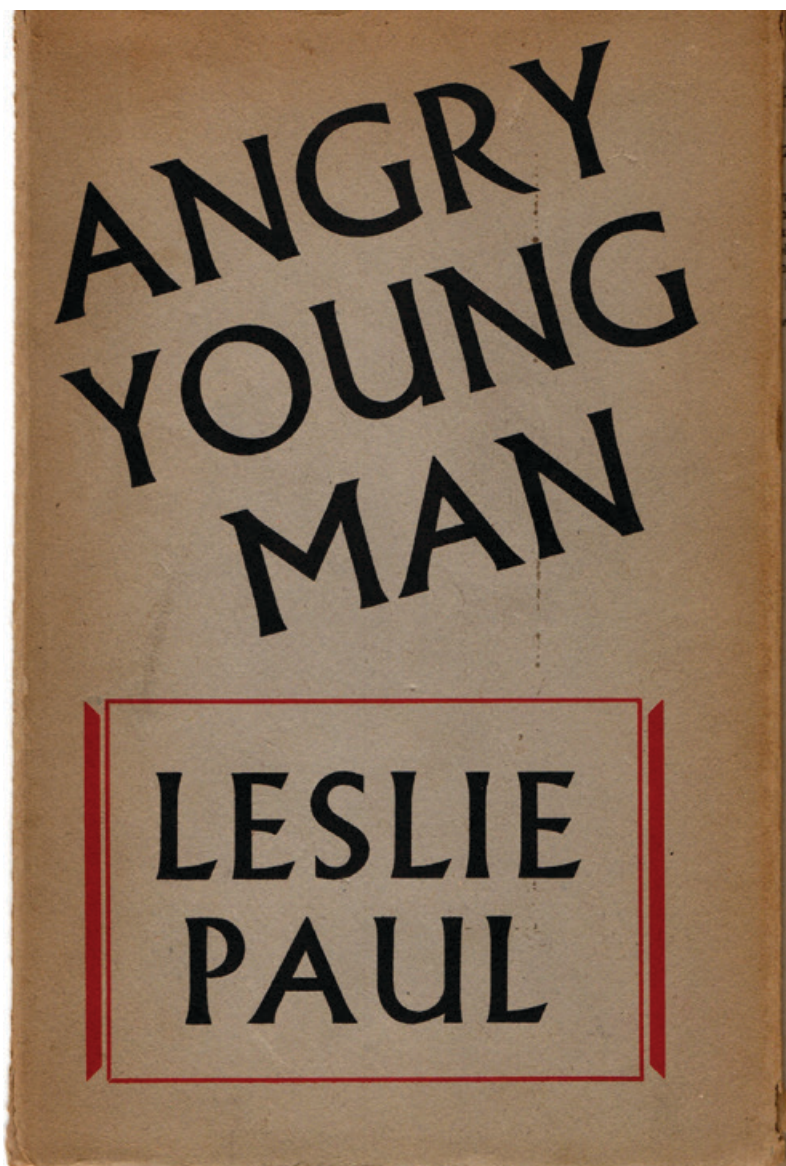


Figure 2.2 *Angry Young Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), Leslie Paul's third autobiographical work.

in the 1950s. Aged 46 at the time of publication, Paul stands back from his youth and, in middle age, dismisses many of his former interests as 'grand moral gestures'.⁶³ Devotion to the 'simple life' was an insincere 'pose', and he unflinchingly rips at the contradictions and weaknesses of the woodcraft movement, noting its naiveté and superiority as a 'self-conscious and intolerant elite' with a 'hatred' of 'the weak, the sick and, above all, the elderly'.⁶⁴ He dismisses its socialism as window dressing to its main pleasures – outdoor life and campfire mysticism – a position that he derides as 'spiritual desiccation' and as merely part of a 'cult' of the denial of civilisation that has done much to shape the tragedies of recent history.⁶⁵ Due to this realisation, he states, 'I had to make another reading of my own past.'⁶⁶

In this account, Paul regrets drawing a veil over what he really saw in Russia, including its desperate poverty, mismanagement and corruption, and he traces his full opposition to communism by 1938. He also details the reasons for his departure from pacifism once he realised 'there was going to be another war, and what kind of a war it would be', that is, a war against fascism.⁶⁷ Although *Angry Young Man* documents Paul's exhaustion with the agitation of his youth – and it is full of memorable phrases to this effect, such as 'I was as full of theories as a dog of fleas' – he also documents the excitement of some of his endeavours.⁶⁸ One was his central role in the Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI), founded in 1934 by philosophers H. G. Wells and C. E. M. Joad.⁶⁹

As an alliance of left-wing causes, FPSI boasted significant literary figures and political campaigners among its endorsers and membership, and these included Aldous and Julian Huxley, Gerald Heard, J. C. Flugel, Bertrand and Dora Russell, A. S. Neill and John MacMurray. The *Manifesto* on which the Federation was based, as Paul notes, argued for many of the same 'radical and liberal' demands as had the Kibbo Kift covenant and the Woodcraft Folk charter.⁷⁰ It sought to promote a common creed, contact and co-operation between the likeminded to improve their social and political effectiveness. As Paul stood down from youth movement leadership, he was newly nourished by his place in the FPSI, as co-editor of its journal, *Plan*.⁷¹ In *Angry Young Man*, he regrets that 'the intellectual curiosities of the Folk were slender'; he gladly found 'a level of serious debate' in FPSI. To his frustration, however, he found debating to be more forthcoming than doing. He notes, bitterly, 'Left intellectuals did not, I soon discovered, know how to act.'⁷² Paul also notes contradictions in the demands of the organisation; on the one hand they argued for tight controls on certain areas of practice, from unregulated economics

to town planning. On the other, they demanded complete inhibition in sexual matters. Freedom in one area was anathema in another.

In 1939, Paul camped at Liège in Belgium with 1,000 Woodcraft Folk. From his 1951 perspective, the members were ‘at the height of their power and success’ just before the conflict, but the war would fundamentally shift Paul’s relationship with the organisation.⁷³ By 1941 he was in uniform. ‘One could not be a pacifist’, he argues, ‘if one longed with all the ardour of one’s soul for the defeat of National Socialist Germany.’⁷⁴ Paul muses on the irony of having a rifle in his hand after 20 years of campaigning for peace, and notes that his left-wing friends viewed him with pity and reproach.⁷⁵ Consequently, he claims to have been deposed with ‘indecent haste’ from the Woodcraft Folk.⁷⁶ Despite his rhetorical flourish, the actuality was more complex, and Paul continued to correspond with and input into the organisation even after he signed his military papers.⁷⁷

Like many once-enthusiastic interwar pacifists and intellectual fellow travellers of communism, Paul reassessed his politics during the conflict.⁷⁸ With only broken promises and missed opportunities in his hands, but with the loneliness and soul-searching of his war years to focus his vision, Paul stepped away from left-wing politics into a search for something ‘larger than life’.⁷⁹ Paul broke with the communities that formed him, and the person he became in mid-life – the person he felt he had returned to, as his authentic self – was, as a Christian soldier, much more conventional than the politicised young pagan poet of the interwar years. The angry young man calmed down. In losing his political community, he found individual contentment. In losing his pacifism, he found peace.

Individuals, organisations, generations: closing reflections on Paul and other progressives

I have lingered at length over Paul’s biographical writings – as formally scripted, and as read between the lines of his Woodcraft Folk publications and wider works – because they encapsulate his complexities. Although mostly now neglected as a writer, at his best, Paul can be as powerful as George Orwell and as versatile in his voice, moving across journalism, literary criticism, social commentary and novels; he is also as politically contradictory. In his interwar interests, however, he was among those that Orwell cursed, meeting many of the charges levied at the ‘cranks’ Orwell blamed in 1937 for giving the left a bad name: ‘the fruit-juice drinker, nudist, sandal-wearer, sex-maniac, Quaker, “Nature

Cure” quack, pacifist’.⁸⁰ Despite his past pleasures in food reform, naturism, ritual campfire dance, alternative curricula, sex education and anti-war campaigning, by 1950 Paul was creating similar dismissive lists of his own. In his case, he summarised where European youth movements had gone wrong, complaining that they ‘dissipated into hundreds of enterprises and leagues, and into every sort of crankiness – vegetarianism, sunbathing, the cult of nakedness, spiritualism, natural ballet, rhythmical exercises, new forms of medicine, craft leagues ... progressive schools’, and more.⁸¹

In the Woodcraft Folk, Paul had devised a programme from the earliest days that drew on precisely these interests, as had Kibbo Kift before it. The approach was total, incorporating diet and dress alongside political ideology and creative imagination as a utopian vision for the transformation of the whole person as an individual as well as the social body. A similar totality to Kibbo Kift’s covenant and the Woodcraft Folk’s charter was encapsulated in FPSI’s manifesto, which aimed to unite diverse single-issue pressure groups. As Joad put it in 1934, London was ‘honeycombed with societies for the abolition of this and the propagation of that’.⁸² FPSI aimed for a constellation of interests that held in its orbit art, science, philosophy and society. Sex and love were, crucially, as important as education and economics. Its holism appealed to Paul and others; its eclecticism, however, played a part in its downfall; its ambitions went beyond what could be achieved by a group of around 500 members pulled in a range of different directions. The centre did not hold. As Paul put it, in his personal take on his own loss of faith, his interests were a ‘jigsaw of parts which crumbled as I picked them up’. By 1951, he reduced them to ‘self-righteous’ -isms: ‘materialism, atheism, anti-clericalism, vegetarianism, free-sexism, pacifism, communism, syndicalism, socialism’.⁸³

These elements, however, comprised precisely what it meant to be progressive in interwar Britain. In the interwar years, ‘progressive’ was commonly used colloquially as an oppositional term to ‘conservative’ or ‘reactionary’, thus broadly signalling a political position on the left.⁸⁴ The term was also regularly used in the period as a synonym for ‘advanced’ thinking; here it encompassed experiments in eating, living, loving and dressing as well as the more popular application to education, where its breadth signalled a range of different approaches including experimental, even utopian, methods of child governance.⁸⁵ Paul not only held these beliefs personally but harnessed the early Woodcraft Folk to them all. In his writings, always at least partly autobiographical, he used these theories to make sense of the world; by mid-century he dismissed them as fallacies.

Paul's life writing, however, was always more ambitious than the telling of his story alone; he also attempted, at times explicitly, to speak for a generation. His works communicate what the literary critic Raymond Williams would call 'a structure of feeling', that is, 'a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities, which gives the sense of a generation or a period'.⁸⁶ Williams' phrase was a deliberately contradictory union of that which was personally experienced and the wider sociocultural phenomenon of history crystallised into a moment. Paul was part of what Joad called 'the bewildered generation', those who came of age after the First World War and who rejected the old order; in his twenties, he aimed to speak for youth.⁸⁷ In *The Annihilation of Man*, Paul spoke, mid-war, for former pacifists who served.

Over 30 years, Paul moved from being a youth leader to a leader of youth and, later, to an advisor on youth policy. At the end of the 1950s, he contributed to the Abermarle Report on youth services, commissioned by the Ministry for Education at a time of rising anxiety about the expansion of teenagers resulting from a post-war birthrate boom and the perceived rise of working-class delinquency. As one of several contributors – including the sociologist Pearl Jephcott and the cultural studies pioneer Richard Hoggart – it is not possible to read the text solely as Paul's philosophy.⁸⁸ Nonetheless, in its promotion of self-determination as a key part of motivating young people and in its promotion of the 'special value' of being 'a member of a group, living side by side for a period in camp', we might capture some of Paul's influence.⁸⁹ It is notable, however, that the Woodcraft Folk were not among the many youth groups and services consulted with and credited in the report.

By the mid-1960s, Paul reflected on the spiritual vacuousness of the generation of Angry Young Men to whom his biography inadvertently gave a name, even as he bristled at the 'temerity' of those who seek to encapsulate social movements and literary scenes while they are still in progress.⁹⁰ In his 1965 essay, 'The Angry Young Men Revisited', Paul also reflects on the nature of autobiography. He considers it 'obligatory' that 'the writer who wishes to remain creative must move from a fixation with private traumas into the exploration of the whole human condition which his own past is brought'.⁹¹ He characterises this move as a sign of maturity. He also notes, for both his past self and the writers that he analyses: 'No one stays young or angry forever.'⁹²

Life writing comes with methodological challenges in its use as a historical source, and Paul's work exemplifies some of these issues. His literary flourishes, used for dramatic narrative effect, demonstrably

obscure the detailed actuality of the circumstances; they foreground feeling over fact. Paul is necessarily the hero of each of his personal pieces and he sometimes claims centrality for himself, including in very literal ways, in activities that were shared (as figurehead of the Kibbo Kift split; as founder of the Woodcraft Folk; as editor of the FPSI journal).⁹³ In writing histories of organisations, too, the confident person who writes prodigiously, with elegance, style and authority, will command more power and attention than those who undertake organisational labour but do not hold the pen or have the ear of publishers. ‘Head Men’, to use the early term for Woodcraft Folk leaders, may consequently be listened to more closely than, say, the body of women who may run youth groups or do core work as organisational secretaries. Other sources can tell other stories.⁹⁴

A further irony remains. For all Paul’s efforts to insert himself into history by repeatedly revising his past and attempting to speak on behalf of an era, his writings from the first half of the twentieth century are little read today. He did not make the annals of *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in Britain in the 1930s*, for example, assembled by Samuel Hynes in 1976.⁹⁵ He was, by then, aligned to another canon and better known as an Anglican philosopher.⁹⁶ In the run-up to 1975, the Woodcraft Folk’s fiftieth birthday, Paul had been distanced from the organisation for some time. Olive Brown, then a Woodcraft Folk group leader, recalls that his name was never mentioned in the post-war groups she attended as a child. When, in the early 1970s, she located Paul through his publications, he complained that no one from the Woodcraft Folk had contacted him in many years; Brown brokered the reintroduction that led to Paul giving the jubilee speech.⁹⁷ At the Woodcraft Folk’s sixtieth birthday, in 1985, aged 80, Paul addressed Woodcraft Folk members at City Hall. Three months before his death, he saluted the organisation he didn’t think would outlast the ideologies of the era; he credited it for persisting ‘triumphantly’.⁹⁸ The organisation Paul once renounced outlived him and outgrew him. At its centenary, the Woodcraft Folk has proved more steadfast than its first leader, who lurched in and out of causes and beliefs.

Notes

1. Sydney H. W. Shaw is credited by Paul as co-founder in some accounts of the Woodcraft Folk’s origins, but many other summaries do not include Shaw’s name. In the woodcraft tradition, members chose aliases from nature and mythology; Shaw went by the woodcraft name of Woodpecker (Paul’s was Little Otter).
2. The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift was a camping, hiking and campaigning group founded in 1920 by artist, author and former Boy Scout Commissioner for Woodcraft and Camping John

- Hargrave, as a co-educational all-ages pacifist alternative to the Scouts. Leslie Paul joined in 1922. The 1924 three-page motion, 'That the administration of Kibbo Kift in recent months has been profoundly unsatisfactory', with 32 signatories including Paul, can be found in the London School of Economics Youth Movement Archive (Kibbo Kift papers) at YMA/KK/2. A full history is provided in Annabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books, 2015).
3. In his 1951 autobiography, Paul says the Boy Scouts had his 'affection and loyalty for eight or nine years'. Leslie Paul, *Angry Young Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 29.
 4. Separate from this account, Olive J. Brown's *Who Was Leslie Paul?* (self-published, 2007) provides a book-length study of Paul's life and literary works. Brown's aim is to 'resurrect' him as a forgotten figure whose cultural contributions were 'purely positive' (pp. 7, 149).
 5. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 110.
 6. The concept of 'structure of feeling' was developed by literary critic Raymond Williams. It first appeared in Raymond Williams and Michael Orrom, *Preface to Film* (London: Film Drama, 1954) and was developed over several of Williams' subsequent works.
 7. Paul produced four iterations of autobiography where he documented his family background and early youth movement times. The phrase 'poor kid' is from Leslie Paul, *First Love: A Journey* (London: SPCK, 1977), 33.
 8. The word 'race' in Paul's pamphlet shows his debt to eugenic theory. For the Woodcraft Folk and eugenics, see Rich Palser, *Education for Social Change: The Politics and Pedagogy of the Woodcraft Folk in the Interwar Years* (London: Amazon, 2020). All woodcraft groups were informed by now-discredited educational theories of 'recapitulation' as a system of child development that involved primitivist play. Their language was racially inflected with references to non-European, non-white cultures using terms such as 'savage', 'tribal' and 'primitive', especially terms drawn from literary interpretations of 'American Indians'. These were influenced by the naturalist and illustrator Ernest Thompson Seton, who founded the boys' organisation Woodcraft Indians in the USA at the start of the twentieth century. For Seton, see Brian Morris, 'Ernest Thompson Seton and the Origins of the Woodcraft Movement', *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 2 (1970): 183–94. For Native Americans as a cultural imaginary, see Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) and Shari M. Huhndorf, *Going Native: Indians in the American Cultural Imagination* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001).
 9. Leslie Paul, *The Child and the Race: An Educational Programme for Use in Woodcraft Fellowships and Other Co-operative Youth Movements* (London: Education Committee of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1926), 4.
 10. For further discussion of Paul's distinctive approach to a socialist youth movement, including its limitations and its differences from other socialist youth movements of the period, see Will Searby's [Chapter 3](#), this volume.
 11. Paul, *The Child and the Race*, 10.
 12. Leslie Paul, 'Evolution and Woodcraft', in *The Folk Trail: An Outline of the Philosophies and Activities of Woodcraft Fellowships* (London: Noel Douglas, 1929), unpaginated extract accessed at the London School of Economics Youth Movement Archive (Woodcraft Folk papers) [YMA/WF/357]. (The YMA/WF papers were relocated to the archive at the Institute of Education (IOE), University College London (UCL) in 2018, and recatalogued.)
 13. Kibbo Kift's internationalist and anti-imperialist concepts of world patriotism, world citizenship and allegiance to a world map (rather than the Union Jack) are outlined in Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift*. They were indebted to H. G. Wells' ambitions for a united world state and to his ideals about teaching world history. See H. G. Wells, *The Outline of History* (New York: Garden City Publishing, 1920).
 14. Extracts from Leslie Paul's interview with H. G. Wells, *The Herald*, 17 October 1930, 2–3.
 15. Paul, *The Folk Trail*, unpaginated extract.
 16. Paul, *The Folk Trail*, unpaginated extract.
 17. Leslie Paul, *The Green Company: Pow-Wows on Pioneering for Boys and Girls* (London: C. W. Daniel, 1931).
 18. Leslie Paul, *Co-operation in the U.S.S.R.: A Study of the Consumers' Movement* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1934).
 19. Leslie Paul, 'The Last Ten Years – and the Next: By the Headman', in *The Woodcraft Folk Year Book*, 1934, unpaginated. Originally accessed at Folk House, Woodcraft Folk's headquarters, 2016; now part of the Woodcraft Folk Archive, IOE, UCL (catalogue number unknown).

20. An annotated bibliography of Paul's publications, assembled with Paul's input, was compiled by Selwyn Goodacre in 1985. <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/annotated-handlist-of-the-published-books-of-dr-leslie-paul/> (accessed 27 January 2024).
21. Leslie Paul, *The Training of Pioneers: The Educational Programme of the Woodcraft Folk* (London: E. Jones, 1936), 3.
22. Although those proposing pedagogical alternatives imagined mainstream education as the enemy, embodying British imperialism and Christian indoctrination, the English primary school curriculum in the interwar period, as outlined in the Hadow Report of 1931, in fact provided some elements of history teaching and nature study that aligned with Paul's educational priorities. Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on the Primary School* (HMSO, 1931).
23. Paul, *Training of Pioneers*, 7.
24. Paul, *Training of Pioneers*, 12.
25. Leslie Paul, *The Republic of Children: A Handbook for Teachers of Working-Class Children* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1938), 34.
26. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 50.
27. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 74–75.
28. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 98.
29. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 99.
30. Leslie Paul, *The Living Hedge* (London: Faber & Faber, 1946).
31. Gordon S. M. Ellis and Joseph Reeves were socialist members of Kibbo Kift, who were conscientious objectors in the First World War. Palser examines their contributions to Paul's thinking in *Education for Social Change*, 52–59.
32. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 199; Paul, *First Love*, 3.
33. Leslie Paul, *Heron Lake: A Norfolk Year* (London: Batchworth Press, 1946), 8.
34. Paul later described the lecture topics as 'social and military subjects' in *First Love*, 22.
35. Paul, *Heron Lake*, 196.
36. Leslie Paul, *The Annihilation of Man: A Study of the Crisis in the West* (London: Faber & Faber, 1944), 5 (emphasis in original).
37. Paul, *Annihilation*, 5.
38. Paul, *Annihilation*, 21.
39. Paul, *Annihilation*, 21.
40. Paul, *Annihilation*, 22.
41. Paul, *Annihilation*, 23.
42. Paul, *Annihilation*, 90.
43. Paul's changing position on the German youth movement is given in Mike Tyldesley, 'The German Youth Movement and National Socialism: Some Views from Britain', *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 21–34. Paul's perspective changes from seeing members as inspirational colleagues to victims of Nazi appropriation, and finally as seedbeds of Nazism.
44. Paul, *Annihilation*, 105.
45. Paul, *Annihilation*, 106.
46. Paul, *Annihilation*, 105.
47. Paul, *Annihilation*, 105.
48. Paul, *Annihilation*, 154.
49. Paul, *Annihilation*, 162.
50. Paul, *Annihilation*, 162.
51. Paul, *Annihilation*, 171.
52. Paul, *Annihilation*, 187.
53. Paul, *Annihilation*, 188.
54. Leslie Paul, *The Meaning of Human Existence* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), flyleaf.
55. Paul, *Human Existence*, 7.
56. Paul, *Human Existence*, 147.
57. Leslie Paul, *The Age of Terror* (London: Faber & Faber, 1950), 16.
58. Paul, *Terror*, 123–24.
59. Paul, *Terror*, 145.
60. Paul, *Terror*, 237.
61. Paul, *Terror*, 194.
62. Paul, *Terror*, 248.

63. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 121.
64. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 17, 111, 64.
65. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 71–72.
66. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 206.
67. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 204.
68. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 131.
69. The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals (FPSI) was founded in 1932, partly in response to the crushing Labour election defeat of 1931. FPSI became the Progressive League in 1940 and continued to 2005. Its early interests, from psychology to rural preservation, are seen in C. E. M. Joad, ed., *Manifesto: Being the Book of The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934). Interpretations can be found in R. A. Wilford, ‘The Federation of Progressive Societies and Individuals’, *Journal of Contemporary History* 11, no. 1 (1976): 49–82; Lesley A. Hall, ‘“A City That We Shall Never Find”? The Search for a Community of Fellow Progressive Spirits in the UK Between the Wars’, *Family & Community History* 18, no. 1 (2015): 24–36; Janet Shepherd, ‘Voices in the Wilderness? The Progressive League and the Quest for Sexual Reform in British Politics, 1932–59’, in *Labour and Working-Class Lives: Essays to Celebrate the Life and Work of Chris Wrigley*, ed. Keith Laybourn and John Shepherd, 133–52 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2017).
70. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 239.
71. In several accounts, Paul lists himself as *Plan*’s editor, but he was co-editor with architect J. W. M. Dudding until June 1938, when both resigned. FPSI archives are held in the London School of Economics Library: GB 97 Progressive League.
72. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 241.
73. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 257.
74. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 284.
75. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 273–75.
76. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 274.
77. Paul maintained contact with the Woodcraft Folk until 1941, including after he signed up. He helped maintain unity in the early war years when the organisation was torn about its official position, with its adult members including both conscientious objectors and servicemen. Although Paul had attempted to steer the organisation to a pacifist stance in the early 1930s, by 1939 he supported the Woodcraft Folk to take a neutral war position on the grounds that it was a children’s organisation. At the same time, the Woodcraft Folk ‘refused to associate itself with the war machine, or lend support of any kind, moral or material, to the prosecution of the war’. Little Otter [Leslie Paul], ‘The Woodcraft Folk in War Time’, *Helper* 4, no. 6 (1939), YMA/WF/333.
78. See accounts in Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980) and Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2000).
79. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 302.
80. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1937), 173–74.
81. Paul, *Terror*, 235.
82. C. E. M. Joad, ‘The FPSI: What It Is; What It Wants; And How It Hopes to Obtain It’, in Joad, *Manifesto*, 32.
83. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 295.
84. Emily Robinson maps the term’s history in Britain in ‘Defining Progressive Politics: Municipal Socialism and Anti-Socialism in Contestation, 1889–1939’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 76, no. 4 (2015): 609–31.
85. Tisdall examines how the terms ‘progressive’ and ‘child-centred’ have been used to describe very different curricula. She distinguishes ‘utopian’ progressives (informed by psychoanalysis, promoting self-governance) from ‘non-utopian’ progressives (child-centred but adult-led). The Woodcraft Folk in its early days was ‘utopian’ in this schema. Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 1–5. For other histories of ‘progressive’ schooling, see R. J. W. Selleck, *English Primary Education and the Progressives 1914–1939* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972); W. A. C. Stewart, *The Educational Innovators*, 2 vols, II: *Progressive Schools 1881–1967* (London: Macmillan, 1968).
86. Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 131.
87. C. E. M. Joad, review of *World Without Faith* in *The Fortnightly Review* 138 (July–December 1935), 251–52 quoted in Overy, *The Morbid Age*, 13.

88. Ministry of Education, *The Youth Service in England and Wales: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Minister of Education, November 1958* (London: HMSO, 1960). This document is widely referred to as the Abermarle Report; Paul and Hoggart drafted the main content of the report. Mark K. Smith and Michele Erina Doyle, 'The Abermarle Report and the Development of Youth Work in England and Wales', *The Encyclopedia of Pedagogy and Informal Education* (2002), <https://infed.org/mobi/the-albemarle-report-and-the-development-of-youth-work-in-england-and-wales/> (accessed 27 January 2024).
89. Ministry of Education, *The Youth Service in England and Wales*, paragraph 191.
90. Leslie Paul, 'The Angry Young Men Revisited', *The Kenyon Review* 27, no. 2 (1965): 344–52, 350.
91. Paul, 'Angry Young Men Revisited', 350.
92. Paul, 'Angry Young Men Revisited', 344.
93. Literature on life writing methodology is extensive; sources include Margaretta Jolly's magisterial edited work, *Encyclopedia of Life Writing: Autobiographical and Biographical Forms* (London: Routledge, 2001) and G. Thomas Couser's pithy *Memoir: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
94. For alternative perspectives on the early days of the Woodcraft Folk, authored by other members, see the periodicals *Helper* and the *Herald of the Folk*, as well as logbooks by local groups held in the Woodcraft Folk Archives at IOE, UCL.
95. Samuel Hynes, *The Auden Generation: Literature and Politics in England in the 1930s* (London: Bodley Head, 1976). Paul did not make the literary pantheon but featured as an exemplar of interwar didacticism in Jonathan Rose, *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Classes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 453–55.
96. Paul's obituary mentioned his Woodcraft Folk contributions as a side note with his literary career; his publications on reforming the Church of England were perceived to be his principal achievements. 'Obituary: Dr Leslie Paul', *The Times*, 12 July 1985.
97. Brown, *Who Was Leslie Paul?* 146–47.
98. A recording of Leslie Paul's speech at the sixtieth anniversary event at City Hall can be viewed on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=VJv3nU145UI (accessed 26 January 2024).

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3

All those who are young in spirit

Will Searby

Grow old? What sense!
How can old age o’ertake a camper,
Lithe and strong?
Who says a camping man grows old is wrong.
Grow young – there’s sense in that
You townsfolk old,
Come out the birds and bees among
And then you’ll find – without a doubt –
You will grow young.¹

The early Woodcraft Folk, from its foundation in 1925, was animated by a curious, almost messianic concept of ‘youth’. This framing of youth as the cipher for a revolutionary subjectivity – symbolising both a rejection of capitalist modernity and an embrace of a simpler, more ‘natural’ existence – provided the early Woodcraft Folk with a mobilising ideology which helped to explain both the meaning of the organisation’s practical day-to-day activity and a theory of how the movement would achieve social change. Simultaneously, what I will call the ‘youth ideology’ of the Woodcraft Folk was central to bringing together the different political strands which made up the early organisation, acting as a glue to bind together socialists, educationalists and pacifists in a precarious unity. Reflecting later, however, Leslie Paul, one of the central founding members,² would state that the Woodcraft Folk ‘had less and less to offer with each decade, and understood less and less of what it rejected’.³ Just as this youth ideology helped to express something of the unique appeal of the Woodcraft Folk, it also served to isolate the organisation from the forces of the left with which many members sought to align, and involved an internal logic often contradictory to the socialist politics many in the Woodcraft Folk sought to evangelise.

As a youth movement, the Woodcraft Folk is pre-dated by the Scouts (1907), the Girl Guides (1910) and its precursor organisation, the Kibbo Kift Kindred (1920), to name just a few in Britain alone. In the early twentieth century, the development of youth movements was subject to extensive debate in the fields of child psychology, alternative pedagogy and politics. However, there has since been scant analysis of the ideological and political meanings of 'youth' and the role that it played in left-wing movements like the Woodcraft Folk. Paul and the other early leaders had founded the Woodcraft Folk as an expression of their own youthful revolt against the undemocratic adult leadership of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, a fact which was to have a significant impact both on the conception of left-wing democratic politics and the conception of youth leadership which shaped the early Woodcraft Folk. Paul later recounted that at the founding meeting of the Woodcraft Folk, 'there wasn't one of us ... who was over 21'.⁴

This is one of the key factors which distinguished the Woodcraft Folk from similar movements like the Scouts which sought to organise young people on the basis of a programme developed by adults. It points to a further distinction between the Woodcraft Folk as a *youth movement* and the various youth 'wings' of political organisations, such as the Labour and Conservative parties, and the Communist Party. While the early Woodcraft Folk received the majority of its funding from the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, and many Woodcraft leaders spoke of the importance of instilling 'cooperative values' in the young,⁵ the Woodcraft Folk maintained a clear independence from its sponsors in its development, both in terms of its educational work and the day-to-day activities of its groups.

This aspect of being a youth-led movement, especially at its inception, is registered strongly in the early literature of the Woodcraft Folk. While Woodcraft leaders did recognise a distinction between adult and child members of the organisation, the age at which a Pioneer could sign the 'Charter of the Folk' and become a 'fully privileged member' was as young as 16.⁶ From the outset, in pamphlets such as *Who's for the Folk?* (1926), *Little Brother Wants to Know* (1926) and *The Child and the Race* (1926), Leslie Paul expounded a social philosophy within which youth was elided, with a rejection of 'town life' and with 'new and old forms of life independent of capitalism'.⁷ 'We are rebels', he wrote in *Who's for the Folk?*, 'and to this decadent civilisation we bring a new fire and a new energy'.⁸ Necessarily, for the first years of the Woodcraft Folk, the vast majority of the literature which lays out any form of programme or social philosophy comes from Leslie Paul. Although Paul wrote in 1926 that the Woodcraft Folk was not 'a "youth" movement in the narrow sense' since

it was open to adults and recognised a need for adult supervision and facilitation, he was clear that the movement was ‘an uprising or a stirring of all people who have a young mind and a sound body’.⁹ Youth represented, in Paul’s imagery, a powerful and essential ideological metaphor for the politics of the movement and the challenge that it posed to ‘decadent civilisation’. This metaphor can be seen represented evocatively in Figure 3.1 in an early image, from a 1927 Folk publication, of a lithe and



Figure 3.1 Cover art by ‘Tomahawk’. *Herald of the Folk*, vol. 1, no. 1, March 1927. CC BY-NC-ND 4.0. <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/herald-of-the-folk-no-1-vol-1-march/>.

supple youth in a harmonious communion with the natural environment through the symbols of ‘woodcraft’.

There are a variety of sources of influence for this conception of youth. One such important influence on Paul was the German Wandervögel.

An article in the 1930 edition of the *Herald of the Folk* described the Wandervögel as ‘a movement towards nature, away from the town and the machine, making use of hikes and camps to reach a simpler and more natural life than that of urban society’.¹⁰ Founded officially in 1901, the Wandervögel were a largely middle-class movement of German youth organised around hiking. Heavily inspired by a rejection of nineteenth-century German bourgeois values, the movement drew much of its symbolism from an idealised conception of Germanic ‘Teutonic’ culture and a romantic valorisation of medieval ‘wandering scholars’.¹¹ In 1913, the ‘Meisner Proclamation’ of the Wandervögel announced that:

Free German Youth, on their own initiative, under their own responsibility, and with deep sincerity, are determined to independently shape their own lives. For the sake of this inner freedom, they will take united action under any and all circumstances.¹²

Through such sentiments, the Wandervögel articulated a clear relationship between youth and folk culture, and a rejection of industrial modernity. Leslie Paul wrote of the Wandervögel that ‘we felt no doubt at all that we stood for the same things ... the same independence, the same love of the open air, the same eagerness to discuss everything under the sun’.¹³

Another key influence on Paul’s conception of youth was his interest in child psychology and the educational theories of writers such as G. Stanley Hall. Paul wrote in a 1926 memo to ‘Folk Council’, the elected leadership of the Woodcraft Folk, that the child ‘passes through several stages or “epochs” that bear close resemblance to phases in the upward struggle of the race’.¹⁴ The early literature that Paul contributed to the Woodcraft Folk is replete with evolutionist metaphors for youth and social change. The Woodcraft Folk charter, for instance, called upon members to make themselves aware of ‘the development of man in the slow march of Evolution that we may understand and revere the Great Spirit that urges all things to perfect themselves’.¹⁵ Through these theories, Paul and other early leaders in the Woodcraft Folk found a quasi-scientific theoretical justification for an association between youth and a rejection of industrial modernity, since the theory of ‘recapitulation’ naturalised an affinity between the young and the social organisation of

previous 'epochs', which represented 'an alternative to the confused and disorganised life of the cities'.¹⁶ For this reason, Paul was able to expound a view wherein an optimistic Darwinism blended with a creed of social emancipation in the identity of youth. Through its educational work, the Woodcraft Folk could be said to be harnessing the 'primal instincts of the child', facilitating a process which possessed the inevitability of natural evolution towards 'man's struggle for liberty'.¹⁷ To this end, the Woodcraft Folk sought to utilise 'woodcraft' educational practices to develop an entire alternative pedagogy and alternative culture to industrial modernity, incorporating costume, camping and even pseudonyms, or 'folk names' derived from nature.

Both of these influences informed a certain common sense in the conception of youth that Paul bestowed on the early Woodcraft Folk. However, it must also be noted that this common-sense association of youth and revolt was also typical of a broader sentiment in the immediate aftermath of the First World War. The young adults of the 1920s were the 'lost generation',¹⁸ 'disoriented, wandering, directionless'.¹⁹ John Hargrave, the founder of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, reflected this sentiment strongly in his book *The Great War Brings It Home* (1919), in which he declared the intention that the youth movements, out of the tragedy of a 'burnt' youth, must develop 'the children of the slain'. Hargrave's book argued: 'The Great War brings home that our great disorganised civilisation has failed.'²⁰ Mechanical slaughter imposed predominantly on the young acted as a vindication for many who warned of the ills of industrial modernity, and it helped to stimulate a pacifist reaction within the youth movements. The betrayal of the First World War helped to politicise youthful revolt; it added political content to what had previously been an abstract 'revolt' of the youth movement. John Hargrave's pacifism, expressed in *The Great War Brings It Home* and in his demand for a revised edition of *Scouting for Boys* with the militarist passages removed, occasioned the first political split within the British youth movement. This split determined that the Kibbo Kift Kindred already embodied a form of youth revolt that was implicitly politicised.

The second split, in 1924, which established the Woodcraft Folk, politicised this youth revolt still further and added additional content to the emancipatory creed of the 'youth movement'. While notionally a split over decentralisation and autonomy for local groups, as a democratic opposition to the autocratic leadership of John Hargrave, it also helped to cohere much of the 'left' of the Kibbo Kift around the Woodcraft Folk. Paul later recounted that 'the two wings of the movement were inspired by different social philosophies. And to become the leader of an

organization increasingly dominated by the aggressively minded socialists may have been the last thing Hargrave wanted.²¹ Concurrently, Paul and many other early Woodcraft leaders were becoming more involved in the upsurge of the post-war socialist movement, and both Leslie Paul and Basil Rawson, who went on to succeed Paul as 'Headman', were personally active in the labour movement during the 1926 General Strike.²² This convergence of Paul's personal politics with various other actors convinced of the need for a left-wing 'alternative' to the Scouting movement helped to stamp the socialist politics of the early Woodcraft Folk, and this in turn produced a more defined content for the exact form that the 'revolt' of the youth movement would take.

In this regard, socialism combined with the other previously stated influences to be presented as a quality essential to the very identity of youth. In the early pamphlets Paul supplemented the *negative* creed of youthful escapism redolent of the Wandervögel with a *positive* commitment to social transformation. 'After the ugliness and monotony of the smoky city we find new life among the green and growing things', he wrote in 1926, 'and this health, together with our understanding, enables us to fight tenaciously for the social betterment.'²³ Similarly, in the same year, Paul wrote in a pamphlet on the Woodcraft Folk educational programme: 'We are the revolution. With the health that is ours and with the intellect and physique that will be the heritage of those we train we are paving the way for that reorganization of the economic system which will mark the rebirth of the human race.'²⁴ The Woodcraft Folk sought 'to enlist the enthusiasm and energy of youth for the great task of our generation; the building out of our inequal and disorderly age a civilisation worthy of mankind'.²⁵

For many of its early leaders and adherents, the Woodcraft Folk's socialist politics represented a realisation of the ambitions of the youth movement far more truthfully than other youth organisations. Joseph Reeves, the educational secretary of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, stated in 1927 that 'the youth movement of the post-war period represents a widespread revolt against those standards of morality, religion, national, and international relations which proved themselves to be unreliable guides to human conduct'.²⁶ Similarly, Leslie Paul wrote in 1930 that:

'Woodcraft' ... is most decidedly a youth movement, taken in its broad aspect. But, with the exception of the Folk, every woodcraft movement has left the old order in possession of the field. The Folk alone denounce it and wish to destroy it ... Soon the cleavage will

become sharp: there will be two great educational organisations – the Scouts on the one hand, standing for Imperialism and the old order of life, and on the other – the Folk, the cultural advance guard of the new world that science offers us.²⁷

Likewise, Sydney Shaw, another founding member, derived the Woodcraft Folk's socialist politics directly from the other aspects of the youth movement, stating:

But with this reaction against town life was born the desire to work for and build a new social order, the desire to see everyone getting the best out of themselves and out of life. The young people in the movement ... believed it was possible to organise society so that everyone had his just share of the necessities and the pleasures of life.²⁸

Through this politicised interpretation of youth, Paul and other early Woodcraft leaders also presented the organisation as a challenge to the established socialist and labour movements. As opposed to what they viewed as the staid and mechanistic institutions of the left, 'so very dull',²⁹ the Woodcraft Folk brought 'a new fire and a new energy' to the transformation of society.³⁰ Viewed from the perspective of the vibrancy and vitality of camp life, the institutions of the left seemed all too much a part of the civilisation that the movement rejected. Leslie Paul wrote that 'we were ranged critically against the whole apparatus of contemporary society, condemning it all at heart, including the dreary working class movements with their endless committees and conferences meeting in dusty, smoke-laden halls, and lacking in excitement and grandeur'.³¹ Through a social philosophy which proposed youth as a metaphor for the rejection of capitalist modernity, the Woodcraft Folk simultaneously represented a *youth* intervention in the socialist and labour movements as well as a left-wing intervention in the youth movement.

This 'condemnation' of the established left was not, however, solely aesthetic or impressionistic; it also found expression in a critique of methods and practice, a strategic difference. As Paul wrote in *The Woodcraft Folk Year Boke* [sic] in 1928:

Some of us – the younger ones amongst whom I count myself – have fresh and biting memories of the failure of the industrial weapon during the general strike and of the gradual deterioration of the effectiveness of labour politics and we are brought to feel that a new revolutionary impulse must come from somewhere.³²

The Woodcraft Folk challenge to the left outside of the youth movement was not just that it was boring or uninteresting to young people, but rather that ‘any attempt to establish a new worldwide economic order is dependent upon the training of youth’.³³ Since ‘woodcraft’ activities were imagined to allow children and young people to commune with a more natural, less inhibited, state of existence, they were also imagined to contain the germ of a new society and to facilitate social forces through unleashing the innate capacities of youth which could help to transform society. As Basil Rawson put it in 1932, the Woodcraft Folk sought to organise the young who ‘despite all the repressions of their home and school life, still retain something of that instinctive urge to freedom which is usually stifled in the adult by the onslaughts of industrialism’.³⁴ This informed a strategic critique of the left outside of the youth movement on the basis that it had hit ‘the wrong trail’ because its institutions were ‘built on the wrong foundation of the capitalist mind in the child’.³⁵ Social change was stifled by the inhibitions placed on the young in capitalist society, and the solution was to ‘get our children outside the capitalist educational machine’.³⁶

However, while it was stated explicitly and frequently, the socialist politics of the Woodcraft Folk sat uneasily alongside elements of the youth ideology of the early movement. On the one hand, it was presented as an integral aspect of the identity of youth which the Woodcraft Folk sought to harness to transform society; on the other, it often seemed ‘tacked on’ and somewhat incongruous next to the romantic and folkish imagery of the ‘woodcraft’ emphasis on nature and healthy living. The charter of the Woodcraft Folk required members to declare their intention to develop physical health ‘for the service of the people’, before affirming the statement that ‘the welfare of the community can be assured only when the instruments of production are owned by the community ... when man shall turn his labour from private greed to social service ... and when Nations shall cease to suckle tribal enmities’.³⁷ Similarly, Leslie Paul wrote that ‘we must build a sure brain on the foundation of a virile body’ as a means towards achieving ‘a new social order’, based upon a ‘freedom from wage slavery’.³⁸ The means by which the disparate injunctions towards anti-capitalism and healthy living were combined in a unified programme was through an implicit, and occasionally explicit, association between capitalism and age and ill-health. Youth was revolutionary because modern industrial capitalism represented a sick and decrepit state of affairs. As Paul reflected later on: ‘Civilisation was about to die, and the future belonged only to us, the young, who were going to build a better one.’³⁹

This framing, which identified youth with a revolutionary renewal of society, and age with capitalism and industrialism, risked substituting a socialist analysis of capitalist society with an oversimplified dichotomy between renewal and decay. ‘There’s LIFE’, wrote Basil Rawson, ‘in the ripple of muscle and the swing of sun-tanned limbs on our hikes and at our camps. LIFE – which stuffy, ill-built cities and so-called civilised (?) homes cannot give.’⁴⁰ In this imaginary, as strikingly represented in the image in [Figure 3.2](#) taken from an early Folk publication, the organisation offered the possibility for the young to strike a new path, leaving the decaying and corrupting cities behind them for the wholesome and rejuvenating activities of hiking and camping.

This slippage at times facilitated a misidentification of Woodcraft’s antagonists, a contempt for ‘the slaves of mammon and convention’ rather than for the capitalist system.⁴¹ For instance, in *Little Brother Wants to Know*, it was declared that ‘a fellow can’t have a good brain unless he has a strong, supple body’, and therefore, ‘we haven’t much patience with fellows who are content to be weak and mollycoddled and who haven’t the grit to make themselves as healthy as young savages’.⁴² This had implications for the Woodcraft Folk’s approach to social change as well, since it was observed that ‘You can’t build an A1 Commonwealth from C3 people!’⁴³ Such declarations, which demonstrate a preoccupation with physical renewal as a corollary of social transformation, were undoubtedly also derived in part from Leslie Paul’s personal interest in evolution, but they also speak to questions of the construction of youth more broadly.

In adopting a framing wherein the identity of youth was associated with virility and bound up with the health of society overall, early attitudes in the Woodcraft Folk reflected wider aspects of the discourse on



Figure 3.2 ‘The Wideawake’. <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/herald-of-the-folk-no-1-vol-1-march/?page=6>

youth in British society. In the case of the Scouts, for instance, Baden-Powell expressed a fear that the British Empire, if it did not develop its youth 'physically and also morally', would go the way of the Roman Empire, whose people 'ceased to have any responsibility for themselves or their children, and consequently became a nation of unemployed wasters'.⁴⁴ Victorian social reformers, too, expressed concern for the vitality of youth in similar terms, as one pamphlet from 1878 put it:

We seem to forget that in taking care of the children we are giving physical stamina to future generations, instead of propagating a race of short, stunted, decrepit, pale sickly men and women, who become aged at 50. We are, by taking care of the children, imparting health, life, vigour and animation to our future generations – our future fathers and mothers.⁴⁵

In a similar vein, early Woodcraft Folk literature spoke of 'those children who would go under in the industrial struggle but for the health and knowledge we give them'.⁴⁶ In 1926, the *Herald of the Folk*, a publication for Woodcraft leaders (discontinued in 1931), carried two separate articles lamenting the state of Britain's young people in similar terms. Modern children, complained one article, were 'weak and ill-nourished, and have not the physical stamina necessary for their mental development'. The article went on to state that 'these weaklings fall an easy prey to epidemics'.⁴⁷ Similarly, another article in the same issue warned of 'the problem of national degeneracy and the Great Unfit'.⁴⁸ In both cases, the Woodcraft Folk offered a solution to such concerns: to 'live in the Woodcraft Way, and regain the Heritage of Health'.⁴⁹

The fact that the Woodcraft Folk employed themes so similar to mainstream and even right-wing understandings of youth in this way is a testament to the Woodcraft Folk's embeddedness within the context of the entire problematic of youth as it developed in nineteenth and early twentieth-century Europe and America. John Springhall, commenting on the development of youth movements, has noted that in the context of imperial decline, the notion of youth increasingly came to represent 'a "social problem" whose solution invariably became the provision of adult-supervised leisure pursuits'.⁵⁰ Indeed, understanding that youth has long represented a metaphor through which social anxieties about social discipline, disease and 'racial decline' are expressed is essential for understanding the role that the identity of 'youth' played within the early Woodcraft Folk. Despite the fact that early Woodcraft leaders declared themselves against 'civilisation', through the internal logic

of the metaphors of youth that they employed they routinely espoused political sentiments affirmed by the same society that they denounced.

Further to this, the understanding of youth employed by the Woodcraft Folk predetermined a particular approach to social change that stood in tension with much of the socialist politics that were nominally espoused. Beyond the frequent references in language to the 'Great Spirit' and the 'evolution of the Race', in presenting social emancipation in generational terms the logic of the ideology of youth in the early Woodcraft Folk was also bound up with a distinctly *evolutionist* strategic orientation to political transformation. 'The race needs beings that are prepared to stake their lives, that the evolving may go forward', wrote Paul, 'and the rot that is civilisation may be stayed.'⁵¹ In spite of describing themselves as 'rebels' and 'revolutionaries', an evolutionary, as opposed to revolutionary, theory of social change was at the heart of the Woodcraft Folk approach to organising the youth. Young people, trained by their experience in the Woodcraft Folk, were to flow 'like a stream of new blood into the body politic, working the change'.⁵² The social contribution of the Woodcraft Folk, in this understanding, was to be measured in generations; it was deferred to the future, situated not in the concrete antagonisms of the present but in activity to 'inculcate those habits of mind and habits of body necessary to bring man to devotion to world peace and a new world order'.⁵³ This evolutionist understanding of social change was also necessarily individualist, since the task of the organisation was the 'cultivation of a world outlook' in young people, based on 'mental and physical fitness'.⁵⁴ As the Woodcraft Folk sought to 'train' youth for the task of building a new world order, they sought to develop the personnel of a new society. As it was put in one article: 'everyone has the duty of self-development of mind and body as the first step in the onward march'.⁵⁵ Through this framing, social transformation could be displaced onto the commitment of young people to 'develop in [themselves], for the service of the people, mental and physical health'⁵⁶ – an individual effort at self-improvement rather than a collective struggle against oppression and exploitation.

For this reason, although the Woodcraft Folk attacked other 'woodcraft' youth movements as escapist, they themselves could not help but repeat the same weakness in their orientation towards social change due to the understanding of youth that they employed. On a generous reading, Woodcraft's orientation to youth informed a prefigurative practice of constructing a new Jerusalem of the 'Co-operative Commonwealth' on their camps, which played a role in preparing the ground for wider social transformation. In this sense, camps and other Woodcraft activities acted

as a positive example juxtaposed to industrial modernity through providing the space for the expression of the natural inclinations of youth, and in turn aided wider social change through the belief ‘that children brought up in the practice of co-operative activity will not depart from it’.⁵⁷ In reality, however, in seeking to organise youth *independently*, the Woodcraft Folk were not able to elaborate a concrete theory of how political pressure was to be brought to bear on society.

On this point, comparison with organisations which sought to organise young people within the ambit of a wider political programme is informative. The Communist Party of Great Britain, for instance, had maintained a youth movement in the form of the Young Communist League since 1921. An obvious point of comparison is the role played by both organisations in protesting ‘Empire Day’. When schools organised an annual celebration of the British Empire, the YCL instructed its members to attend in Communist uniform, and two boys were even caught attempting to remove the flag.⁵⁸ By contrast, the Woodcraft Folk organised ‘abstention of Pioneers from school’.⁵⁹ A letter to the *Daily Worker* in 1931 made clear that ‘this idea of “staying away” gives rise to false pacifist ideas and does not teach the children to fight their own battles’.⁶⁰ The Young Pioneers (YCL under-13s) adopted none of the utopian language of the Woodcraft Folk; instead of ‘sunburnt youths and maidens’,⁶¹ they were simply ‘working-class kids who understand that the only way to stop the bosses pinching all the good things of life (which are made by the workers and so should really belong to them) is by fighting them every inch of the way’.⁶² A comparison between the methods and rhetoric of the Woodcraft Folk and the Communist Youth reveals distinct differences in the conceptualisation of adolescence and political activity; in place of the escapist programme of Woodcraft, the YCL was grounded in direct political hostilities derived from the political analysis of the CPGB. The communist programme was distinctly more adversarial, with a special section at the 1928 YCL conference devoted to ‘The fight against the Scout Movement’, stating that its ‘disintegration’ should be the ‘permanent daily task of the League’.⁶³

Indeed, by the early 1930s the gap between the Woodcraft Folk’s youth politics and the movement’s socialist and anti-imperialist politics was becoming clear even to members of the organisation themselves. Already in 1931, it was becoming clear that the association between youth and socialist politics, previously treated as a given, was not something that could be taken for granted, as Leslie Paul wrote in the 1931 Year Book: ‘There is a generation – which is nearly 90% of our movement – which has no memories of the enthusiasm and idealism of

the workers before their defeat in 1926.⁶⁴ This realisation, that the politics which had previously been proposed as the inherent politics of youth may in fact be a product of the particular experiences of Paul's generation, had serious implications for the broader politics of the organisation and necessarily occasioned a change in emphasis from the youth-led tone of earlier pamphlets to a stronger educational focus. However, this was only a superficial aspect of the reckoning with the politics of the youth movement that Woodcraft Folk leaders were forced to undertake in the early 1930s. The rise of fascism in Germany prompted a period of profound disillusionment for Paul, since the Wandervögel seemed to have all but submitted to, even enthusiastically supported, Hitler's politics. In 1934, he wrote an article for *The Adelphi* which sought to grapple with this 'curious desertion by youth of the principles of the first Youth Movement'.⁶⁵ In this article Paul laid blame at the apolitical nature of the Wandervögel, concluding that 'escape is no longer possible'.⁶⁶ Youth, he concluded, 'cannot get outside the system, nor even pretend to, for other generations have yoked it to their burden'.⁶⁷

Although this reckoning resulted for Leslie Paul in the understanding that the youth movement must be organised on the basis of a conscious political programme of anti-fascism and anti-capitalism, it did not occasion a fundamental break with the politics of the youth movement. That is, it did not, for Paul, culminate in a complete rejection of the initial ambitions of the Meisner proclamation: that youth should organise 'to independently shape their lives', 'on their own initiative' and 'under their own responsibility'.⁶⁸ By the mid-1930s, however, partly due to the age of Paul and other founders, the Woodcraft Folk was in actuality less 'youth-led' than previously, and Paul saw the corrective to the faults he identified in the Wandervögel in the content of Woodcraft Folk education, rather than in revisions or re-evaluations of the organisation's political practice or organisation. Other members of the Woodcraft Folk, however, did draw conclusions which touched more fundamentally on questions of political organisation. In an article in the 1935 Year Book, subtitled 'A Controversial View', a contributor writing under the woodcraft name 'Kingfisher' wrote that an organisation must be built 'on a policy of socialism and political action, without the trimmings of work with children'.⁶⁹ This statement was made as part of a direct attack on the prefigurative, escapist identity of the Woodcraft Folk, since it was observed that 'We escape to our camp feeling that the workers struggle and politics are an unclean business, and console ourselves with the fact that in a few children we are inculcating socialist principles'.⁷⁰ Kingfisher's argument was that the Woodcraft Folk would inevitably remain an escapist movement

without affiliation to a wider political party and the politics of an organisation oriented to political, rather than educational, activity, since it would have no concrete relation to political action. While other members might remain convinced of the Woodcraft Folk's evolutionist strategy of training youth to be 'World Citizens', Kingfisher warned that 'it will not avail them to be nice little socialists under Fascism!'.⁷¹

The solution proposed by Kingfisher was for political affiliation to the Labour Party; other members proposed closer relations with the Independent Labour Party or the Communist Party.⁷² Ultimately, however, the Woodcraft Folk remained an independent youth educational organisation. The implicit warning of the likes of Kingfisher was that to do so would mean that the 'trimmings of work with children' would sideline any serious programme for political activity, and the organisation would remain 'in isolation, unconsciously perhaps, from the movements that the masses support'.⁷³ This view was vindicated starkly in 1936, when the Public Order Act prohibited political organisations from marching in uniform. Attendees of the 1937 annual delegate conference of the Woodcraft Folk were presented with either the possibility of withdrawing overtly political statements from the organisation's literature or abandoning its costume. Attendees expressed their general agreement with the first proposal, on the grounds that 'it was impossible for the movement to drop the costume as this would take away our distinguishing point and attraction for the children'. The motion in question stated that 'the Woodcraft Folk is an educational, not a political movement'.⁷⁴ Due to the Woodcraft Folk's investment in the ideology of youth, and its mode of operation as an independent youth movement, the 'trimmings of work with children' trumped politics.

In his *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Marx asserted: 'It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but ... their social existence determines their consciousness'.⁷⁵ Applying this to the Woodcraft Folk, we can see how many early members understood the role that the 'capitalist educational machine' played in shaping the social existence of young people, but also the degree to which they overestimated education, a change in 'consciousness', as a corrective. In *The Training of Pioneers* (1936) Leslie Paul remarked that the Woodcraft Folk programme 'aimed at usurping the school syllabus', to 'remake the child's education in its entirety' but 'we failed to see that we could do neither of these things without a radical change in society'.⁷⁶ This impasse, the chicken and egg relationship between education and social change, is the result of an absence of a strategy for political activity.

Despite aspirations of 'blazing the trail'⁷⁷ and building 'a rebel movement',⁷⁸ the Woodcraft Folk did not fulfil the ambitions of its early leaders in becoming a movement of political action. The youth ideology of the organisation facilitated a vagueness on the movement's politics and dictated a dynamic in which the educational objectives of the movement took precedence over the development of a political programme. In the absence of such a programme, the Woodcraft Folk sought to establish parallel forms of social organisation to the family and the school system, even incorporating families into the organisation in the form of 'Roof trees' (nuclear families who joined the Woodcraft Folk together). The youth ideology of the Woodcraft Folk was, implicitly, familial and educational, concerned with the 'propagation' of the seeds of a new society through the cultivation of a new generation. The idea of the family as a haven from capitalist alienation is a staple of mainstream liberal understandings of society, and this implicit understanding is what allowed early Woodcraft Folk leaders to imagine the world of youth counterposed to that of industrial modernity. But this distinction is a distinction *within* capitalist social relations, not *apart from* them.

The faith in the independence of youth from contemporary capitalist society was a cornerstone of the youth ideology of the Woodcraft Folk, but for all that members did not want to see it, this ideology was derived from the society that they rejected. The movement set out to organise as a movement formally independent of the other institutions of the working class, premised on an ideology which assumed that the young possessed their own interests and their own methods of action. However, unlike workers in capitalist production, young people do not, as a whole, stand in determinate relation to capitalist production with an independent means of political activity. The idea of a political revolt of youth that the Woodcraft Folk inherited from the Wandervögel and which informed its politics was from the outset founded on a misconception. Ironically, the Woodcraft Folk's commitment to organisational independence condemned it to ideological dependence on the society that the movement rejected. Although the emphasis on a revolt of youth, organising 'on their own initiative', was increasingly eclipsed by a focus on the Woodcraft Folk's educational work throughout the 1930s, it is important to recognise that both of these models, independent youth leadership and 'education for social change', are implicitly dependent to some degree on an assumed independence of the young from adult society.

Paul later reflected that the early Woodcraft Folk 'pursued an ideal of toughness which made us contemptuous of ease and respectability and involved us in a hatred of the weak, the sick and, above all, the

elderly',⁷⁹ but it is easy to relegate this to a superficial indictment solely of the Woodcraft Folk in this period. Even in retrospect, Woodcraft Folk leaders failed to recognise that the youth ideology of the early Woodcraft Folk was not a product of ideas or the eccentricities of Paul and his contemporaries. Instead, it was derived implicitly from the Woodcraft Folk's practice and organisation – from the organisational distance that it maintained from institutions of the wider left, and the influence that this provided by default to the ideologies of child education and the mainstream social construction of youth in capitalist society. The similarities between the sentiments expressed in the youth ideology of the early Woodcraft Folk, of racial decline and fetishised vitality, and those expressed by their antagonists, the likes of Baden-Powell, force us to consider whether the ambition of the Woodcraft Folk – to construct genuine 'alternatives' to the Scouts and the 'capitalist educational machine' – is possible at all. This raises questions that go well beyond the specific legacy of the Woodcraft Folk and has implications for a whole range of progressive politics, especially as they relate to youth 'counter-culture'.

Notes

1. Speedwell [Folk name], 'Age', *The Woodcraft Folk Year Boke*, 1928 [FH_013_01], 13.
2. Paul's exact role in the founding of the Woodcraft Folk has been subject to some retrospective distortion. For a more comprehensive account of Paul's contribution to the establishment of the Woodcraft Folk, and his subsequent narrativisations, see the [previous chapter](#).
3. Leslie Paul, *Angry Young Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 71.
4. Leslie Paul, speech to Woodcraft Folk History Workshop Conference, 1985, <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/the-early-years-of-woodcraft-folk-1925-1985-1/> (accessed 6 February 2024).
5. The Woodcraft Folk was recognised as the 'National' youth movement by the Co-operative Society in 1929; *Truth about Youth* [YMA/WF/037/21], 3.
6. Leslie Paul, *Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council*, 1926 [FH_002_04], 8.
7. Paul, *Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council*, 7.
8. Leslie Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 1926 [YMA/WF/004/08], 2.
9. Paul, *Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council*, 2–4.
10. 'The German Youth Movement', *Herald of the Folk*, October 1930 [FH_007_05], 9.
11. Robbert-Jan Adriaansen, *The Rhythm of Eternity: The German Youth Movement and the Experience of the Past, 1900–1933* (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 5.
12. Howard Becker, *German Youth: Bond or Free* (London: Routledge, 1946), 100.
13. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 152.
14. Paul, *Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council*, 5.
15. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 4.
16. Paul, *Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council*, 6.
17. Pamphlet, 1926, quoted in Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 63.
18. Ernest Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 1926), 4 (quotation from Gertrude Stein).
19. Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: The Bodley Head, 1990), 386.
20. John Hargrave, *The Great War Brings It Home* (London: Constable & Company Ltd, 1919), 51.
21. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 59–60. For a more detailed discussion of the complex politics of the Kibbo Kift Kindred, see Annabella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books, 2015).

22. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 84.
23. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
24. Quoted in Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 63.
25. *The Folk Year Book*, 1932 [FH_013_03], 2.
26. Joseph Reeves, 'The Co-operative Movement and the Woodcraft Folk', *Herald of the Folk*, March 1927 [FH_006_06], 5.
27. Paul, 'Mr Evans has followed his nose!', *Herald of the Folk*, July 1930 [FH_007_03], 6.
28. Sydney Shaw, 'The Spiritual Basis of the Woodcraft Folk', *Herald of the Folk*, August 1930 [FH_007_04], 3.
29. Leslie Paul, 'Ten Years of Child Educational Work', *Woodcraft Folk Year Book*, 1935 [FH_013_07], 5.
30. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
31. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 68–69.
32. Leslie Paul, 'Speech of Headman to Althing', in *The Woodcraft Folk Year Boke*, 1928 [FH_013_01], 8.
33. Leslie Paul, 'The Woodcraft Folk, a New Orientation to Co-operative Education', 1930 [YMA/WF/037/20], 4.
34. Basil Rawson, 'The Place of the Pioneer in the Green Company', in *Folk Year Book*, 1932 [FH_013_03], 10.
35. B. Birkett, 'Which Trail?', in *Folk Year Book*, 1931 [FH_013_03], 8.
36. Birkett, 'Which Trail?'.
37. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 4.
38. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
39. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 71.
40. Basil Rawson, 'Wideawake', *Herald of the Folk*, April 1930 [FH_007_01], 10.
41. Rawson, 'Wideawake'.
42. Leslie Paul, *Little Brother Wants to Know*, 1926 [FH_004_02], 2.
43. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
44. Robert Baden-Powell, *Scouting for Boys, Part VI* (London: Horace Cox, 1908), 4.
45. George Smith, *Our Canal Population* (London: Haughton and Co., 1878), 12.
46. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
47. 'Modern Children', *Herald of the Folk*, March 1927 [FH_006_06], 8.
48. 'Our National Schools', *Herald of the Folk*, 1926, 15–16, 10.
49. 'Modern Children', *Herald of the Folk*, 1927, 8.
50. John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977), 16.
51. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 2.
52. Basil Rawson, '1935 – Folk Year', *The Pioneer of the Folk*, vol. 11, no. 7, February 1935 [FH_009_01], 5.
53. Paul, 'A New Orientation to Co-operative Education', 4.
54. 'The Woodcraft Folk', *No More War*, 1928 [YMA/WF/076/26].
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56. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 4.
57. Paul, 'A New Orientation to Co-operative Education', 3.
58. Stephen Heathorn and David Greenspoon, 'Organising Youth for Partisan Politics in Britain, 1918–c.1932', *The Historian* 68 (2006): 89–119.
59. *Year Book of the Woodcraft Folk*, 1933 [FH_013_05], 23.
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61. Paul, *Who's for the Folk?*, 3.
62. Heathorn and Greenspoon, *Organising Youth for Partisan Politics in Britain*, 105.
63. Report of the 5th National Congress of the YCL (1928), cp_ycl_001_02, quoted in Mary Davis, *Fashioning a New World* (Loughborough: Holyoake Books, 2000), 60.
64. Leslie Paul, 'Where Is Britain Going?', in *The Folk Year Book*, 1932 [FH_013_03], 6.
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66. Paul, 'Decline of the Youth Movement', 321.
67. Paul, 'Decline of the Youth Movement', 321.
68. Becker, *German Youth: Bond or Free*, 100.
69. Kingfisher [Folk name], 'The Youth Movement', *Woodcraft Folk Year Book*, 1935 [FH_013_07], 13.
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72. *Minutes of Kin Council* (30 August 1936) [YMA/WF/064/31].
73. Kingfisher, 'The Youth Movement', 12.
74. *Minutes of National Folk Council* (30 January 1937) [FH_003_12].
75. Karl Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1977), 12.
76. Paul, *The Training of Pioneers*, 7.
77. Birkett, 'Which Trail?', 8.
78. Leslie Paul, 'Speech of the Headman to Althing', in *The Woodcraft Folk Year Boke*, 1928 [FH_013_01], 8.
79. Paul, *Angry Young Man*, 64.

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Online is the Woodcraft Folk Heritage Site, with designated file numbers starting with FH.

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4

Socialism, eugenics and the Woodcraft Folk in the interwar years

Richard Palser

This chapter argues that, in its early years, the Woodcraft Folk had an approach to social change which combined a socialist goal with a eugenic strategy for achieving it. This approach was first elaborated by Leslie Paul in late 1924 and early 1925, just six months after the Co-operative-aligned groups had split from Kibbo Kift and formed a loose federation called the 'Fellowship Movement'. It provided the framework for the formation of the Woodcraft Folk in December 1925. It was codified as an educational theory and practice in the organisation's first publication in 1926, and a further expanded version appeared in 1929. At the end of 1936 it modified its educational programme in a manner which implicitly jettisoned the eugenically framed educational practice upon which it was founded, though the theorisation behind this was not formally repudiated until 1938.¹

The first historian to point out this linking of a eugenic method to a socialist goal was John Attfield in his book on the history of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society.² This chapter aims to build on his work, and starts by identifying, in much the same manner as Attfield, exactly how the Woodcraft Folk saw its socialist goals being furthered by eugenic methods. However, it will go on to argue that while they began to abandon this approach in 1936 as Attfield has suggested, his explanations as to why and how they came to do so seem less plausible. It will therefore offer an alternative explanation of how and why this change took place.³

Combining socialism and eugenics

In a very explicit, and in today's terms quite shocking, article Paul compared the relationship between eugenics and socialism to that between the seed and the soil. The eugenicist seeks to perfect the race (the seed), while the socialist aims to change the environment (the soil). Only by paying attention to both can you get a good crop. In recognising this, he claimed, the Fellowship movement was the only one in which the philosophies of eugenics and socialism combined. This was important because the seed was then degenerating in quality precisely because of the environment of modern urban life in a capitalist society. So the problem was how to improve the seed because as Paul saw it: 'We cannot see that it is any use reaching a co-operative commonwealth *if it is inhabited by a degenerating race*'.⁴

The solution lay in 'tribal training', or woodcraft. The theoretical justification offered for this, Stanley Hall's recapitulation theory, had already been explained by Paul in an earlier article thus:

From its birth a child epitomises the mental developments that have taken place in man since he evolved on earth. That is to say, the phases of child development correspond strongly to similar stages in the evolution of man. The child re-capitulates in his desires, his actions, and his thoughts, the struggles and questionings of early man ... The educational idea that has grown up around this is called 'recapitulation theory'.⁵

Hall's *Adolescence*, published in 1904, is widely attributed with having popularised, if not with having first coined, the term adolescence as 'the definitive term for the elongated hiatus between childhood and adulthood'.⁶ However, for Hall the significance of adolescence lay not simply in giving recognition to a specific stage of child development, but in being *the* optimal developmental moment at which to introduce, through unfettered recapitulation, new and more advanced characteristics than those inherited by the child, and indeed those yet developed by humanity – 'adolescence is ... the only point of departure for the superanthropoid that man is to become'.⁷

It seems unlikely that Paul was consciously responding to this aspect of Hall's theory. He later said he read *Adolescence* around the time of the break with Kibbo Kift but admitted that 'as a schoolboy I found it absolutely beyond me. But the general idea, just then I was accepting evolutionary philosophy, was easy to assimilate'.⁸ If recapitulation was



Figure 4.1 'The Fire Dance'. Leslie Paul's *The Folk Trail*, 1929. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/357.

not seen by Paul as a means of evolutionary *advance*, the tribal training that enabled recapitulation was certainly seen as a means of combating the degenerative effects of city life – something also advocated by Ernest Thompson Seton in *The Book of Woodcraft and Indian Lore*, another early influence on Paul.⁹ Paul incorporated many aspects of Seton's tribal training into the practice of the early Woodcraft, including 'savage dancing' as illustrated in [Figure 4.1](#).

In place of the attempts at detailed prescriptions on how to nurture the recapitulation process at each stage of child development offered by Hall, Paul painted a broader-brush picture of how the recapitulation process should inform the Folk's educational policy:

Although it may seem true that the child does pass through these processes, *we have no means of ascertaining their duration or their power*. The child may go through all the developments of the stone-age man in a few hours, or alternatively he or she may remain for years in the 'gang' (or tribal) stage ... So that, beyond recognition of the general principle, we cannot use this as a definite educational method for spare time training. Our use of the principle must be as follows: that by taking the children out of the city into the open, by letting them educate themselves in a natural environment, we

enable them instinctively to express the stage through which they are passing. Beyond that, the recapitulation is out of our hands.¹⁰

However, this does not yet fully explain why Paul saw the Fellowship movement as being the only one in which the philosophies of eugenics and socialism combined. After all, Paul was placing an emphasis on the outdoors environment as a means of countering the degenerative effects of urban life. Yet the eugenics movement emphasised the hereditary nature not only of physical and mental health but also character. However much eugenicists might accept that the environment (the soil) was also a factor shaping these, it was through selective breeding that the 'seed' could be improved. This could take the form of negative eugenics, limiting the breeding of the 'unfit', or positive eugenics, encouraging the breeding of the 'fit'. In Paul's case it was the latter.

We set a standard of mental and physical health, below which it is unlikely that any of us will marry (this standard, based on education, is, of course, the keynote of eugenics).¹¹

These ideas on recapitulation and eugenics came straight from John Hargrave and Kibbo Kift. Some historians have tended to present Hargrave's clashes with, and departure from, Baden-Powell's Scouts as being the result of conflict between an anti-war philosophy and an ultra-patriotic one, with Hargrave even being described as a left-wing idealist.¹² Yet in *The Great War Brings It Home*, what is 'brought home' by the war is less the immorality of mass slaughter or the inter-imperialist nature of the conflict, but far more its dysgenic effects – because it reduced the breeding stock of the fittest while leaving the unfit to breed. Even before the war, he argued, it was clear that under 'our system of civilisation', the race as a whole was becoming weak, both mentally and physically.¹³ A national scheme of woodcraft training was urgently needed if the degeneration of the race brought on by modern urban living was to be halted, and the basis laid for a process of positive eugenics that would see a further evolution of the race.

The instinct for health and strength in these men and women [those trained using woodcraft methods] will lead them to *select* partners for life from among those who have had much the same training; and the result of such a combination will naturally produce children of a finer mental and physical capacity than was otherwise possible ...

In this way “natural eugenics” will develop ... Instinct will lead them to select the finest in body and mind and thus in time a Blood-line or Caste of Hardihood will evolve.¹⁴

Woodcraft training was a means of countering the degenerative effects of modern urban life by enabling the child to recapitulate the stages of development of man, but though this could result in young men and women of great mental and physical fitness something more was needed. A ‘Blood-line or Caste of Hardihood’ had to be bred. However, this would happen instinctively and without the need for coercion. This eugenic goal was carried over into the Woodcraft Folk, and it was fundamental to its outlook for the first decade.

Thus, for example, in *The Folk Trail* (1929) Paul again returned to the dysgenic effects of modern urban life:

Degeneracy spreads until the race finds itself without the vitality to combat it. A sane eugenical mode of living, and a keener appreciation of the necessity for simple living, and hard thinking, are necessary preliminaries to any attempt to combat it, and even if any crusade against unfitness, on a national scale, is not possible it is urgent that the folk attempt to build *a new caste of supple bodied and vigorous minded people* who shall be worthy of the future.¹⁵

This ‘new caste of supple bodied and vigorous minded people’ was needed to bring about humanity’s evolution to socialism precisely because the labour movement was lacking in these qualities. For while the early Woodcrafters saw themselves as allied with the labour movement of that day – the trade unions, co-operative societies and the Labour Party – they also held themselves to be superior to it. During the general strike of May 1926 they had thrown themselves into assisting the strike committees and councils of action, but the defeat of the strike confirmed for them what they perceived as the inadequacy of the working-class movement. As Paul later explained, their response was that:

A new and better human material was needed: what could be done with the human wreckage which capitalism had left lying about. Parodying an aphorism of Lloyd George I said, and this became our slogan for a long time, ‘You can’t get A1 socialism from C3 people.’¹⁶

The A1 people needed for A1 socialism could only come from the young who had not yet succumbed to the degenerative effects of modern

city life. As discussed in the [previous chapter](#), the Woodcraft Folk in its early years was less an educational organisation for young people and more a movement of young people. It saw itself as 'the first youth movement, within Co-operative spheres, to give coherent and conscious expression to the ideals and philosophy of young people'.¹⁷ Consequently, when it came to making international contacts, the young leaders of the Folk looked not to the youth organisations of the workers' parties on the continent but towards the Wandervögel in Germany. They perceived the Wandervögel as an autonomous movement of youth rather than, as were the Scouts, a movement for young people run by adults. An article in the *Herald of the Folk*, the folk magazine, in 1930 looked back at the pre-war Wandervögel and quotes from the Manifesto of the Free German Youth of 1913, and commented:

This is not the romanticism of adolescence, but a fighting creed by which a new society was one day to rise like a phoenix from the ruins of the old. The Youth Movement was the nucleus of a new race and it was a fundamental honesty and an intimate association with nature upon which it was building.¹⁸

There was a contradiction here. On the one hand, the Woodcraft Folk was advancing a eugenic policy based on the inadequacy of the working class, viewing itself as the youthful embodiment of everything that the labour movement lacked. On the other hand, it was appealing to the labour movement, and the co-operative movement in particular, to provide the funding and the publicity whereby it could build itself. How was it possible to combine the two?

It is certainly the case that there existed widespread hostility within the working-class movement towards the mainstream eugenics movement which, in the years leading up to the First World War, made the class assumption that the 'fit' were to be found in the professional classes and the 'unfit' in the working classes. Many conservative eugenisists had opposed social reforms on the grounds they would encourage the breeding of the unfit and were thus dysgenic.¹⁹ There was also a small current within the working-class movement that had kept alive Owenite ideas which rejected inherited characteristics as the basis of the formation of character, which it attributed instead to education and the environment.²⁰

However, there was also support within the working-class movement for combining socialist and eugenic ideas. This was particularly the

case among intellectuals who associated themselves with the working-class movement, and who in the interwar years played a much greater role in the Labour Party. Although critical of the mainstream eugenics movement for under-estimating the role of the environment in shaping an individual's physical and mental character, they accepted that inheritance also played a role. While advocating reforms that could minimise the negative effects of the environment, they shared the eugenisists' fears of degeneracy and were prepared to countenance eugenic measures to discourage or prevent the breeding of 'degenerates'.²¹

The Woodcraft Folk shared this fear of 'degenerates', and its desire to breed 'a caste of supple bodied and vigorous minded people' dictated that they should be excluded from it.

Backward, mentally deficient and unfit children should not be enrolled in the group. They need special attention and organisation you cannot afford to give. Please note that for the health of the children who are "whole" they should never be included in a group no matter what personal plea. Experience shows that viciousness and sexual irresponsibility goes hand in hand with M.D [mental deficiency] and sometimes venereal disease as well. You cannot take too many precautions to protect children from association with people who are irresponsible or abnormal in any way.²²

Woodcraft's combination of eugenics and socialism actually meant it could emphasise either element of this depending on the audience it wished to reach. The educational practice of the Folk in its first decade could be seen from both a eugenic and a socialist perspective. Camping and hiking in the countryside, away from the degenerating influence of the town, provided an environment in which children could naturally recapitulate the instincts of the stages of man's evolution and grow healthy in mind and body; simultaneously, it could be seen as removing them from the commercialised culture of capitalism and the reactionary influences of church and school. Tribal training could unleash the 'gang life' that formed an essential part of the recapitulation process; yet at the same time it provided an experience of practical co-operation. Education in the evolution of the world and of humanity could render children more conscious of their future role in furthering the evolutionary process, yet it simultaneously prepared them for taking an informed and active part in the labour movement as adults.

Impact of the rise of fascism in Europe

John Attfield suggested that it was the rise of fascism in Germany that resulted in the Folk abandoning its attempts to combine socialism and eugenics, and this chapter builds on this explanation. However, his explanation as to how the one led to the other is oversimplified. The essence of his argument is that once Paul saw the way in which eugenics ‘in its degenerate form’ provided the theoretical underpinnings of Nazism, and he made the connection between this and the pro-Nazi attitudes of both Wandervögel and some Kibbo Kift youth leaders, he wrote a new educational programme (*The Training of Pioneers*) which broke completely with eugenics.²³

The difficulty with this explanation is that it focuses almost entirely on the political evolution of Leslie Paul. Although the Nazis began to implement eugenic policies early on after coming to power, there is no evidence in the Woodcraft archives of any discussion of these policies in the Woodcraft Folk nor, more importantly, any discussion on whether to abandon the ‘less degenerate’ Woodcraft Folk espousal of eugenics in the light of them. While the evolution of Paul’s views is clearly very relevant – he was the leading theoretician and author of Folk policy even after resigning as Headman in 1934 – on its own it cannot account for the organisation as a whole being willing to abandon, without discussion, how it theorised a practice established for nearly a decade. Nor does it adequately explain how the Woodcraft Folk, as an organisation that prided itself on its democracy, arrived at a new theorisation of its practice.

The rest of this chapter will attempt to offer a more nuanced account of how the rise of fascism provided the impetus for this change in approach.

As Attfield pointed out, the first impact of Hitler’s rise to power in Germany on the Folk was to force it to reconsider its relationship to the Wandervögel and instead look to international socialist contacts. Leslie Paul had first come into contact with the Red Falcons when visiting ‘Red Vienna’ in 1930,²⁴ and in August 1933 members of the Austrian Red Falcons attended the Woodcraft Folk ‘Mass Camp’.²⁵

As a consequence of these established links, the February 1934 bombardment of Vienna and the suppression of its social democratic government brought home to the Woodcraft Folk even more forcefully the nature of the threat represented by fascism.²⁶ Pointing to the suppression of working-class organisations in Germany, the *Herald of the Folk* had already warned the previous month that ‘It would be folly

to suppose that an English fascist movement would be humane and decent.²⁷ Now the Woodcraft Folk was receiving first-hand reports of the situation facing the Austrian Red Falcons from people it had shared camps with.²⁸

In response, the organisation mobilised its members, including its Pioneer members, in practical solidarity activity. *The Pioneer* of April 1934 carried an article on 'Why they need our help' and announced the starting of a fund for helping Red Falcons who were in need.²⁹ This appears to have formed part of an international solidarity effort by the Socialist Educational International – hundreds of children from Vienna were taken into the homes of SEI affiliates in Czechoslovakia and Switzerland, and financial help to do this also came from Poland and Norway as well as from the Woodcraft Folk.³⁰ Increasingly, the Woodcraft Folk looked to the SEI as its avenue for international collaboration.

The second impact of these events was to open up a debate within the Folk as to the extent to which, and how, it should be engaging in political activity. As early as November 1932 Leslie Paul had raised the idea of increasing political activity through the creation of a youth section, but it appears that his proposal was not well received.³¹ However, the 1933 Althing (annual conference) did agree to establish Hardihood groups for the 16 to 20 age range, with the immediate task of making propaganda promoting the Folk at peace meetings, labour meetings, conferences and demonstrations.³²

Following the defeat in Austria, Leslie Paul returned to the topic with renewed vigour. Arguing that 'the only worthwhile work today ... is anti-fascist work', he proposed the dropping of 'a good deal of the mystical, romantic Woodcraft we inherited from Kibbo Kift and have never been able to lose', such as totems and woodcraft names; a simplification of the costume; more intense propaganda work by Woodcraft youth; and the definite inclusion of anti-war and anti-fascist propaganda with pioneers.³³

The May 1934 Althing saw a majority in support of a resolution on fascism, but a substantial minority of over a third of delegates supported an alternative amendment. The debate seems to have revolved around Paul's proposals as expressed above, and opposition arguments included accusations that if the main motion was passed, the Folk would develop into an 'empty popular movement'; that by creating a Hardihood movement it would lead to the scrapping of educational work with children; that the organisation would lose the financial backing of the co-operative movement; and even that it would lead to militarism as the ultimate logic of Paul's position was to build up a military organisation.³⁴

Yet for those supporting the turn to building a youth movement, these arguments simply were not facing up to the urgency of the new political reality.³⁵ It was this sense of urgency that made the long-term evolutionary perspective – of utilising recapitulation theory to create a ‘caste of Hardihoods’ – seem less and less relevant. This was perhaps best expressed in an article by Hawkmoth (Sidney Pool) entitled ‘At the Fork of the Trail’. He pointed out that there used to be a popular Woodcraft poster with the slogan ‘We can’t have an A1 civilisation with C3 people.’ He argued that it would be more correct to say, ‘We can’t have A1 people in a C3 civilisation.’

I know that it is important to have fit minds and bodies, I know that it is important to train in our way, but it is of most *urgent* importance to have a fit social system. What shall it avail us to perfect bodies and minds for fascism and war? The only thing of any consequence now is to help sway the balance against fascism and foil imperialist war. It is merely dodging the task to be content with training Pioneers and passing the baby onto the next generation.³⁶

The building of a youth movement was, however, proving to be fraught with difficulties. In January 1935, Basil Rawson, now Headman, envisaged three types of Hardihood lodges: those consisting of Hardihoods who wanted to assist in the Woodcraft training of Pioneers (young people between the ages of 10 and 16³⁷); those consisting of Hardihoods who had been through the Pioneers but were not so keen on assisting the work with Pioneers; and those consisting of youth who had no previous Woodcraft experience.³⁸ The first of these could readily be accommodated within the Folk’s existing practice; the others were more problematic.

The main problem was that ‘a more deliberate political line’ for the Hardihoods raised the issue of what that political line should be. Up until then there had seemed to have been an inclusive, agreed political stance – pacifist opposition to war based on an analysis of the First World War as an imperialist war and the creation of a socialist commonwealth which would end all wars. But as Hardihoods moved out from woodcraft activity to public meetings, conferences and demonstrations, they were increasingly drawn into debates on political strategy and tactics in the fight against fascism and war – issues over which the Kinsfolk were themselves divided.

A range of proposals were made to try to resolve the problem of the organisation’s inability to give a political lead to young people. In the 1935 Yearbook, Kingfisher (Ernest Jones) wrote a lengthy article, no doubt encouraged by the discussions with the Labour Party then taking

place on their giving support to the Woodcraft Folk, proposing that the youth section affiliate to the Labour Party.³⁹ By the 1936 annual delegate conference (ADC) the Youth Committee report was advocating transferring any definite youth section to the British Federation of Co-operative Youth, but this too was rejected. Matters came to a head with the introduction of the Public Order Act in January 1937, when Leslie Paul abandoned entirely the project of building a youth movement. To avoid the Folk facing legal challenges on the grounds it was a uniformed political organisation, Paul argued for the removal of the more political statements from the Woodcraft Folk's rule book on the grounds that this would not affect the training of Pioneers. He accepted that the Hardihoods would face a curtailing of their political activity as a result of these changes, insisted that he did not want to deprive young people of political activity, but argued they should find avenues other than the Folk in order to do so.⁴⁰ The proposals to remove the more political statements from the rule book were rejected by the ADC when first discussed, but Paul had won the argument over work with youth and at the 1938 ADC it was formalised that the main purpose of the movement was the organisation and training of children.⁴¹

The contribution of the Socialist Educational International

Yet in retreating from building a youth movement, the Folk did not simply revert to its previous theorisation of its educational practice. In the same period that it struggled to find a way to help sway the balance against fascism and war, new ideas and debates about the socialist training of children were being introduced into the Folk from the outside – by the Socialist Educational International (SEI). In December 1935, the first issue of *Helper* magazine was launched, published by the Folk in conjunction with the SEI. Although edited by Koodoo (Henry Fair), the SEI wanted an English-language publication that could also be read by the Red Falcons in the USA (see [Figure 4.2](#)). Consequently, many of the articles were contributed by the SEI, and by Kurt Löwenstein in particular.⁴² Published monthly, it acted as a lively discussion bulletin in which Folk members and SEI leaders debated their educational policies throughout 1936 and beyond. As the Folk retreated back to the training of Pioneers as its primary role, these ideas enabled the Folk to theorise its educational practice within a new framework that still seemed relevant to the changed political situation.

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SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL INTERNATIONAL



FOR WAR

OR PEACE?

CHRISTMAS. CHARITY OR FELLOWSHIP.

CRAFTWORK FOR CHRISTMAS

PIONEERS RALLIES.

CO-EDUCATION

OURSELVES. GENERAL NOTES. ETC.,

PRICE THREEPENCE



Figure 4.2 *Helper* magazine, front cover, December 1935. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/3333.VOL.5.

The SEI set out unashamedly to socialise children in socialist values and a socialist outlook, seeing this as critical to socialist advance.

There is no freedom of choice. Either it [the child] is raised by the reactionary forces of the past and immediate present, or alternatively it is socialised by our example, by our pedagogic ideas and by their realisation in the future, and by Socialism. The working class family lives confined under such adverse conditions that, in the main, only ill-health and disorder can prevail. *Socialist education constitutes then an absolute necessity for the freedom of the working class and of mankind.*⁴³

Like Robert Owen, the SEI saw education as a vitally important, if not *the* most important, agency for social change. Also like Owen, the SEI believed that to change people's social outlook, you had to change the social relations in which they found themselves. However temporarily, camping provided an opportunity for children to experience socialist co-operation rather than capitalist competition. Through this lived experience of co-operation children could learn to 'control their behaviour and help towards good comradeship, the first step towards socialism'.⁴⁴ The German and Austrian Falcons placed great emphasis on camping in large bell tents that could accommodate 10 to 15 children, whereas the Folk used smaller lightweight tents. Camping in either could be a means to building strong and healthy bodies and minds, a love and understanding of nature, the power to think clearly and to act courageously (they argued), but the Bell tents were better 'for the development of social responsibilities, and for making acquaintance with social problems'. In the larger bell tent, children experienced a community organised for a specific purpose in which they worked collectively in organising the life of the tent. 'Tent life is the basis of Falcon Republics and they cannot succeed without it.'⁴⁵

Despite the differences over camping techniques expressed on either side – which ranged from how to achieve democratic participation and how to organise an effective programme, through the problems of discipline, to issues like inequalities in pocket money – the Woodcraft Folk rapidly left recapitulation behind and embraced the framework of the debate with the SEI.

Particularly attractive to the Folk was that camping was also the chosen vehicle of the SEI for educating children in internationalism, and for the same reason it was seen as an essential part of socialist education in each country.

The great International Republics are the children's version of the international socialist republic for which all who suffer in the present world of capitalism strive and struggle. Therefore our Falcons love their republics like a socialist island in the raging society of today.⁴⁶

However, the practical teaching of internationalism was not solely through the socialist islands of international camps. The second issue of *Helper* magazine outlined how working-class children's organisations gave help to children in other countries – during a lock-out in Austria in 1925, during the French Citroen sackings in 1934, following the suppression of Red Vienna in 1934, and most recently at the 1935 International Falcon Republic in France, 'when the whole camp assembled in dead silence on the day of the burial of the victims of the Brest and Toulon riots'. The article said that these demonstrated 'that children can be internationalist in outlook and action'.⁴⁷

This approach was repeated by the Folk following the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in July 1936. In October 1936, Leslie Paul directly appealed to Pioneers to 'save their pennies and half-pennies to give to the Spanish workers to help them defend their country and to buy food for their children and medicines and bandages for their sick' on the grounds that if they are beaten there will be war soon, 'or we shall be threatened by dictators'. It was through international solidarity of this type that the Folk was able to make its practice seem relevant to the changed political situation, even after retreating from building a youth organisation.⁴⁸

The SEI also challenged the Folk's previous ideas on child psychology – not frontally but by refocusing issues of child psychology on the explanations of a socialist educational technique. Thus, in the first of a series of articles in *Helper* magazine, Kurt Löwenstein started his article on 'Psychology of the Adolescent' with a quote from Stanley Hall, but in practice this was more of a journalistic hook to catch his readership than an indication of his intention to discuss Hall's ideas directly. After saying that helpers need to know something about the peculiarities of different age groups, and explaining adolescence as a period when boys and girls can no longer be treated as children although they are not fully grown, the rest of the article was devoted to explaining the importance of co-education despite differences in development between the sexes. He placed co-education in the context of building for a socialist society in which the emancipation of women in politics and economics is essential, and argued that this emancipation cannot give results 'unless there exists a natural comradeship between men and women'.⁴⁹ In a subsequent

article in the series on 'Psychology of our Pioneers', he argued that the period of calm *prior to* the storm and stress of adolescence is 'the best and most successful period for our educational methods', in part because boys and girls will have learnt 'how they differ; but that much stronger than this physical difference is their moral and social solidarity'.⁵⁰

Löwenstein also raised the issue of heredity in these articles. Again, after starting an article with a list of sources on child study, including Hall but also introducing new 'authorities' like A. S. Neill, he then introduced the notion of 'social' rather than individual heritage – social heritage consisting of the 'manners, customs, traditions, skill, technique, moral codes and ethical ideas'. While accepting that heredity may favour or retard the individual's development through the inheritance of physical, mental or social capacities, he insisted that 'social heredity determines the use to which they shall be put'. Education and training are nothing but the means of 'rapidly and systematically leading children to their social heritage and ... their social task'.⁵¹

In the 'Psychology of our Infant Folk', after discussing the importance of play and the importance of the child doing things for themselves rather than being instructed or having things done for them, he made clear his views on how the child develops a sense of morality, which directly rejected notions of a fixed or inherited 'human nature':

Regarding the moral nature of the child, in the beginning they are neither good nor bad, neither moral nor immoral, but just natural. Neither the theological that has pictured childhood in darkest colours, nor Rousseau and Ellen Kay, who advanced the theory of original perfection, purity, and goodness of children are right, *moral qualities are always the product of society*.⁵²

This, then, was the context in which a revised programme of educational pow-wows (or talks) for group nights, *The Training of Pioneers*, was drafted, those drafts were discussed, and re-drafts assembled before publication at the end of 1936.⁵³ Despite the lengthy quotation from *The Child and the Race* in the introduction, gone is the theorisation for its educational practice of recapitulation, and the resultant emphasis on pow-wows on 'Evolution and World History'. Instead, emphasis was placed on the teaching of modern history 'from a working class point of view' and the history of the working-class movement in particular. No longer did the child need to understand their place in the long evolution of humanity – it was sufficient that they would be able to see their role as contributing to the upward march of the labour movement.

The Republic of Children

Though an important feature of the organisation's educational work, the talks outlined in *The Training of Pioneers* were only one aspect of it. The abandoning of its early eugenics still necessitated a formal repudiation of recapitulation theory and a re-theorisation of its overall approach. This was provided by Paul's 1938 book *The Republic of Children*, which was far broader in scope than *The Training of Pioneers* but complementary to it. The very name of the book is an indicator of the considerable influence of the Socialist Educational International on its contents. Yet it is by no means a facsimile of the educational approach of the Red Falcons of France, Germany or Austria. Paul's search for a new theorisation of the organisation's methods led him to draw on not only the ideas of the SEI but also, and partly because of the influence of the SEI, on the pedagogy of the New Education movement as it had developed in the UK. Furthermore, the book is also the product of the Folk having to find its place within, and ways of gaining support from, a labour movement that was in many ways quite different to those that the continental affiliates of the SEI had to encounter.

Thus, when Paul discussed the efforts of the co-operative movement to promote the education of working-class children, he emphasised the ways in which Robert Owen's ideas on education had anticipated the New Education and 'were a hundred years ahead of his time'. Yet when the co-operative movement had later begun the systematic organisation of education for children it had forgotten all about Robert Owen's experiments and instead modelled its approach on the church Sunday Schools.

One of the reasons for the failure of the Junior Guilds and Classes [of the co-operative movement] to develop into a national organisation, or to seize the red-hot enthusiasm of the child, is that, like the Socialist Sunday Schools, their technique is that of the day or Sunday School. Imaginatively they are in the nineteenth century.⁵⁴

The technique being criticised here is that of formal classes leading to examinations and certificates. The Folk prided themselves on its methods not being those of mainstream formal education, with its classroom instruction and imposed discipline, and even though the Co-operative equivalent had a different curriculum (usually the history of the co-operative movement) and was based upon voluntary participation, it tended to use similar classroom techniques of instruction. The Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society was very much the exception to the rule in

this regard – its Education Secretary, Joseph Reeves, consistently sought out more ‘progressive’ educational methods which had included involvement in the Kibbo Kift Kindred and its offshoot the Woodcraft Folk.⁵⁵

The Folk’s alternative to the methods of the co-operative movement was to enlist the enthusiasm of children by offering similar activities to those offered by organisations such as the Scouts and Guides. This was more than just a hook to attract children. It was in the course of these activities that children could learn by discovery and exploration, by play. Drawing on the ideas of the New Education movement, the Folk’s emphasis was on ‘learn by doing’, that is, that through direct participation in these activities each child would discover and acquire individual skills and abilities that in turn enabled them to contribute as adults to the working-class movement. Like the New Education movement, Paul stressed that each child should be seen as an individual and should be encouraged to develop to their full personal potential. However, this approach was of particular importance if children were to develop a co-operative outlook.

In the Woodcraft Folk theory, children learn by doing. ‘Learn by doing, teach by being’ is a good slogan. Not good for everything, perhaps, but certainly good for ‘morals’ and ‘ethics’. A code of behaviour is not something that can be taught in the sense that the twice-times table is taught. It is something absorbed almost unconsciously by the child from the caste or class or group of society of which he finds himself a part. The life children live is that to which their surroundings and associates persuade them through the force of convention and custom and tabu. The Woodcraft Folk must, therefore, attempt to create, by example, the kind of atmosphere in which children absorb a good social code of conduct. To this end all the activities and ceremonies and methods of government of the movement must contribute. Merely to moralise to the child is a waste of time. Abstract conceptions of beauty, love, justice, equality mean little. They are just grown-up words. But a feeling for love, beauty and justice arising out of the life of the group – a feeling for the *thing itself* even when the label is missing, rather than lip-service to a half understood idea – that is an enduring achievement. In brief, don’t moralise – do.⁵⁶

The emphasis here was on creating the ‘atmosphere’ in which children come to have ‘a feeling for the *thing itself* even when the label is missing’. The choice of the word ‘atmosphere’ is significant: he might equally have

used the term ‘environment’, but didn’t. All of the activities, and ceremonies, and methods of government of the movement must contribute to creating this atmosphere. It is in this atmosphere that their ‘surroundings and associates persuade them through the force of convention and custom and tabu’ of a way to live and a way to behave. To some extent this atmosphere was created in the weekly group meetings, but to fully create this atmosphere it was necessary to take working-class children away from their everyday life in the city to another life where children could really develop a feeling for the *thing itself*. This was the countryside, where the Woodcraft Folk created its co-operative/socialist camping communities. Camps were not just the highlight of a child’s Woodcraft life – they were the core of its educational philosophy and method. ‘The Woodcraft Folk camp is a community, and enjoys a community life ... The leisure-time group becomes, for a little while, the full-time tribe with its own laws, practices, and traditions.’⁵⁷

This is not to say that children did not receive any formal instruction as part of their Woodcraft life. Yet many of the talks outlined in *The Training of Pioneers* provided formal preparation for the activities where children would have the opportunity for learning by doing. The Folk chose to call these talks ‘Pow Wows’.⁵⁸ This use of a term other than ‘talk’ is in fact indicative of another feature of the Folk’s educational philosophy – ‘learn by doing’ also had its corollary in ‘teach by being’. Again echoing the ideas of the Progressive Education movement and in particular those of A. S. Neill, Paul insisted that as a Woodcraft leader you ‘must be on the child’s side, and the child must know that you are on his side’.⁵⁹ In the Woodcraft Folk a child’s personality should receive the same respect as an adult’s, there must be no separate ‘officer caste’, and instead children and adults must be on terms of comradeship and trust. The use of the term ‘Pow Wow’ would therefore appear to have been intended to denote that it was not so much a formal class, but more a discussion between equals with the more experienced and knowledgeable taking the lead. Paul suggested that they should be delivered informally, ‘sitting with the children in a ring on the floor and chatting, or leaning on a desk’.⁶⁰

Unlike the co-operative movement, the leadership of the SEI too had been influenced by the New Education movement and engaged with the Folk in discussing the relevance of these ideas to their conception of ‘education for social change’. Leslie Paul was critical of some of the practices of the SEI at camps – particularly over its emphasis on centrally organised activities which left insufficient scope, in his view, for small group activities that could develop the individual child. But underlying

these discussions over their respective educational approaches was the Woodcraft Folk's emphasis on creating an 'atmosphere' in which a child could get 'a feeling for the thing itself *even when the label is missing*'.⁶¹ For many of the Falcon organisations, in the Folk's practice the 'label' was missing far too often – something which will be examined in more detail in the [next chapter](#).

Conclusion

While it is possible to find in *The Republic of Children* some glimpses of the evolutionist and eugenic approach which launched the Folk, there is also a very clear and fundamental break with the past – particularly in the formal repudiation of recapitulation theory. If the years from 1925 to 1934 can be said to be its childhood years of combining socialism with eugenics, then the years from 1934 can be described as a period of adolescent 'storm and stress', and only by 1938 was it emerging into adulthood. Although subject to some amendment along the way, the theory and practice of *The Republic of Children* provided the fundamental framework for its educational work for the next four decades, carrying it through the Second World War and the first phase of the Cold War despite the many social and political changes which these years witnessed.

Notes

1. Leslie Paul, *The Child and the Race: An Educational Programme for Use in Woodcraft Fellowships and Other Co-operative Youth Movements* (London: Education Committee of the Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society, 1926); Leslie Paul, *The Folk Trail: An Outline of the Philosophy and Activities of Woodcraft Fellowships* (London: Noel Douglas, 1929); Leslie Paul, *The Training of Pioneers: The Educational Programme of the Woodcraft Folk* (London: E. Jones, 1936); Leslie Paul, *The Republic of Children: A Handbook for Teachers of Working Class Children* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1938).
2. John Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge* (London: Royal Arsenal Co-operative Society and Journeyman Press, 1981).
3. This chapter was first presented at the symposium *Education for Social Change: The Many Histories of the Woodcraft Folk* held at the Institute of Education, London, in September 2018. A more detailed and comprehensive version of the main argument is contained in Rich Palser, *Education for Social Change: The Politics and Pedagogy of the Woodcraft Folk in the Inter-war Years* (London: Amazon, 2020).
4. See Leslie Paul, 'The Woodcraft Log: The Seed and the Soil', *Comradeship and Wheatsheaf*, April 1925 [YMA/WF/119] (emphasis in original).
5. Leslie Paul, 'The Fellowship Idea: Part III', *Comradeship and Wheatsheaf*, January 1925 [YMA/WF/119].
6. Jon Savage, *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875–1945* (London: Pimlico, 2007), 66. This is a highly readable and useful popular history of the 'creation of youth'. More scholarly recognition of Hall's contribution includes John Demos and Virginia Demos, 'Adolescence in Historical Perspective', *Journal of Marriage and Family* 31, no. 4 (1969): 632–38.

7. Stanley Hall cited in Robert E. Grinder, 'The Concept of Adolescence in the Genetic Psychology of G. Stanley Hall', *Child Development* 40, no. 2 (1969): 355–69, 358. This section is totally indebted to the clarity with which Hall's views are explained in this article, and any errors in the presentation of Hall's views are my own.
8. Leslie Paul, 'Interview with John Springhall 7 August 1976', in Mary Davis, *Fashioning a New World: A History of the Woodcraft Folk*, 125–28 (Loughborough: Holyoake Books, 2000).
9. Ernest Thompson Seton, *The Book of Woodcraft and Indian Lore* (London: Constable, 1912).
10. Paul, 'The Fellowship Idea: Part III' (emphasis in original).
11. Paul, 'The Seed and the Soil'.
12. See, respectively: A. J. Finlay, 'John Hargrave, the Green Shirts, and Social Credit', *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 1 (1970): 53–54; John O. Springhall, 'The Boy Scouts, Class and Militarism in Relation to British Youth Movements, 1908–30', *International Review of Social History* 16 (1971): 125–58.
13. John Hargrave, *The Great War Brings It Home: The Natural Reconstruction of an Unnatural Existence* (London: Constable and Company, 1919), 4.
14. Hargrave, *The Great War Brings It Home*, 365 (emphasis in original).
15. Paul, *The Folk Trail*, 96 (emphasis added).
16. Leslie Paul, *Angry Young Man* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), 104.
17. Leslie Paul, 'Memorandum on the Activities of the Woodcraft Folk, Presented to the Folk Council, Feb 8th 1926'. Typed manuscript with handwritten cover page entitled 'Little Otter's Memorandum to the Folk Council', 1 [FH_002_04].
18. 'Woodcrafters and Wandervögel 1: The German Youth Movement', *Herald of the Folk*, October 1930, New Issue 17, 8 [YMA/WF/331].
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37. The age ranges of the names of groups of children and young people in the Woodcraft Folk varied over time. In the 1930s, for example, there were two age groups: Elfs for 6- to 10-year-olds and Pioneers 10- to 16-year-olds. In 1963, this older age group was divided into two, with

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 53. The formal teaching advocated by Paul in 1926 can be found in the sections entitled 'The Story of Life' and 'Evolution' in his 1926 *The Child and the Race*; his 1936 'minimum programme' is outlined in the [Chapter 1](#) of *The Training of Pioneers*.
 54. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 39.
 55. See the discussion in [Chapter 2](#) on the meaning of 'progressive'. For more on Reeves' educational outlook and the policy of RACS, see Attfield, *With Light of Knowledge*.
 56. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 85 (emphasis in original).
 57. Paul, *Republic of Children*, 164.
 58. The Woodcraft Folk's use of this expression as meaning a talk or discussion is in line with the meaning given to it by white North Americans, popularised by 1940s–50s Hollywood 'Westerns'. The Native American meaning of Pow Wow is actually a social festival involving dance and singing. See Deloria, *Playing Indian*.
 59. Paul, *The Republic of Children*, 75.
 60. Paul, *The Republic of Children*, 153.
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Part II

Internationalism

5

Educational principles and the educational practice of international camps, 1945–1970

Richard Palser

The Second World War, closely followed as it was by the start of the Cold War, saw a change in the way the Woodcraft Folk understood internationalism. As was discussed in the previous section of this volume, an opposition to Empire nationalism and imperialist wars was at the forefront of the organisation's thinking when it was first formed, and this led to its reaching out for international connections – first with the Wandervögel and then with the Socialist Educational International. Contact with the SEI grew into collaboration in organising international 'children's republics', as well as practical solidarity with the victims of fascism in Austria, Spain and then Czechoslovakia. The outbreak of war in 1939 brought to an end this phase in its understanding of internationalism.

A new understanding of internationalism came to dominate the organisation's thinking and practice in the immediate post-war years. At the heart of this was the idea that by building exchanges across borders, children would come to know 'the other', and in place of the suspicion and fear generated by the war and Cold War, a new outlook of friendship based on mutual understanding could arise. This chapter starts by discussing why this shift in the Woodcraft Folk's understanding of internationalism took place during the war and its immediate aftermath. It then goes on to scrutinise the educational methodology employed in the organisation and the programming of international camps and exchanges that took place after the war so as to illuminate the ways in which this new understanding of internationalism was carried out in practice. Although Woodcraft incorporated its internationalist message

into all its year-round activities, it was the international camps that stood in the forefront of, and came to symbolise, their efforts to 'Span the World with Friendship'. The chapter focuses mainly upon international camps organised by the Woodcraft Folk and the International Falcon Movement to which it became affiliated, as it is in this area that the archive sources are most available, but it will also make some mention of the organisation's exchanges with countries behind the 'Iron Curtain'.

The impact of the Second World War and the start of the Cold War

The outbreak of the Second World War brought to an abrupt halt the organisation's international work. There were obvious practical obstacles to any international contacts, let alone exchanges, with Nazi Germany occupying large swathes of Europe – but the greatest obstacle was that the war shattered the ideological unity of the Woodcraft Folk that had been constructed in the interwar years. A shared opposition to Empire nationalism and a pacifist opposition to war proved insufficient to channel a common response to Britain's declaration of war against Nazi Germany. The membership was divided over whether to support the war as a 'war against fascism' or to oppose it as an imperialist war or on strict pacifist grounds. The compromise reached was to remain formally neutral, on the grounds it was not appropriate for a children's organisation to take a political position on the war, while reaffirming a shared commitment of its members to doing their utmost to educate children for peace even under wartime conditions. However, since there was no agreement on what education for peace actually meant in the context of the war, in practice this simply meant seeking to hold the organisation together around the belief that when the end of the war finally came it would bring new opportunities for international collaboration and the need to build this time for a lasting peace.

When that day came, the Woodcraft Folk did indeed throw itself energetically and enthusiastically into resuming its international work. Exactly a year after the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it hosted an international camp near Brighton, to which it invited delegations of children from ten countries across war-torn Europe. 'After six years of warfare ...' the advance publicity proclaimed 'children will work, sing, play, dance and live together in an International Co-operative Community and through their activities lay the basis of firm friendships which will help to further World Peace'.¹ It organised the camp in defiance of the Co-operative Union's Educational Executive, knowing that

this would bring to an end the Woodcraft Folk's participation in the National Co-operative Youth Organisation which had begun in October 1944.² Around 1,000 Woodcraft members attended the camp, approximately 35 per cent of its total membership then.³ The following summer, over a tenth of its membership attended international camps in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Holland.⁴ Later that year, it was successful in creating a new vehicle for international camps and exchanges to replace the shattered SEI.

The International Falcon Secretariat (IFS) was, however, a very different organisation to the pre-war SEI. With some former SEI member organisations in countries now in the 'Eastern bloc' (Latvia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and eastern Germany) the IFS combined two poles of influence – the Kinderfreunde of Austria and Germany on the one hand, with their traditions dating back to the SEI, and on the other hand the Scandinavian organisations now under the leadership of the Swedes, who were coming from a tradition outside of the SEI. The Scandinavian organisations had made it clear that they were opposed to simply relaunching the SEI because they were opposed to the term 'socialist education'.⁵ The creation of a 'secretariat' for the Falcon organisations – the name Falcons, and in some cases Eagles, was widely used on the continent – meant that further discussion on the different approaches to the social education of children could continue while practical collaboration on international camps and exchanges could begin immediately. The founding conference agreed by acclaim to adopt as its motto 'Span the World with Friendship'.

When the IFS once again attempted to gain agreement of educational methods at an 'international leaders conference' in 1952, they felt able to agree on the following statement on the aims of its educational work:

To present ethical values concerning the right of men, equality, tolerance and humanitarianism.

To prepare the children to live in a future society based on a social order inspired by the named great values leading them to a positive and active attitude towards the problems of human life.

By this education we seek to reach:

- a) *No premature cravings* but a dynamic critical attitude.
- b) Broadmindedness attained by the encouragement of the child *to use its own judgement.*
- c) The feeling of *human loyalty and solidarity* with the strivings for the abolition of social and economic misconceptions still existing.⁶

This was clearly a compromise statement. While the ethical values that were to be presented through educational work were sufficiently broad as to encompass a wide spectrum of ‘progressive’ views, it also made it clear that it was training children to live in a future society inspired by those ‘named great values’ – clearly implying that such a society did not yet exist. Where the Austrian and German affiliates might (at that time) define that future society as socialist, the Swedes might define it as a social democracy, and room was still left for those that might define it as a humanitarian or liberal capitalism that guaranteed tolerance, rights and equality before the law.

The third paragraph indicates the qualities it hoped to foster in children through this education, and at first sight appears obscure in meaning – what are these ‘premature cravings’ that should be avoided? In his *Republic of Children*, Leslie Paul had argued against the adult lecturing of children using grown-up words that children cannot yet understand, proposing instead that what was required was for the child to grasp ‘the thing itself’, even when the label was missing (see [Chapter 4](#)). It was through the atmosphere created in the Woodcraft community that children could come to have a feel for ‘the thing itself’ without necessarily having the words – socialism or co-operative commonwealth – to label it. Similarly, the ‘premature cravings’ being referred to here may be a desire for something that the child is not yet fully able to understand, a parroting of adult words without any feeling for the thing itself. Rather than this, the educational aim should be to instil a ‘dynamic critical attitude’, a broadmindedness that came from encouraging the child to ‘use its own judgement’. For a feeling for the ‘thing itself’ was ‘the feeling of human loyalty and solidarity’ and the striving for ‘the abolition of social and economic misconceptions still existing’. Where the Austrian and German affiliates would call this a consciously socialist education, the Swedish affiliate would call this an education in preparation for ‘active participation in a social democracy’ – yet both viewed the lived experience of their group and camping communities as being the key means of developing these feelings and strivings. By 1953, both poles of the debate felt it was no longer necessary to continue the debate over whether they were engaged in ‘socialist education’, and they were sufficiently happy with the practical work of the IFS to agree to rename it the International Falcon Movement (IFM).

The third factor prompting a change in how the Woodcraft Folk framed its internationalism was the growing ‘red scare’ that accompanied the onset of the Cold War. On 26 June 1950, a few months after Senator McCarthy launched his red scare in the United States, the London

Evening Standard reported on allegations that the ‘Woodland Folk’ were being used to ‘implant left-wing and near-Communist ideas into the heads of children’. Picking up on the organisation announcing it was to send delegations to Falcon camps in Belgium and Austria, it claimed that at the Brighton camp children had sung ‘The Internationale’ with raised clenched fists, and that the Woodcraft Folk songbook also contained the Russian song ‘The Scarlet Banner’. Four days later, the Balham and Tooting *News & Mercury* reported that the Woodcraft Folk was annoyed by the accusation of teaching communism, and Bill Ballantine, a leading member at the time, clearly thrown onto the defensive, is quoted as saying: ‘Our children are in our organisation as they might join any other. There are no political ties at all, and no attempt is ever made to put any ideas into their heads.’⁷

In January 1951, *Helper*, Woodcraft’s magazine for adult volunteers, suggested that the organisation must have come to the notice of Tory HQ, as in recent months local and regional papers had carried claims by Conservative Party speakers that the organisation was communist and spreading propaganda – an accusation even made in the House of Commons.⁸ Although this particular red scare was primarily aimed at left-wingers in the teachers union, the Woodcraft Folk too was in danger of being dragged into a witch-hunt. In response, the organisation now stressed that its objectives were merely ‘to teach citizenship, training in a democratic way of life, co-operation and international friendship and understanding’.⁹

These, then, were the factors leading to a change in the way the organisation understood internationalism and the educational content of its international work: the war had brought to an abrupt halt the practice established in the 1930s and thrown into limbo the organisation’s understanding of internationalism; the post-war IFS no longer acted as an influence that would pull the organisation back towards the pre-war outlook of the SEI; and the red scares of the early Cold War pushed the organisation towards a more benign explanation of its international activities. The rest of this chapter will examine what this meant in practice.

The theory behind international camps

The Woodcraft Folk’s overall approach to the education of children remained largely that of *The Republic of Children*. At the centre of its activities were the Woodcraft camps – small temporary communities, in

which children could live, work and play together in co-operation. They saw international camps as having a similar role. As Basil Rawson, then Headman of Woodcraft, put it at an IFM 'Helper School' on international camp work in 1964:

The important thing is to arrange our camp communities so that they are in reality as far as we can build them socialist communities in practice which give the children the experience – the practical experience – of a socialist way of living. It is from experience rather than from any kind of class lecture that a child develops social habits. A child who repeatedly practices a socialist way of life as a member of a community at camp develops the habits which it eventually tends to apply to life in industry, at home, in politics, and everywhere in that other life away from camp.¹⁰

The use of the word 'socialist communities' was not intended by Rawson to denote a difference to 'co-operative communities'. In the interwar years Rawson and other Woodcraft leaders, in common with many in the labour movement, had used the term 'co-operative commonwealth' and 'socialism' interchangeably to describe their ultimate goals. They still did so after the war when this interchanging of the terms was diminishing in broader circles, though they tended to describe their camps as socialist communities when discussing internally and as co-operative communities in public.

Yet camps involving children from different countries were not the same as domestic camps in one important respect. These were children who may themselves have lived through the war and seen each other's countries as the enemy, whose parents and group leaders may well have been bearing arms against each other, and who could still see the devastation caused by the war all around them. Furthermore, the hatred and suspicion fed by war overlaid language and cultural differences that marked the children of different countries off from each other. Not surprisingly, there was an emphasis placed on overcoming barriers to mutual understanding based on ignorance, on identifying what these children had in common and therefore on using these exchanges to learn about each other's countries. As Wally Poole, a leading member, put it at the same Helper school as mentioned above:

Whilst they are together ample opportunity must be made available to them to find out something of the host country, and for them to

exchange ideas and experiences of their home background so that there can be a full exchange of information, of likes and dislikes.¹¹

A number of mechanisms were used to do this. The programme of the 1951 camp at Debden Green included an 'International Friendship Day' where each country brought greetings to the whole camp and an 'International Eisteddfod' at which they performed folk songs, folk dances and mimes to showpiece their 'national cultures'. The camp was deliberately organised to coincide with, and be accessible to, the Festival of Britain in central London, and the Souvenir Programme gave advice on the different exhibits. In addition, delegations went on from the camp to stay for a week in the homes of children they had camped with.¹² Other Falcon organisations used the same mechanisms to enable children to learn about the lives of children from other countries.

There was, however, more to these camps than facilitating 'study tours'. They were organised so as to encourage an awareness of having more in common with 'foreign' children than there were differences between them, and to develop a sense of friendship between them. For Basil Rawson and the Woodcraft leadership, this could best be done when children shared more than entertainment organised for them by adults. For children of different countries to really get to know each other, and develop meaningful friendships, they had to interact as equal participants in a co-operative camping community.

We all know of camps that are run with all kinds of facilities and entertainment. Other organisations have had such camps; they are run for children, not by children. ... In that kind of camp they can receive lots and give nothing. The reason why children like a well-run socialistically motivated camp ... is that they have a part in it, they are important in it. If we hope for socialist values from our work at camp we must so arrange it that it is virtually a community in the miniature, a community in which the children have a full share in the government, the administration, the work and also the fun of the camp.¹³

It was through children feeling that they had a part in, were important in, these temporary communities in the miniature that mutual understanding and friendship would best develop – and for this they had to have a full share in the government, administration, the work and the fun of the camp. The best means of achieving this were, however, open to discussion. Different Falcon organisations placed a different emphasis on the variety of mechanisms available to them.

Children having a share in all aspects of the camping community

These international camps, by their very nature, were too large to administer as a single unit and so had to be divided into 'villages' that made the organisation of meals, washing facilities, swimming, games and other activities more manageable. How these villages were to be constituted was initially an area of discussion. At the 1951 camp, each British 'village' of about 70 hosted around 30 Falcons so that these international delegations were integrated into the life of the camp alongside their British hosts. This contrasted with the practice of the previous Falcon camps, where concern over language difficulties had led to separate villages for overseas delegations. At the 1947 camp in Holland, and the 1950 camps in Belgium and Austria, villages were constructed according to spoken language clusters, resulting in villages consisting entirely of overseas delegations. Clearly, it was hoped that reducing language barriers might make village administration easier and facilitate children interacting with each other. Reporting on the Austria camp, Woodcraft Folk National Organiser Henry Fair said he wanted to see development of mixed villages where delegations are mixed with the hosting nation, and argued that this could be achieved despite the language difficulties.¹⁴ The Woodcraft Folk had some success during the 1950s in persuading the Falcon organisations to their way of thinking.

There was agreement among the Falcon organisations that children should share in the work of the camp, but again there were differences of emphasis. The Folk had initially adopted the practice of the Falcons which assumed that, in large camps, food preparation and cooking should be carried out centrally by professionally trained staff or adult volunteers, with the active involvement of children being limited to tasks such as peeling potatoes, slicing bread or distributing the food. But at the 1957 international camp, they decentralised the kitchens with each village being responsible for its own food preparation and cooking. In this way, children from overseas delegations could be integrated into village rotas for tasks such as cooking, ensuring an adequate water supply or washing up, and they would get to know each other by working together in small groups.¹⁵

Giving children a share in the government of the camp proved more difficult. All IFM affiliates saw the democratic participation of children in the running of the camp as particularly important, but in practice there were variations in how this was to be achieved. The Woodcraft Folk's approach was a continuation of what Leslie Paul had described as 'tribal

democracy', which stressed the relationship between children taking on responsibility for practical tasks in the running of the camp and their resulting training in skills of leadership.¹⁶ To again quote Basil Rawson:

It is natural that the more important or complicated responsibilities will go to the better trained, the more experienced, or the older members of the community. But even the youngest and newest member at the camp should have responsibility. That way *the child feels important and wanted and takes every responsibility seriously*. Sharing in the government involves not a teaching and preaching, but a practice in democracy. So it is necessary to have some democratic form of council of all members of the camp who equally share in the *daily organising and the daily admin* of the camp.¹⁷

Those chosen to fulfil particular tasks were accountable to the 'council circle'. It met at least daily and included all participants at a group or district camp, or in the village of a large international camp. As children looked to the older children and adults as role models, they would take on more responsibility and learn about their accountability to the camp as a whole. However, this approach was not easily transferred to the large international camp. However decentralised the administration, some form of camp-wide centralisation of policy-making would still be necessary.

One approach to solving this problem was implemented at the 1947 camp in Holland, where young people appear to have been directly integrated into the adult decision-making structures, with no separation between the two. In each village and in the overall camp parliament, under-16s were elected so as to give a rough parity of adults and children in decision-making bodies.¹⁸ The parliament, it was stated, was to oversee the camp programme.¹⁹ However, as was later pointed out by Dutch participants at an IFS school on camping, the 'principal trend of the programme, which is laid down in advance, cannot be changed by the children'.²⁰

Another approach was adopted at the Austrian Falcon's international camp in 1950, when the democratic structures for children ran parallel to the administration of the adults rather than being integrated into it. An advance circular explained that the Austrians and Germans saw the basic unit of the camp as a tent for 10 to 12 children, and each tent was to elect a delegate to the parliament. Alongside this sat the Camp Council, which consisted of heads of villages, delegation heads, heads of the different camp departments and the Camp Chief. This body had

the final authority, and the camp parliament 'is the voice of the Falcons' or *Pioneers' wishes and the channel through which the Camp Council can reach all campers*'.²¹

Underlying this approach for the larger Falcon organisations – the Germans, Austrians and Swedes – was a modelling of parliamentary democracy which reflected their ideological commitment to liberal democracy as an alternative to both fascism and communism. The educational message that the German Falcons hoped to convey to children through these camp parliaments was spelt out in a series of news sheets for participants in advance of the 1952 camp in Germany.²² Here it is explained that a state is just an organised community 'where many individuals are living together within a certain order', and this requires a government and rules. After pointing out that there are many forms of government – an absolute monarchy, a dictatorship in a totalitarian state or a democratic state – it asks which form of government will fit 'our Falken state'. It is of course the democratic state. This is then contrasted with the communist Eastern Bloc.

The Swedish Falcons, at its camps before the war, had added a further dimension to its modelling of parliamentary democracy – party competition for votes in elections. Campers would be divided into parties with names such as 'Joy and responsibility', 'Common sense' or 'Nothing is impossible'. These elections, however, bore little relevance to the practical running of the camps, and even less to the planning of the camp which had been thoroughly carried out by leaders beforehand, and so the election process was all form with little content. Increasingly in the post-war years they came to take on a carnival atmosphere, with the banging of pots, and water being thrown over opposing candidates as they made their speeches. By the mid-1950s, 'Vote for the seven-sleeps party' or 'Vote for the juice party' became the most common election slogans, which a central leader described as 'parodies of real choices' – and once elected the parliament had little to discuss and sometimes did not meet at all.²³

At the large international camp in Stockholm in 1956, the decision was made that no parliamentary elections with contesting parties be held. If the elections were held then the elected would need to participate in decisions on matters for the camp, and this was not deemed to be practical. Instead, participation was encouraged through the camp shop being run as a co-operative, and through children being involved in the writing and production of the camp magazines.²⁴ The election of office-holders for a camp co-op shop was also the practice at the Austrian camps.

But even camp parliaments elected without competing parties could throw up unintended results. In 1963, a camp for teenagers (14

to 18 years) was held in Aarhus, Denmark. Elections to the camp parliament resulted in representatives of all the four sections of the camp being British – despite the fact there were only 89 Woodcraft participants. Although the parliament also included adult representatives of each of the other delegations, this clearly cut across the objective of modelling international co-operation.²⁵

The unforeseen outcome of elections prompted a debate on how the camp parliament should function at the 1964 IFM Helper School on international camps. A German participant argued that the camp parliament was advisory only, a view echoed by Basil Rawson. Another Folk participant, Wally Poole, pointed out that ‘Camp Parliament faces difficulties because it is imposed on an already existing camp organisation.’ He argued that instead a prior project should be suggested for the parliament to discuss and then work out the details of how this was to be carried out.²⁶ This latter proposal was in line with how the Woodcraft Folk had attempted to breathe new life into the camp parliament at its Down Ampney camp earlier that year.

Our Pioneer Camp Parliament showed itself to be very similar to our own Parliament in Whitehall – I mean that some MPs did not accept the importance of their role and absented themselves without the permission of their constituents. At the same time, we know that MPs were getting very poor audiences for their “report back” meetings. Even so, those who laboured on behalf of us all, under the leadership of our camp President, Basil Rawson, made some firm recommendations to the camp, some of which resulted in positive action ... they organised money raising functions that enabled us to make a donation of £10 to the Down Ampney Church Restoration Fund, £22–10-d to Oxfam and collected signatures condemning Apartheid ...²⁷

The organisation continued to trumpet that its international camps would include the election of camp parliaments, but at subsequent camps these parliaments faded into the background while alternative forums for discussion of international issues began to be experimented with.

Rendering conscious a feel for ‘the thing in itself’

If these camps were constructed so as to ensure that children learnt not only about each other’s countries but also about what they had in common, and to experience sharing in an international co-operative

community, how was that feeling for the ‘thing itself’ to be developed into a conscious desire for peace and international friendship?

Some IFM affiliates took a very direct approach, making explicit the intended message of the camp. For the Austrian and German Falcons in particular, the overcoming of the deeply entrenched divisions caused by the war and building a lasting peace required a new, more integrated Europe. Participants attending the 1952 camp in Germany were told:

Today ... it is our foremost task to work towards a better understanding and collaboration amongst the children of Europe in their common work of building a better continent. In this new Europe there will be no room for wars, hatred, suppressions and need, but only peace, friendship and wealth for all people. Therefore we intentionally call this camp ‘Falkenstaat Junges Europe’ (Falcon State Young Europe).²⁸

This name for the camp was prominently displayed at all the major events organised at the camp (see [Figure 5.1](#)).

The Woodcraft Folk’s approach to this was again an extension of their general educational method applied in their domestic camps.



Figure 5.1 Falken State Young Europe, Fussen, Germany, 1952. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/302.

Just prior to the 1951 camp, *Helper* magazine explained ‘Why we have ceremonies’:

The ceremonies are developing in the Folk a community spirit, a sense of ‘belonging’; they turn a group of people who happen to be camping together into a collective body, united by bonds of mutual sympathy and understanding.²⁹

The use of ceremony had always been part of the Folk’s woodcraft practice, designed to capture the child’s imagination and simultaneously reinforce their sense of belonging to something separate and apart from ‘that other life’ in the city. They formed part of the glue which, for the Folk, held together their co-operative camping communities. They were, not surprisingly, also an integral part of the 1951 international camp. At the welcoming event for international delegations, the ‘Seizin Ceremony’ was performed, and in the Souvenir Programme the words of ‘The Law’, the ‘Fire Lighting’ and ‘Leave Take’ ceremonies, and the ‘Campfire Carol’ were printed so as to be available to all participants.³⁰ These traditional ceremonies were supplemented by a song newly acquired from the continental Falcons – ‘Link Your Hands Together’.

Link your hands together
A circle we’ll make.
This bond of our friendship
No power can break.
Let’s all sing together
In one mighty throng
Should any be weary
We’ll help them along.

Other Falcon organisations used allegory to promote a sense of a common bond between the children. For example, at the 1947 international camp in Holland, the Dutch Falcons used the allegory of the ‘Eternal Fire of Friendship’. In brief, the story is about an eternal fire of friendship which has to be kept burning. It tells of a community that lived as friends for a while, but mistrust and suspicion led to fighting and neglecting the fire. However, a young man saved a light from it and hid it. When people realised their stupidity, they went to search for the light so as to relight the eternal fire. This story provided a theme for various rituals and activities running through the camp.³¹

While not as straightforward as this allegory, the ambiguity of many of the Woodcraft ceremonies added a sense of mystery about their

meaning and this helped to create a distinct atmosphere – the child was encouraged to feel that they had a share in a community that was fundamentally different to that of their everyday life. The countryside was a place celebrated in their songs as offering an antidote to the drab and mechanical life of the city, a place not just of physical but also spiritual regeneration. The songs and ceremonies still emphasised this through the ‘Red Indianism’ the Folk had inherited from Ernest Thompson Seton. Thus the chorus of the post-war Woodcraft song ‘Who Are These Folk?’:

Hark the beating of our Tom-Tom,
See the sign upon our Totem
And the Fire before our Wigwam:
We are the Woodcraft Folk.³²

Other Falcon organisations, particularly the Swedes, had an entirely opposite approach to the countryside and were not comfortable with the Woodcraft approach. Rather than it being a place to celebrate an escape from the city and learn the ways of woodcraft, they used the camp to model the new urban environment which their social democratic governments were in the process of creating. As Björn Lundberg has argued, the city became the norm for how nature should be experienced – not in its wild or even agricultural state but as an image of the city, its institutions, its streets and meeting places.³³

At the large 1960 Scandinavian camp at Aalborg, Denmark, the pedagogical idea chosen as the theme of the camp was ‘the habitation’ or ‘dwelling’. A new law had recently been passed in Denmark about house building, and at the camp tents represented ‘flats’ and were joined together in a ‘block’ (see [Figure 5.2](#)). Participants could acquire deeds to the flats/tents, allowing residents to invite their friends to stay – including friends from other countries. At the camp an exhibition of furniture, kitchen tools, building materials and objects of art would be created by the children themselves. As with the modelling of parliamentary democracy, the Denmark camp was preparing children to be active citizens in a social democracy.³⁴

Opening up discussions with Eastern European children’s organisations

In the light of how the Woodcraft Folk had come to understand internationalism and the educational role of exchanges across borders, it is not hard



Figure 5.2 Camp sites modelling urban areas, Aalborg, Denmark, 1960. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/310.

to appreciate why they felt carrying out similar exchanges with Eastern European countries to be equally justified. Indeed, the very fact that the arms race of the Cold War could potentially escalate into a hot war made, from this perspective, such exchanges essential to maintaining peace in the world. Its contacts and exchanges with Eastern Europe had begun in the mid-1950s and were initially tolerated by the IFM, but it became hostile to any contact with communist countries by the end of the decade.

The main criticisms of these links had been that the sending of delegations to Eastern Europe merely provided propaganda for the communist governments there. As the hosts, these governments were largely able to determine where foreign delegations could and could not visit, and they were able to showcase their best ‘holiday camp’ provision for children without their visitors catching any glimpse of everyday life in those countries. Certainly, some of the reports on Folk visits to Eastern Europe are gushing with praise for the wonderful facilities in which they stayed, and the response to this criticism was often ‘any contact is better than none’. Behind this latter argument was the belief that these international contacts across the Iron Curtain were vital in breaking down the distrust engendered by the Cold War. Furthermore, what was true for the children also applied to the adults – Woodcraft leaders saw themselves as engaging in an active discussion with adult leaders of the Eastern European children’s organisations so as to better understand

their outlook and overcome mutual distrust. In particular, they wanted to discuss how to carry out educational work with children that would contribute to 'spanning the world with friendship', and did not hold back when differences emerged.

A clear example of this was the contact made with Czechoslovakia. As early as 1957, the Folk's annual report noted that in Czechoslovakia the camps which they visited were at permanent campsites, with facilities of all kinds at hand, and that almost all chores and rotas were undertaken by persons other than the children.

According to our methods of training, this is a gross mistake. We maintain that the practical lesson learned from our camps by each child taking his or her share in the chores and running of the camp is an essential part of their training in democracy. Our leaders made this point, together with others, at the leaders' meetings they attended, and we are glad to know that it had been taken notice of and that there are leaders within the Czech movement who agree with us on this.³⁵

During a 1965 study visit to Czechoslovakia, Folk members raised with their hosts some of their criticisms of the Pioneer organisation there. This included the groups being based on schools, meeting in schools and being largely led by teachers, and the fact that leaders did not readily join in the activities with the children but mostly stood on the sidelines.³⁶

During the 1950s Woodcraft Folk's internationalist message had struggled to find a hearing against the background noise of the Cold War, and its membership remained largely static. In this context, camp parliaments provided evidence of its commitment to teaching parliamentary democracy through its international activities. By the early 1960s that had begun to change. The protest movement against nuclear weapons provided the political space in which its international activities in particular could be promoted to wider layers, and its membership slowly began to grow. Declarations by international bodies such as the United Nations provided increased legitimacy to its work, and the Folk became emboldened in speaking out on issues such as apartheid in South Africa and civil rights in the United States. As Basil Rawson put it at an international leaders' conference of the IFM in 1963:

Children are aware of the stupidities of the adult world. They are aware of the shadow of 'the bomb'. There is no doubt where socially educated youth stand in relation to the threat of war, to

‘iron curtains’ and ‘the wall’. Their sympathies are for the victims. Their rebellion is against those who perpetuate these things.³⁷

In that year, the Woodcraft Folk independently organised an international seminar in London involving representatives of children’s organisations from 12 countries, including Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, the USSR and Yugoslavia. Later that year, it faced renewed attacks in the national press alleging it was being infiltrated by the Communist Party and had fallen out with the IFM over its international exchanges with the East – its response this time was to ridicule the accusation of infiltration and proudly defend its record on such exchanges. The Woodcraft Folk felt that it had developed particularly close links with the Polish children’s organisation. According to members of the Woodcraft Folk’s International Committee in the late 1960s, its contacts with Poland allowed it to move beyond the large ‘holiday camp’ events to visit local camps and stay in the homes of children in other parts of the country.³⁸ This was the goal when developing contacts with other countries in Eastern Europe and, of course, children coming from Eastern Europe to Britain could see for themselves what life in the capitalist West was like for working-class children. By the late 1960s, with the German Falcons pushing the IFM to reverse its ban on such contacts, the Folk had become recognised within the IFM as the most experienced in building such links.

Responding to the youth radicalisation

In 1967, the Woodcraft annual delegate conference passed a motion calling for peace negotiations to end the Vietnam War and legitimising its younger members taking part in the activities of ‘Medical Aid for Vietnam’. This reflected its growing awareness of a burgeoning youth radicalisation that was already becoming evident in Britain. That year, at the international camp it hosted, specially written songs and pageants replaced some of Woodcraft’s traditional songs and ceremonies. The ‘camp song’ echoed ‘Link Your Hands Together’ while broadening the scope of its internationalism beyond peace and friendship:

Span the world with friendship
Fast our hands will link ...
Hands for Freedom
Hands for Peace
Hands for Human Rights.³⁹

The songbook produced for the 1967 camp included three songs from the Aldermaston marches, six from the American civil rights movement and five contemporary anti-war folk protest songs. Together they formed a third of all the songs prioritised for the camp.⁴⁰ There was a special programme for over-16s, which included discussion of 'World without war – What science can do for mankind' and a showing of the banned BBC film *The War Game*.⁴¹

This shift to accommodating the concerns of radicalised youth appears to have also taken place at other IFM camps. At the 1968 camp at Dobriach, Austria, it was felt that: 'The foundation of real democratic functioning institutions – difficult to carry out on the level of children from the whole camp – is possible [only] in the village.' The central camp parliament had been abandoned. However, one of the central camp 'activity centres', entitled 'Active Democracy', was described thus:

In this hobby group there will be a possibility for the various age groups to discuss amongst each other and with representatives of the older generation – politicians, artists etc – any topics of special interest for young people.⁴²

By 1970 the Woodcraft Folk was once again, as had happened in the 1930s (see [Chapter 4](#)), faced with the problem of how to take up the international issues now being highlighted by the young as an integrated part of its educational work with children. The IFM resolved this difficulty by increasingly prioritising its work with youth, and one of the reasons for the Woodcraft Folk withdrawing from full membership was that it felt the IFM no longer made space for work with children. The Woodcraft Folk continued to prioritise its work with children while making some space for its older teenagers and young adults to express their opposition to war and their support for human rights, but its understanding of internationalism remained, for the time being, fundamentally unchanged. Not until the 1980s did it begin once again to reassess what it understood by internationalism.

Notes

1. 'Camp Bulletin No 1: June 1946' [YMA/WF/181].
2. Koodoo and Little Owl, *The Woodcraft Folk (National Folk Council) Report on the International Camp 1946*, 1 June 1946 [YMA/WF/148].
3. Numbers attending the camp are taken from *Report of National Folk Council for Year Ending 31st December 1946* [YMA/WF/3]. Membership figures are taken from 'The Minutes of the Annual Gathering 1946' [M3199/FH15].

4. *Woodcraft Folk Report for the Year Ended December 31st 1947* [YMA/WF/4A].
5. See: Outline of a lecture on 'The Educational Principles of the Falcon Movement in Scandinavia' by Ejner Gether Sorensen, Elsinor, March 1949 [YMA/WF/151].
6. 'Report on International Leaders Conference 16–18 April 1952 near Zurich', *Falcons Outlook*, no. 5, May 1952 [YMA/WF/338] (emphasis in original).
7. These press reports and others relating to the delegations abroad that year are contained in [YMA/WF/183(b)].
8. *Helper*, January 1951 [YMA/WF/333].
9. Letter to the Axminster and Lyme Regis *Clarion* from the General Secretary of the Woodcraft Folk in response to a July 1950 report of a Conservative Party public meeting entitled 'Schoolchildren being Taught Communism' [YMA/WF/183(b)]. For an account of the red scare in education, see: Mathew R. Kavanagh, 'British Communism and the Politics of Education' (PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2016), 164–70.
10. Basil Rawson, 'Educational and Social Values of Camping' – lecture given at International Helper course, 1964, London. *Falcons Outlook*, no. 6, December 1964 [YMA/WF/339].
11. Wally Poole, 'International Camps', lecture.
12. Souvenir Programme [YMA/WF/184]; 'Bulletin 13th August 1951' [YMA/WF/336].
13. *Falcons Outlook*, no. 6, December 1964 [YMA/WF/339].
14. 'Comments on the 1950 International Camp – Austria' [YMA/WF/152].
15. Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 1957 [YMA/WF/4A].
16. Leslie Paul, 'Democracy, Education and Leadership', *Helper* 5, no. 5, April 1941 [YMA/WF/333].
17. *IFM Report: International Helper Course 1964: International Camp Work* [YMA/WF/166] (emphasis added).
18. *The Rocket* No: 2, issued by the Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale for promoting the International Red Settlement [YMA/WF/182], 3.
19. 'Letter from Woodcraft Folk to members dated 12 July 1947' [YMA/WF/182].
20. Report on the 1951 Helper School on camping in the *Third Biennial Report of the IFS* [YMA/WF/156].
21. 'International Camp of the Red Falcons in Austria', 27 February 1950 [YMA/WF/183(a)] (emphasis added).
22. See '*Junges Europe* – Zeitung für all lagerteilhammer' nos. 1 to 4 [YMA/WF/154].
23. Björn Lundberg, *Naturliga Medborgare: Friluftsliv och medborgarfostran i scoutrörelsen och Unga Örnar, 1925–60* [Natural Citizens: Outdoor Life and Civic Education in the Scout Movement and Young Eagles] (Lund: Arkiv förlag, 2018), 199.
24. Lundberg, *Naturliga Medborgare*, 198–201.
25. Woodcraft Folk Newsletter, 20 August 1964, by General Secretary Margaret White [YMA/WF/M3199/FH41].
26. A report of the school is in *Falcons Outlook*, no. 6, December 1964 [YMA/WF/339].
27. Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 1964 [YMA/WF/4B].
28. *Junges Europe* – 'Zeitung für all lagerteilnehmer' [Newspaper for all participants], no. 1, April 1952 [YMA/WF/154].
29. I. O. Evans, 'Why We Have Ceremonies', *Helper* 4, no. 4, June 1951 [YMA/WF/333].
30. Souvenir Programme [YMA/WF/184].
31. *The Rocket* No: 3, issued by Arbeiders Jeugd Centrale for promoting the International Red Settlement [YMA/WF/182]. Also *Vriendschap*, the newspaper of the International Red Settlement – English language edition [YMA/WF/182]. See also a handwritten record of their trip by Snowdrop [Rona Gundry] [YMA/WF/182].
32. This song first appears in the 1950 *Songs for All Folk* and is clearly intended as a popular presentation of who the Woodcraft Folk are [YMA/WF/361/9].
33. Lundberg, *Naturliga Medborgare*, 194.
34. 'Bornelederen', no. 3, June 1960 [YMA/WF/162].
35. Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 1957 [YMA/WF/4A].
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37. 'The Principles of the IFM Applied', *Falcons Outlook*, no. 4, 1963 [YMA/WF/339].
38. Interview by the author with Andy Piercy (January 2022), and with Tom Searle (January 2022).
39. 'Woodcraft Folk International Children's Camp 1967', Booklet for camp at Normanby Hall, 29 July–12 August [YMA/WF/190].

40. 'The Woodcraft Folk International Children's Camp Song Book, Normanby Hall' [YMA/WF/M3199/FH41].
41. See [YMA/WF/190] and [YMA/WF/M3199/FH41].
42. *Falcon's Outlook*, 1–2/68; and 'International Falcon Movement Österreichische Kinderfreunde No 2: IFM-CAMP 1968, Dobriach, Austria' [YMA/WF/170].

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6

From international friendship to international solidarity

Douglas Bourn

Internationalism could be said to be part of the DNA of the Woodcraft Folk. Throughout its history there has been an ongoing commitment to promoting an international outlook throughout all its activities. Though framed initially as a conscious alternative to the imperialist and nationalist outlooks of other youth organisations, in the post-war years the Woodcraft Folk's international work was framed as promoting international friendship through international exchanges. In recent decades, a new emphasis upon solidarity and support to oppressed and marginalised communities around the world has come to the fore.

This chapter reflects on how this move beyond promoting international friendship through international exchanges, as discussed in [Chapter 5](#), involved a more direct educational emphasis on promoting a sense of global social justice. Global social justice is seen here in terms of wanting the world to have greater social and economic equity, that all peoples have the right to have their voices heard, and that inequalities exist within and between nation states.¹ The major focus of this chapter is the 1980s, as this was the decade which saw these changes being initiated – a decade which included not only the first ever international camp with delegations from Latin America, Africa and South Asia but also major new educational projects which integrated this new emphasis on global social justice into the day-to-day work of the organisation.

The chapter also explores how this emphasis on global social justice, and the Woodcraft Folk's educational work on campaigning against apartheid in particular, became linked to a broader anti-racist programme and the emergence of a distinctive anti-racist strategy. A concluding question that is posed is whether, despite the clear evidence of

a changed approach within the Woodcraft Folk since the 1980s, there remain dangers of this being more symbolic than real, and whether there remains a potential contradiction between an international friendship perspective which emphasises, in the words of Woodcraft's 1983 constitution, 'One Race – the Human Race' and a conscious anti-racist educational approach.

Internationalism

An international outlook has been part of the history of the labour, co-operative and socialist movements, and in many countries there has been a close link between international solidarity and challenging the influence of nationalism, forms of jingoism and imperialism. This can be seen throughout the history of the labour movement in the UK, although the influence of colonial thinking could be said to have been very influential until at least the 1970s and 1980s.

Regarding youth work, there has been a similar tradition of promoting international links and co-operation, although in the case of UK youth groups such as the Scouts, Guides and Boys Brigade this was framed within a dominant narrative of imperialist thinking for the first 60 or 70 years of their existence.²

Yet what is less clear in both the labour movement and youth organisations is what was meant by having an international outlook or being internationalist. While opposition to imperialism was voiced within the British labour movement throughout the twentieth century, in practice the Labour Party up to the 1960s accepted the UK's role as a colonial power.³ Although the broader labour movement consistently opposed the most extreme forms of nationalism, the defence of national interests dominated thinking and policies, particularly during the Cold War era. Internationalism can be seen as promoting a sense of universalism and moving beyond national boundaries, but in reality, at least within the history of the labour movement in the UK, it was more rhetoric than reality.⁴

In youth work, many voluntary organisations helped to develop international bodies.⁵ The Scouts and Guides, for example, are world-wide movements, and international exchanges between young people within their organisations have been a feature of their activities since the 1920s.⁶ But their sense of internationalism was rooted in a contradictory perspective that was nationalistic. Internationalism was seen in terms of reaching out to the wider world but on English terms linked to the

Empire. From the 1960s onwards, however, a much broader approach to international work emerged in these organisations, with an emphasis on friendship and intercultural learning.⁷

Woodcraft Folk and internationalism

The Woodcraft Folk, on the other hand, has had from its foundation in 1925 an internationalist outlook. This was based, as its founder Leslie Paul stated, on a reaction to the overt nationalism and militarism existing in other youth organisations, as well as the need for a new educational narrative for young people of international co-operation and friendship. As mentioned in [Chapter 5](#), the organisation affiliated to the Socialist Education International, and its sense of internationalism was built on a strong sense of collectivism, peace and working in partnership with similar bodies around the world. In his *The Republic of Children*, Paul said the role of the Woodcraft Folk had become more important because of the threat of war:

It is the task of the Woodcraft Folk, and its international associates, in this decade to keep alive – nay, to cause to grow – those human values which reaction is attempting to destroy.⁸

A tangible example of this is the development of close links with similar organisations elsewhere in Europe from the 1920s into the 1930s, particularly in Austria, and the beginning of delegations to international camps abroad and hosting children at Woodcraft camps. Another example, in the late 1930s, is the hosting of children from the Basque country at Woodcraft camps during the Spanish Civil War.

As discussed in the [introduction](#), although the Second World War caused major tensions within the Woodcraft Folk about whether its leaders should support the war effort or not, this internationalist outlook survived in the form of a shared commitment to building a lasting peace at the end of the war. The Woodcraft Folk played a major role in helping the establishment of the International Falcon Movement after 1945 as a means for developing international exchanges that could ‘Span the World with Friendship’. However, what made it distinctive from many other organisations in Western Europe, and certainly within the UK, was its willingness to open links and exchanges with the emerging Pioneer movement in Eastern Europe through their international network CIMEA. The Woodcraft Folk’s approach to its international work from the



Figure 6.1 World Citizen badge. Author's collection.

1940s up to the 1970s can be characterised as promoting international friendship through supporting exchanges with both Western and Eastern Europe. It was rooted in a commitment to world peace and support for movements promoting nuclear disarmament.

The educational objectives of such engagement can be seen in the activities leading to the awarding of the 'World Friend' badge to 6–9-year-olds and the 'World Citizen' badge to 10–15-year-olds (as shown in [Figure 6.1](#)).

Both badges focused on recipients demonstrating some basic geographical knowledge, such as locating Britain on a world map, correspondence with young people in other countries and understanding of the International Falcon Movement. Within the editions of the *Woodcraft Way* which outlined details of each badge there was an underlying theme of 'One World and One People' and promoting a sense of world unity.⁹ This can be summarised as combining the promotion of an international outlook alongside an understanding of different cultures.

This approach continued into the 1980s, as can be seen in the 'pack' produced for leaders on international work:

International work for the Woodcraft Folk can be expressed as the development of a spirit of universal comradeship and understanding of different people and cultures and is embodied in our motto 'Span the World With Friendship'.¹⁰

This emphasis on international friendship was noted by Woodcraft Folk leaders in the volume on reminiscences produced for the organisation's sixtieth anniversary:

Each for all and all for each – that was really our motto. And friendship, throughout the world. We were brothers and sisters wherever

we might be. Whatever our colour might be. That was drummed into them. They were part of the whole world.¹¹

This approach was also seen as a means of promoting peace, despite some members being aware that its effectiveness in doing so could be questioned: 'Although it sounds idealistic that if children grow up to know each other they are less likely to want to fight each other.'¹²

It is clear from the evidence in this volume and elsewhere that this emphasis on international friendship was, in both the 1930s and again in the post-war period, a major factor in securing engagement from both children and adults:

I was keen on the Woodcraft Folk because I felt it taught my daughters more about internationalism, going to camps in Europe as well as Europeans coming to camps here.¹³

This approach to international work was not without its problems and controversy. Developing links and exchanges with Pioneer organisations in Eastern Europe resulted in considerable political criticism at the height of the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s – not only from elements within the Conservative Party and some newspapers but even within the co-operative movement itself.

This commitment to internationalism through youth exchanges can be seen as one of the Woodcraft Folk's great achievements in the post-war period. Sending delegations to places like the Soviet Union, Poland or Czechoslovakia meant that the organisation was laying the trail for other youth groups later. It also gave a practical and demonstrable example of what internationalism meant. The camps from the 1940s onwards became seen as 'our real strength, uniting members in a spirit of internationalism at a time when there were great divisions in the world'.¹⁴

So how could we summarise this sense of internationalism and to what extent did it reflect trends within the labour movement – or was there something distinct about this perspective of the Woodcraft Folk?

The best way to describe this internationalism is to interpret it as a combination of labour and socialist movement traditions and a broader, more liberal and intercultural tradition of learning about other cultures, alongside promoting the value of working collaboratively as was espoused by the co-operative movement.¹⁵

Changing nature of international youth work from the 1970s

By the late 1970s, the Woodcraft Folk's approach to international work could be seen in other youth organisations, though its continued support for links with Eastern Europe was one of its most distinctive features. This commitment to exchanges with communist countries was noted in 1994 by the chief inspector for youth work in England, Tom Wylie, who stated at a conference on international youth work: 'I would particularly like to pay tribute to the work of the Woodcraft Folk with its long-standing commitment to links with Eastern Europe in a hostile climate.'¹⁶

At the same conference, Tom Wylie also noted that youth work 'has a strong tradition of internationalism'. What he also noted was that youth work is primarily about identity, and an international dimension is an important component of enabling young people to make sense of their place and role in the world:

Our task is to expand the imagination of the young: to enable them to have a greater sense of themselves and their self-image and then to move beyond it and towards an enhanced sensibility of the world about them.¹⁷

In the 1980s, a major report on youth exchanges, the Cockerill Report, led to the creation of new structures to support programmes in Europe and beyond. This report also represented a changing approach to the value of international exchanges in terms of linking their goals to broader societal questions that went beyond the needs of the individual:

International visits and exchanges are valuable not only for personal development but as an investment in understanding for a saner future based not necessarily on peoples liking each other, but at least knowing each other better. This intrinsic diplomatic value of exchanges is rooted in and cannot be separated from their educational value, although there may be foreign policy reasons for favouring certain types of exchange, for example to designated countries.¹⁸

There had been significant progress within the wider youth service in the 1980s through the Thompson Report (1982), *Experience and Participation*, which recommended that youth workers should build awareness of the international context of their work and the need for the

youth service curriculum to reflect cultural diversity and challenge racist attitudes among young people and the wider community.

What was now emerging was increased interest not only in links with Western and now Eastern Europe but also beyond Europe through the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council.

Changing nature of internationalism within the Woodcraft Folk in the 1980s

These developments provided opportunities for the Woodcraft Folk because it was increasingly finding it difficult to play a leading role within the International Falcon Movement (IFM). In addition to concerns raised in the [previous chapter](#) about the direction of IFM, there was increasing concern about the movement's overt socialist politics and lack of engagement with educational matters. Consequently, the Woodcraft Folk changed its status from full to associate membership. This enabled the organisation to consider and develop links with a broader range of organisations across Europe and beyond. The broadening of links for the Woodcraft Folk to bodies such as *Frances et Franches Camarades* (FFC) from France and *Arci Ragazzi* from Italy were two examples in Europe of new international partners with whom the organisation could share similar educational objectives.

What was also emerging within the Woodcraft Folk was increased interest in developing links with solidarity movements. The organisation had supported republican movements in Spain in the 1930s and movements against the war in Vietnam in the 1950s and 1960s. By the 1980s, there was growing support within progressive movements in the UK to show solidarity with groups combating American imperialism in Latin America.

These movements reflected a growing interest among many young people to support campaigns and be involved in initiatives that were promoting global social justice. Such initiatives linked or saw connections between forms of inequality and oppression within their own country and those of people elsewhere in the world. Young people showed an increased interest in engaging in international volunteering, and their experiences influenced the formation and growth of organisations such as Third World First, Voluntary Services Overseas (VSO) and the campaigns of bodies such as Oxfam.¹⁹

Ironically, it was through some of the IFM organisations now emerging beyond Europe that an opportunity arose for the Woodcraft Folk to establish partnerships with youth bodies in Latin America, Africa and

Asia. The Woodcraft Folk had by the early 1980s been able to develop strong links with the funding bodies of international youth exchanges, the Youth Exchange Council (YEC) and Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC). As a result, it was able to send delegations of leaders that could lead to direct exchanges between young people and to funding. One direct result of this was a Woodcraft leaders' visit to India in 1987. Following the visit, a strategy was developed for exchanges with youth groups in India that ensured they were based on 'educational as opposed to social or cultural aims'.²⁰

These movements and trends provided an opportunity for the Woodcraft Folk to move beyond its rather 'Eurocentric' approach to internationalism.

South Africa

Throughout its history the Woodcraft Folk's activities have been influenced by broader social and political movements, and one indication of its response to these movements was its reconfiguration of its constitution in 1983. This placed emphasis on a series of key themes including peace, children's rights, the environment and 'One Race – the Human Race'. It was the Woodcraft Folk's engagement in campaigns and educational work on South Africa in the 1980s that can be seen as the most practical manifestation of this latter theme.

As early as the 1950s and 1960s, the Woodcraft Folk had increasingly become involved in supporting campaigns against apartheid in South Africa. By the early 1960s, apartheid was taking on a more authoritarian and ideological tone and progressively minded families in South Africa were finding it difficult to stay in their own country. Some moved to the UK, and if they had children they soon found a welcome home in the Woodcraft Folk. Among them, in 1963, was Esmé Goldberg and her two children. She became active in the Woodcraft Folk in North London, and from that involvement members learnt about her husband, Denis, who was serving a life sentence in South Africa alongside Nelson Mandela for his activities against apartheid. Woodcraft Folk members and groups in North London began to learn from their first-hand experience of what life was like under a racist regime.²¹

In 1985, Denis was released from gaol and came to live in the UK. Upon becoming reunited with his family, he recognised the contribution the Woodcraft Folk had played in not only supporting his family but in its educational work against apartheid. In his autobiography, *A Life for Freedom*, Denis wrote:

This organisation of 30,000 people, parents and children, took Esmé and our children under their wing when they arrived in Britain. Esmé made many good friends, and the Folk, as they always called themselves, became ever more connected to anti-racism issues and opposed apartheid in every way they could, especially through the boycott of South African fruit.²²

He began to visit Woodcraft Folk groups up and down the country, and for a period in the late 1980s and early 1990s was President of the organisation. It was through Denis and his contact with the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), set up in Tanzania to provide education for South African refugee children fleeing apartheid, that opportunities arose for joint activities and the hosting of a delegation. He also spoke at international camps in 1988 and 1995.

His influence on the Woodcraft Folk at this time cannot be overestimated. Through his unique personality and charisma, he was able to engage and inform Woodcraft Folk members of all ages on the impact of apartheid and what racism meant. Adrienne Lowe, who was Chair of the Woodcraft Folk National Council (1992–95), remembers stories about Esmé and Denis from when she first joined the Woodcraft Folk in Wimbledon. ‘I learnt about him and his role in rising up against apartheid in South Africa’, she says.

The Folk took actions against the South African regime by banning South African goods from camps. Even though it was written clearly on food order forms to the Co-op, the occasional crate of oranges would somehow get through only to be duly returned. As a teenager, I took part in anti-apartheid rallies in London and joined the picket line outside South Africa House narrowly avoiding being arrested as those around me were.²³

After Denis’ release from prison, he attended the Woodcraft Folk’s annual conference at Loughborough University, where he ‘kept us all spellbound by his inspirational address’, Adrienne recalls.

Even after 22 years in prison, he was not bitter or jaded. He was as determined as ever to see an end to racial discrimination in South Africa and would spend as long as necessary working within the ANC to achieve this. His motivational speech left me in awe of such a great orator who really believed in equality, tolerance and mutual respect.²⁴

Jess Cawley, also a former Chair of the Woodcraft Folk National Council, commented after his death that Goldberg was notable for:

... the sheer humility of a man who shunned fame but was one of the best orators I've ever heard when on the world stage ... Always with a word of encouragement and the discipline of a true comrade ready to make a huge sacrifice for the cause of his beloved country. It was an honour to know him.²⁵

At numerous annual conferences, influenced by Denis Goldberg speaking to delegates (see [Figure 6.2](#)), the Woodcraft Folk had passed resolutions



Figure 6.2 Denis Goldberg addressing Woodcraft Folk annual conference. UCL Library Special Collections, DC/15/18, Box 18, Folder 5.

condemning apartheid, and this was taken to a new level in 1986 by providing books and educational materials to the ANC-run Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. As well as the donation of goods by many groups up and down the country, the Woodcraft Folk produced an educational resource called *What We Can Do About South Africa*. This resource, as shown by its front cover in [Figure 6.3](#), was significant in that it recognised the need to see fundraising, or giving of books and other materials,



Figure 6.3 *What We Can Do About South Africa*, educational booklet. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA_M3199_FH35, Folder 1.

as the outcome of collective group activities. This ensured that behind the Woodcraft Folk's approach was one not just of charitable giving but of putting into practice an educational approach rooted in the values of social justice.

This initiative was led by a new project within the Woodcraft Folk on development education, funded by Oxfam, the Gulbenkian Foundation, Save the Children Fund and Christian Aid. This project, based in and organised from the Woodcraft Folk's Northern Office, was the first by any youth organisation in the UK that put the themes of global social and challenging inequalities, promoting international co-operation and challenging stereotypes at the heart of an educational initiative.

Development education project

Development education had emerged in the late 1970s and 1980s in the UK as an approach to learning that moved beyond just learning about the wider world. It sought to introduce themes voiced by international development agencies that pointed towards seeking a more just world. It was also an approach that encouraged moving beyond a traditional approach of fundraising combined with stereotypical images of the Global South.²⁶ A typical challenge posed by development education was the need to move beyond samosas, steel bands and saris.²⁷

This approach, while seeming to be in tune with the aims of the Woodcraft Folk, did however mean some consideration of changes in approaches and educational activities. For example, through the 1970s and into the 1980s, internationalism in the Woodcraft Folk often took the form of learning about flags of the world and dressing up in clothes from differing cultures. Even at the 1983 international camp, the activity centre on 'One Race – the Human Race' included activities such as how to wear saris 'with demonstrations from local ethnic communities'.²⁸ Securing a change in outlook and educational approach was a major challenge, as traditionally within the Woodcraft Folk the focus had been on harmony and working together rather than identifying or addressing inequalities. As the organisation began to rethink its educational work on this issue, its 'World Citizen' badge for Pioneers (aged 10 to 12 years inclusive) and Venturers (aged children 13 to 15 years inclusive) was withdrawn because of its rather stereotypical approach to differing cultures and countries.

In the 1980s, there was heightened awareness in British society of poverty in the world because of the media coverage of famine in Ethiopia

and the campaigning work of Bob Geldof leading to Live Aid in 1985. This awareness, however, could be criticised for being framed in a paternalistic way – of helping poor and starving people and giving little attention to understanding the causes of poverty and the injustices that existed in the world. The shortcomings and limitations of these initiatives and their impact have been well documented elsewhere,²⁹ but what is relevant here was that the Woodcraft Folk had become conscious of these issues. Through its development education project, it decided to take a different approach by emphasising a social justice approach to learning about development and global issues, as well as making links and connections between global issues and children's and young people's everyday experiences in the UK.

The project ran from 1986 to 1988, and its outputs included packs on *Stories for Equality* and two major resources, *Getting On with Others* for Elfins (six to nine year olds) and *Images* for Pioneers. There were also, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, materials specifically on South Africa and a *Training Handbook*.³⁰ What the resource packs particularly aimed to achieve was to connect global themes to issues of race, gender and inequalities. They did this by posing positive questions such as 'what are our common needs' and 'what do we need for a good life'. The packs then demonstrated, through comparing different country examples, how there is such inequality in achieving the things we all want to see. There was a specific activity on 'Rich World, Poor World'. The *Images* pack, for example, concluded with activities on the future and planning future scenarios.³¹

While some Woodcraft Folk leaders thought the resource packs were too much like school, this was not the dominant view among leaders. The vast majority, as shown by the engagement in the training courses the project ran, demonstrated a desire for new approaches that more directly addressed inequalities in the world and what children and young people could do to secure meaningful change. The themes identified in the resources continued after the project ended through revisions to the main curriculum for all age groups.

The materials produced on international themes, while contrasting with those produced by several other youth organisations, did reflect some of the language then becoming more evident within the wider youth service – such as participation, engagement in society and building on personal to broader societal development. The packs were produced with the aim of them being appropriate for a wide range of youth organisations, not just the Woodcraft Folk.

What the project did emphasise, and which perhaps made it more radical, was developing a 'critical awareness of things around

us', 'working together' and 'recognising we all live in an interconnected world'. Above all, the project stated that everyone has a 'role to play in the process of understanding and changing our world for the better. It sees power as a central issue, and is concerned with how this happens, who has power, and who doesn't.'

Finally, it directly addressed the need for educational activities that focused on 'systematic forms of discrimination such as racism and sexism'.³² It was this emphasis on directly addressing racism that has been one of the biggest legacies of the project, as it encouraged the organisation to rethink its theme of 'One Race – the Human Race' into a more overtly anti-racist educational approach. While anti-racist themes were evident throughout all of the activities in the materials produced by the project, Session 11 of the *Images* pack was entitled 'What We Can Do About Racism'. This moved the activities beyond a sense of international friendship to one about how groups can address and tackle racism if they see it evident in their group or wider society.

From 'One Race – the Human Race' to anti-racist education

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, 'One Race – the Human Race' came to be one of the themes of the revised constitution of the Woodcraft Folk in 1983. While the focus on 'One Race – the Human Race' could be seen as a recognition of the need for the organisation to more directly engage with issues around racism, during this period there was some difference of opinion as to the extent to which the Woodcraft Folk should take a more direct and overtly anti-racist position that went beyond multiculturalism. These debates reflected wider discussions within education and youth work in general at the time which brought, as the cultural theorist Stuart Hall stated, questions of identity to the fore.³³ This led to a questioning of multiculturalism, raising the need within all forms of learning with young people to address not only inequalities and injustices but also questions of power.³⁴

The revised 1983 constitution of the Woodcraft Folk which first spoke of 'One Race – the Human Race' also stated that 'we will take a firm and determined stand against all forms of racialism and prejudice within our society'.³⁵ This change of emphasis towards more directly addressing racism reflected concerns in wider society at the time over the rise of far-right groups and increased tensions within some multicultural communities. The 1970s and 1980s were a period of debate within all sectors of education about how young people should engage with the multicultural

society that was now so evident within UK society. Many youth organisations were themselves having these discussions, particularly in terms of the continued dominance of white faces within youth groups. While there was recognition of these debates and issues within the Woodcraft Folk, and the Development Education Project was one response to this, there was a degree of unease within the membership as to whether to take a more pro-active and distinctly anti-racist approach.

The team responsible for leading the development education project were aware of these tensions. They noted that development education activities tended to focus on topics and issues, while anti-racist work, to be effective, had to start from personal experience and outlook. The team suggested there were potential pedagogical challenges for the Woodcraft Folk because having an anti-racist educational perspective required a more proactive and clear position.³⁶

In 1986, the Woodcraft Folk received funding for an anti-racist project, which was linked to its funding for development education work, from the London Boroughs Grants Unit. The priority of the project was training in anti-racist work for white leaders. It was noted that it would be 'counter-productive to consider any detailed work with ethnic minority groups until progress has been made with existing leaders in understanding issues involved'.³⁷

In 1987, the organisation produced an anti-racist strategy that was critical of some of its past practices. In particular, it identified a tendency to think not so much in terms of 'One Race – the Human Race' but in terms of 'One Race – the Woodcraft Race'.³⁸ The strategy stated:

The Woodcraft Folk's practices may be internationalist in outlook, but are deeply rooted in British culture. This means that the image the Folk projects, whilst attempting in all good faith to be of a world outlook, is unfortunately perceived in the minds of people from ethnic minorities as mono-cultural, for whites only.³⁹

This strategy was recognised as key to the organisation, as can be seen in the front cover in [Figure 6.4](#) of the Woodcraft Folk's magazine *Focus* at the time. The strategy document went on to note that in a racist society there was a need to move beyond a multicultural outlook to one that directly addressed the root causes of inequality and power differentials in society. All too often, the strategy stated, Woodcraft Folk groups were 'white islands in black communities'. There was a recognition that terms such as 'one' and 'our' were often seen as being exclusive because they reflected a dominant cultural outlook. Specific criticism was made of



Figure 6.4 'Let's Fight Racism Together', *Woodcraft Focus* (Spring 1987). UCL Library Special Collections, Woodcraft Folk Archive DC/15/18, Box 18.

the dominant focus in the Woodcraft Folk's cultural activities being on 'white' English music, songs and dance.

The strategy made several recommendations, including adopting a distinctive anti-racist Code of Practice, encouraging people from ethnic

minorities to apply for posts and roles within the organisation, reviewing its educational programme and instituting a programme of leadership training. The strategy concluded with a call for ‘unity not uniformity’.

At the 1987 annual conference there were workshops for all delegates directly on anti-racist work which brought some of the tensions in the organisation out into the open, but the reports of those discussions suggest they were regarded as a welcome and valuable development for the organisation. The Chair of the National Council of the Woodcraft Folk, in his introduction to the 1988 annual report, noted there was a need for the organisation to challenge and move on from its ‘White Anglo-Saxon with Red Indian tendencies’ culture.⁴⁰

In the following months and years, the themes behind this strategy began to take root through anti-racist and equal opportunities working groups, but over 30 years later it is perhaps still open to debate as to the extent to which the Woodcraft Folk has become a truly anti-racist organisation, not so much in its words and deeds but in its culture and activities. What has happened is that while continuing to promote a sense of international friendship and a global outlook, there has been increasing recognition of a more pluralistic approach:

We seek to build an inclusive movement that celebrates diversity, and is welcoming to young people of all faiths and none. We affirm young people’s identities, and seek to remove the barriers that exist to their participation in our movement and in wider society.⁴¹

Towards international solidarity

This rethinking of anti-racist work went alongside a conscious decision by the leadership of the organisation, and in particular its International Committee, to have a more global approach to both its educational activities and its partnerships with similar organisations abroad. The International Committee had been reformed in 1985 with the aim of it having a more strategic role by linking international exchanges to the Woodcraft Folk’s day-to-day educational work and providing relevant resources and training materials to group leaders.

The growth of the International Falcon Movement (IFM) beyond Europe had created opportunities for developing links with organisations in Latin America, Asia and Africa, but the the Woodcraft Folk’s aim was much more than expanding its partnerships. It was also a way of connecting educational work to a sense of solidarity and commitment to

social justice. It wanted to bring directly into its educational programmes a sense of solidarity with oppressed groups around the world and themes of social justice.

Key to these changes in thinking and approach was the influence of Andy Piercy, the National Council's representative in the IFM and Chair of the Council's International Committee. In the 1980s, Andy represented the Woodcraft Folk at various IFM and other international seminars. Through attending these events, he identified a growth in interest in international children's work among a range of liberation movements and solidarity groups beyond Europe. In 1986, in a paper to the National Council he stated:

National Council needs to have a policy on contact with children's organisations of the liberation movements. The movement for example could pursue contact with the pioneer organisations of the ANC and ANS of Nicaragua. Both organisations have links with CIMEA and IFM but what should our position be?⁴²

Recognising the limited educational value of Live Aid and the potential opportunities created by the development education project, Andy Piercy stated that 'our material needs to reflect (the causes of power that are linked to) capitalism and imperialism that children can understand'.⁴³ The paper went on to highlight the importance of continuing the solidarity work with SOMAFSCO and the move beyond boycotting South African products to including educational work. What was also significant was that he made connections in these debates to combating stereotypes and to move beyond 'national costumes' as a depiction of a citizen of another nation.

Solidarity with the Western Sahara

Perhaps the most long-lasting impact of the changes in the Woodcraft Folk's approach was the way in which the organisation showed support for the Saharawi people from the Western Sahara who were living under colonial rule by Morocco. From an initial chance encounter to an offer to host children from the refugee camps in 1988, the Woodcraft Folk developed an ongoing programme of links, leaders' visits and the annual hosting of delegations well into the twenty-first century. The development of a partnership with the Western Sahara was the result of a request in a fundraising initiative of the Saharawan Aid Trust called 'Rainbow Rovers'.⁴⁴

What was significant about the development of this partnership was that, like many such initiatives, the call often came because of some form of fundraising and aid programme. What the Woodcraft Folk was able to do was to turn this link into an ongoing exchange programme, which in turn resulted in a major awareness-raising and educational programme.

This can be seen in the ways in which, in the 1990s, there were ongoing visits from Saharawi children to camps and visits by Woodcraft Folk leaders and young people to the refugee camps. The visits by the Saharawi children included homestays, receptions with local dignitaries and coverage in the local and national press.⁴⁵ Gwerin y Coed, the Woodcraft Folk in Wales, in 2001 produced a pack and ran a project on the context of the Saharawi people, and what groups could do to support them in a way that reflected a distinctive development education approach.⁴⁶

1988 international camp

The 1983 international camp included a small delegation from Sierra Leone, the first group to be hosted at an international camp from Africa. But it was the 1988 international camp, held at Weston Park in Shropshire, which saw a major development in the Woodcraft Folk's international work and could be said to be the culmination of this rethinking within the organisation of its approach to both its exchanges and its educational programme. It was significant for including delegations not only from most European countries but, for the first time, children from refugee camps in Western Sahara and delegations from Nicaragua, Palestine and the ANC school (SOMAFCO) in Tanzania. There were also delegations for the first time from Algeria and Cyprus.⁴⁷ The final camp report noted that such delegations provided:

... the opportunity had to express our solidarity with the people of South Africa, the people of the Western Sahara, and the people of Nicaragua in their struggles.

These will probably be amongst the most cherished memories of the camp.

Their value will be not in the scrapbook but if they continue to inspire and motivate the future actions of the organisation.⁴⁸

The report from the delegation that hosted the Nicaraguan delegation stated: 'The ANC, Western Sahara and Nicaraguan delegations elevated

the whole camp activity. For the first time the camp really felt like an international camp.’⁴⁹

The international nature of the camp, the largest ever to that date in terms of number of foreign delegations, could also be seen in its educational programme which included ‘theme days’ such as ‘Feed the World’, ‘Global Powerhouse’ and ‘Save Our Forests’. As one young person commented in a report of the camp: ‘My life will never be the same again.’⁵⁰

Building on this sense of solidarity and global outlook

From the 1980s onwards, the Woodcraft Folk continued to build on these major advances that had taken place in the 1980s. In 1989, the International Committee had as one of its objectives to:

- Explore work beyond Europe, but based around existing contacts with priorities being India, Somafo, Nicaragua and Western Sahara with consideration also given to Palestine.⁵¹

Through the 1990s there were regular visits by children from Western Sahara and also from Nicaragua and Palestine. At the 1995 International Camp in the New Forest, there were delegations from the post-apartheid South Africa, Argentina and Peru.⁵² The camp programme included special activities on refugees and children’s rights and, as the annual report of the organisation stated, there was now a strength to the Woodcraft Folk’s internationalism that included not only exchanges but solidarity work and education on group nights.

A revised *Pioneer Leaders Handbook*, published in 1991, showed this ‘respect for different lifestyles and values’ alongside promotion of an ‘international outlook’.⁵³ However, a planned International Friendship Pack, which aimed to include materials from Oxfam and other agencies and take a more distinctly anti-racist approach, was never published. This was despite the re-emergence in the 1990s of a working group on anti-racist work. It is evident, however, that from the late 1990s onwards, a change to a more overtly anti-racist approach could be seen in policy statements and camps, with reference being made to plurality of perspectives and voices. The 2018 annual report, for example, had a section on increasing diversity and inclusion and noted that 15 per cent of its participants in groups had a background other than ‘White British’.⁵⁴

Conclusion

This decade of the 1980s was critical in terms of the changes in policies and debates around international work. Not only did the Woodcraft Folk begin to expand its international links beyond Europe but it brought a new approach to what was meant by internationalism. From the focus on international friendship that had dominated in the Cold War era, by the time the Berlin Wall came down in 1989 there was a new, added dimension to international work around the concept of international solidarity and support to liberation movements. What was, however, distinctive about this approach was that it was much more than a political or ideological sense of solidarity. It was rooted in an educational approach towards social justice that promoted understanding of power and inequalities in the world.

The debates in the Woodcraft Folk around how it should engage in anti-racist training started the process of rethinking the extent to which there should be an emphasis on ‘One Race – the Human Race’, as well as the need to recognise a plurality of perspectives and give more emphasis to a more directly anti-racist educational approach. While these issues were not unique to the Woodcraft Folk, the organisation began in the 1980s to connect these questions to a more global and internationalist approach.

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Part III

Woodcraft Folk culture

Cultural interweavings of English and German youth movements, 1920–1960

Susanne Rappe-Weber

The history of the Woodcraft Folk is unique and at the same time interwoven with comparable efforts in other countries. This chapter examines its specific connections to youth movements in Germany. The twentieth-century rise of social movements originating from young people developed in response to challenges and opportunities within societies as a response to industrialisation and greater liberalisation.¹ From the turn of the twentieth century onwards, youth communities' own forms of socialisation, cultural practices and intellectual concepts were initially developed in specific areas but quickly spread across city and country borders through media and personal contacts. In this respect, the Wandervögel and the Bündische Jugend on the German side, and the Woodcraft Folk on the British side, were not autonomous phenomena but rather movements that were interconnected in many ways.

Written sources on this intertwined history are available in varied forms and are now well archived.² Until now, the focus of youth movement research has been on the period before 1945 and, in particular, on groups influenced by middle-class milieus and selected personal contacts. In addition, youth organisations such as Woodcraft Folk, Die Falken and their international associations such as the International Falcon Movement – Socialist Education International have tended to focus on their own histories.³

Based on these research findings, this chapter will examine cultural connections and the extent to which these served as a starting point for a new European orientation after 1945.

It reviews the comparisons between German and English youth movements up to 1933, the impact of the Nazi period in Germany, the post-1945 period and the impact of a broader European outlook. The chapter will focus on music and particularly folk songs and songbooks as a way of highlighting the connections between the two youth movements. This cultural dimension ensured mutual understanding across divides, which became important in the situations after the two world wars. The practice of making songbooks is taken into account because it reflects the selection processes and value decisions of the editors and thus provides information about the respective ideological orientations. At the same time, songbooks must take into account the wishes of the addressees if they are to be successful in group practice. The innovative period between 1918 and 1933 was of particular importance, as will be explained below.

German and English youth movements, 1900–1933

To understand how youth movements arose in Germany and England, it is appropriate first of all to recognise the difference in secondary school structures because they provided contrasting opportunities for extra-curricular activities.⁴ In Germany, middle-class male youths attending secondary school between the ages of 14 and 21 often had free time in the late afternoons and evenings, on Sundays and during holidays. Against this background, independent groups developed from the end of the nineteenth century, first in Berlin and Hamburg, and then in many other large and medium-sized cities, with a focus on walking and hiking as communal activities. This was the birth of the Wandervögel, which was soon complemented by similar groups for young women.

In England, for middle-class boys attending secondary school there was a greater emphasis on sports and, with the boarding school structure, there was inevitably less free time. For working-class boys (and also girls), up until outbreak of war in 1914, there was an expectation that they would contribute to the family's livelihood from a relatively early age.⁵

In the German Wandervögel, the main activity was hiking in the areas surrounding the places of residence. During holidays, these were extended to tours lasting several weeks to explore regional features. There is also evidence of a few visits to other European countries. These include a visit by the Alt-Wandervögel to England in 1909, during which meeting English Scouts was one of the highlights of the five-week trip.⁶

The 1914–18 World War had a major impact on young people's perceptions of other countries. There was a rise in Germany of more nationalistic youth movements with a greater emphasis on camaraderie and

less emphasis on rules and educational principles.⁷ The positive impact of this was the potential development of closer friendships, but the negative impact was more bullying. Within these organisations, the ways in which their camps were organised changed. Larger tent camps became a typical form of organisation. The rise of the Hitler Youth was helped by these changes in youth movements' organisation, leading to more totalitarian approaches.

Interrelationships in the founding of the Scouts in England and Germany

When the German naval doctor Alexander Lion became aware of *Scouting for Boys* shortly after its publication, he could look back on a career comparable to that of its English author Robert Baden-Powell. Lion had also taken part in the European colonial wars in Africa and had come to the conclusion that the male youth of his home country lacked the awareness and practical preparation to meet the challenges of serving the state, particularly overseas.⁸ His translation of *Scouting for Boys* into German under the title *Das Pfadfinderbuch* mainly contains instructions and advice on mental and physical training for young men.⁹ Together with his comrade, the officer Maximilian Bayer, who also had served in Africa, Lion succeeded in establishing Scout groups in many German cities based on the English model in the sense of functioning as pre-military training. Groups of girls, similar to the Girl Guides, also emerged. *The Scout Book for Young Girls* was published for them, based on a model of girls as future citizens.¹⁰

The founding of the Scouts in Germany met with reservations among the German public. On the one hand, the strong involvement of Jewish sponsors and supporters was denounced. This anti-Semitism did not stop at the assimilated, highly decorated military man Alexander Lion. On the other hand, the founders had to deal with the accusation of 'Englishness'.¹¹ Coinciding with an arms race between Great Britain and the German Reich, the adaptation of an English educational concept for German youth appeared inappropriate.

Kibbo Kift as a source for the reorientation of the 'Bündische'

As a result of Germany's defeat in the First World War, the concept of the German Scouts, which had been strongly oriented towards military practices and needs, came under pressure to reform. New ideas were needed

to educate young men to lead a healthy life close to nature and, above all, to bring group life into line with the times. The inspiration for this came from the pre-war Wandervögel and from North American writings (E. T. Seton), but also from contact with the English Scouting critic John Hargrave.¹² The German Scout and publisher Franz Ludwig Habbel translated and published Hargrave's main texts immediately after they appeared in England. In doing so, he clearly emphasised the English origin of these books by also printing the forewords and not adding any German text adaptations. Expressions such as 'Kibbo Kift' or 'Woodcraft' were conveyed to the German readership without any linguistic translation:

Kibbo Kift is an old English expression which literally means proof of great strength but was interpreted to mean the ideal of outdoor learning. Thus, we speak today in the Woodcraft camps of Kibbo Kift and mean the thought and aim of the great track into the open and education in free air.¹³

In Germany, the perceived need to reform Scouting opened up a way to integrate Kibbo Kift's suggestions. By contrast, in England, Hargrave, as a critic of Scouting, had to leave Baden-Powell's Scouting organisation and found a new league. Due to the already weak links to world Scouting and the great importance of decentralised structures in Germany, the new Scouts were able to combine the cultural practices of the Wandervögel and Scouting with 'tribal education'. Despite an ideological interpretation of community life, they could also remain Scouts at the same time. The organisational backbone of the new association was no longer the division into age groups but the amalgamation of age-diverse 'tribes' into an archaic educational community. Elements of German nationalist, anti-Semitic and männerbündian ideologies found their way into many youth leagues, so that this orientation became a dominant branch of the 'Bündische' movement.¹⁴ In his book *Kibbo Kift: Die Waldverwandtschaft*, Habbel offered his own interpretation of the differentiation from other youth cultures: 'A new humanity in his spirit can only be thought of if the Scout Law frees itself from civilization and speaks from the depths of the forests.'¹⁵ In fact, community education in tribes, each headed by a 'chief', was to produce an elite for 'the whole', named by Habbel as the 'new realm'.¹⁶ A consequence of this approach was a selection process that resulted in removal of those who were deemed not to be fit enough.

This ideological development had its counterpart on the female side.¹⁷ Elise von Hopffgarten, who was influenced by the women's movement, was at the head of the German Girl Scouts until the end of the war, when she was replaced by Katharina 'Erda' Hertwig as leader of the Bund

Deutscher Pfadfinderinnen in 1922.¹⁸ Hertwig, a member of the German National People's Party and the Prussian state parliament, shaped the association by employing neo-Germanic ideas. But at the same time, she focused on the self-confident contribution of women as citizens. She did not refer to an imaginary, nature-romantic tribal society but oriented the girls of her alliance towards the Germanic heritage, when strong women like Thusnelda fought against Rome.¹⁹ Hertwig represented her association at numerous international meetings and cultivated personal connections with England, initially formed while studying there to learn the language.²⁰ A highlight of her international work was her participation in the World Congress of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts in the USA in 1926.

The Neupfadfinder and the Mädchenpfadfinderbund were part of the Bündische Jugend. In a narrower sense, this specific milieu only comprised around 40,000 young people in Germany between 1920 and 1933. However, its style-forming effect reached far beyond this inner circle, because 'the Bündische' was adapted by many circles. In fact, Bündische youth cultures found their way into a wide variety of religious, sporting and proletarian associations, reaching a total of around 40 per cent of all young people in organisational terms.²¹

Woodcraft Folk and the Falcons

In both England and Germany, socialist youth organisations experienced a strong boost after 1920, leading to the founding of the Woodcraft Folk in England in 1925. In Germany, the Weimar Youth Day of 1920 called for the development of independent educational and cultural orientation of the Falcons in contrast to the party-political youth work of the social democrats and socialists (see [Figure 7.1](#)).²² Cultural activities became seen as the main focus of activities for young workers, not class struggle.²³ Despite ideological differences, there were several points of contact with middle-class youth bodies, and evidence from the biographies of individuals shows movement between the classes. The similarity in leisure activities between the middle- and working-class youth groups can be seen not only in their programmes but within some 'Falken' groups with close affinity with other youth bodies.²⁴

International socialist movements after the First World War were divided into two camps: those allied with the Soviet Union and communist parties, and those which saw their links to be with social democratic parties. These divisions were reflected in youth organisations. The founding of the SEI (Socialist Educational International) in Hanover in 1924, supported in particular by the German educator and member of



Figure 7.1 Kinderfreunde tent camp at Spring Festival of Wilmersdorf Youth League in Brieseland, 1930. Illustration courtesy of Archiv der Deutschen Jugendbewegung.

the Reichstag Kurt Löwenstein (1885–1939), was an important milestone as it led to collaborative initiatives between social democratic youth movements across Europe.²⁵ The organisation of the International Children’s Republic Camp in Brighton in 1937 demonstrated both the organisational strength of the Woodcraft Folk and the degree of international cohesion that had now been achieved, despite socialist organisations in Germany being banned by the Nazi regime and their supporters massively persecuted.

The folk song as an innovative youth culture

The ‘Bündische’ youth culture and its spread into proletarian milieus beyond the German borders to England would have been inconceivable without the newly awakened interest in music and dance. Community and group affiliation became particularly attractive through communal dancing and music-making. This approach included a return to interest in older cultural practices related to songs, dance and crafts, and became reinterpreted as a signature of modern youth cultural practice.²⁶ This critique of industrial modernity could be seen through such publications as the songbook *Zupfgeigenhansl*, first published by Hans Breuer in 1909.²⁷ The Heidelberg medical student had become acquainted with

the Wandervögel in Berlin-Steglitz as a schoolboy and found the existing school, soldier, church and folk songbooks to be unsuitable for group life.²⁸ This criticism motivated his group to compile their own collection. They eventually published around 260 songs, some of which are just based on listening to people sing and writing them down for the first time in musical notation and lyrics. The graphic silhouette motifs for the book supported the prominent position of 'Zupf' as 'the' songbook of the Wandervögel and the youth movement to this day. The language of the songs is German throughout, including its dialects. Songs from other countries or in other languages were not included. Extra additions also contributed to the spread of the *Zupfgeigenhansl*, for example, the indication of guitar accompaniment chords, which were printed directly above the staves – a practice that characterises every good song publication today. Numerous other song collections were produced based on this model: it became a common practice for Wandervögel groups to create their own song booklets and, where possible, have them printed. Dances and dance instructions, arrangements for instruments and polyphony expanded the repertoire.

Some budding music teachers recognised early on that the newly awakened interest of young people in self-determined singing required improved music lessons. The new song material also seemed to revitalise approaches to singing at school. School singing, characterised by religious songs or patriotic hymns, had little connection to the established middle-class music scene in concert societies and opera houses. Pupils therefore usually pursued ambitious musical interests privately, for example through piano or singing lessons, but found no opportunities for this at school itself. Fritz Jöde, born in Hamburg in 1887 as a worker's son and influenced by social democracy, became a formative innovator in music education. As a young teacher, he had already been looking for ways to bring musical education to educationally disadvantaged classes since 1908. Among other things, he was involved in the Hamburg Volksheim, an institution founded in 1901 on the model of London's Toynbee Hall.²⁹

After the First World War, Fritz Jöde and like-minded music teachers, who had also had positive experiences in the Wandervögel, launched a wealth of initiatives that had a long-term impact on public music culture in Germany. In addition to the training of teachers for music at all school levels, the establishment of communal music schools and the publication of song and instrumental playbooks, new forms of communal singing also helped to define the public image of the youth music movement.

Morris dancing

One of Jöde's comrades-in-arms, the Berlin-born primary school teacher Georg Götsch (1895–1965), had been involved since 1921 as a leader in a music association inspired by the Wandervögel, the Märkische Spielgemeinde.³⁰ He was also a member of the leadership circle of the Musikantengilde (Musicians' Guild), which was organised throughout Germany and brought together the professional advocates of the youth music movement (see Figure 7.2). When Götsch took a leave of absence from teaching in 1924 and began studying music, the activities of the Spielgemeinde intensified, which in addition to singing also cultivated dancing and amateur dramatics. Parts of this choir community of around 80 people undertook extensive choir trips, including to England, Norway and Holland.

The partnership with England was of particular importance, motivated by Götsch's friendship with Rolf Gardiner (1887–1962). Gardiner was born in 1902, the son of a wealthy British Egyptologist who had married the daughter of an ennobled assimilated Viennese Jewish civil servant. He grew up in Berlin and England and had been a Scout and, briefly,



Figure 7.2 Fritz Jöde conducting a choir of the Angestellten-Gewerkschaftsjugend. Illustration by Julius Grob and courtesy of Archiv der Deutschen Jugendbewegung.

a member of Kibbo Kift. Even as a schoolboy, and later as a student at Cambridge, he developed a wide range of interests, some of which grew directly out of his contact with the German youth movement. He communicated his experiences on his travels, seeing himself as an ambassador for youth, thereby influencing the international youth movement network. He was committed to making the German youth movement known in England and attempted to found similar 'Bünde', notably his 'Springhead Ring', established in 1930. However, his close ties to Germany put him in a difficult position at the beginning of the Second World War, especially as he had expressly welcomed the Nazi takeover in 1933 as well as Anschluss with Austria in 1938 and saw no reason to stop his British-German activities until the eve of the Second World War. This attitude, which brought him into limited contact with fascist circles in England, has so far overshadowed our perception of the range of his activities.³¹

The friendship between Götsch and Gardiner began in 1926 and lasted a lifetime. In the same summer, the Märkische Spielgemeinde took 23 singers on their first trip to England for several weeks. With Gardiner's support, they travelled from Southampton via Bath and Worcester to Oxford and London, a visit repeated in modified forms in 1928, 1931 and 1936 with Götsch's renamed 'Deutscher Singkreis'.³² Concerts, church music and auditions, as well as ad hoc performances, were held in many places; the programme included folk songs, madrigals and canons but also motets by Johann Sebastian Bach. The Spielgemeinde and Deutscher Singkreis succeeded in reaching very different audiences, not least because of the fact that of 32 musical events, two took place in adult education centres and three in workers' clubs, while the others were held in churches and schools.

The ideological charge of this activity is unmistakable, as it was about the common 'Nordic' character of the English and Germans, that is, a 'racial' argument that was set against political tensions during and after the First World War, and which was imagined as the basis for future friendship between nations. The eugenic demands derived from this also circulated in the Woodcraft folk milieu.³³ The Spielgemeinde and Deutscher Singkreis found such fantasies realised above all in dance, as mediated by Gardiner. As Götsch explained:

For these dances are a general Germanic good ... The return to the indispensable wisdom and art of living of these dances is in England a related and just as important phenomenon of recovery from rationalism as the rediscovery of old music in Germany by the youth and the awakening of the youth through old music.³⁴

In England, the visitors had become acquainted above all with the contra dances and the Morris dances, the latter performed at Gardiner's insistence exclusively by men, which quickly found their way into German ensemble music through the exchange of sheet music. The shared interest in pre-Baroque and early Baroque musical styles led to a wealth of rediscoveries.³⁵

The intensity of community life in the Spielgemeinde and the Deutscher Singkreis finally resulted in the plan for a centre in Frankfurt an der Oder. This, the Musikheim, was actually realised in 1929 with the support of the Prussian government and was primarily used for further musical training for Prussian elementary school teachers but also for leisure activities and training courses as part of adult education. One of the instructors was Rolf Gardiner, who held courses in English contra dancing, sword and Morris dancing there. In 1931, a meeting with the 'English Dancers and Players' took place in the Musikheim. A member of this ensemble from England, Katharine Trevelyan, became Georg Götsch's first wife a short time later.³⁶

Songs and songbooks in youth associations

Youth associations compiling their own songbooks became a widespread practice. However, the forms these songbooks took varied enormously. They ranged from simple publications for specific events to personal compilations for personal use or for group events, and from bound songbooks of the respective associations to more elaborate publications by publishers. The *Zupfgeigenhansl* had already set the standard for this in Germany, but its wide distribution was not matched by the more recent, specific compilations.

The interplay between the movements, with their demand for printed singing and playing music and the newly emerging, partly commercial publishing industry, demonstrates the innovative character of these youth cultures.³⁷ In Germany, quite a few internationally active music publishers emerged as a result, some of which still exist today, including Bärenreiter, Voggenreiter and Mösseler. The international co-operation is reflected in the magazine *Pro musica. Organ für Neue Musik*, which was published in 1932–33 by Kallmeyer (Germany), Hansen (Denmark) and Oxford University Press (Great Britain). It printed contemporary music for musical amateurs, selected and edited by the directors of the Berlin Youth and Folk Music School, including Fritz Jöde.³⁸ In terms of song selection and careful design, the publications of these publishers clearly stood out from older works, but also from pure school or church songbooks and commercial products for singing societies.

Walther Hensel's *Finkensteiner Blätter*, for example, were successful and exemplary, appearing as single sheets in a monthly series of ten volumes published by Bärenreiter Verlag from 1923 onwards. The Finkensteiner Bund, named after the location of the first meeting, thus represented a branch of the youth movement that saw its musical activities as cultural work for its own ethnic group, the German-speaking minority in the Czech Republic.³⁹ Accordingly, the *Finkensteiner Blätter* contained German folk songs, some of which were taken from the *Zupfgeigenhansl*, set for choral singing in several voices and notated for elaborate lute playing.⁴⁰

These examples are contrasted with songbooks from the 1920s and 1930s like *The Ashen Stave: Campfire Songs by Little Otter* (1928), Woodcraft Folk's own first book, in which Leslie Paul presented 12 new songs for the groups. It contains a manageable selection of songs and uses popular melodies with new lyrics to support Woodcraft activities through communal singing.⁴¹ Comparable songbooks were also published by the various youth bodies in Germany, such as *Die Falken singen* (Songs for the Workers Youth Movement), which appeared around 1930.⁴²

Misuse of music in the Hitler Youth

The successes of the youth music movement in Germany – in particular the professionalisation of music lessons in schools and the establishment of numerous 'young' choirs and instrumental groups – were ideologically transformed by the Nazi state from 1933 onwards, while existing workers' choirs were closed down as organisations hostile to the Nazis.⁴³ Youth organisations such as the Falcons were of course also declared opponents of the Nazis. Many musically trained group leaders who were politically and ideologically sympathetic found new fields of activity in the singing and playing groups of the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls. The 'Third Reich' also needed new compositions and professional musicians in all genres to serve the 'Nazi people's community'. New songs with Nazi content increasingly shaped the prescribed communal singing in state youth organisations, schools and finally among the soldiers. This instrumentalisation of folk music reached its organisational peak in the staging of National Socialist celebrations and consecration ceremonies, for example at the Reich Party Congresses in Nuremberg. The music at the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936 was a special case because this international event was not one-sidedly based on propaganda but once again allowed a certain cultural range.⁴⁴ Here, the Morris dancers under

the direction of Rolf Gardiner were in demand as part of the accompanying cultural programme.⁴⁵

When oppositional youth groups resisted the regime, certain songs and musical styles often played an important role in identifying each other.⁴⁶ In the youthful working-class milieus of the Ruhr area or around Leipzig, for example, autonomous cliques repeatedly established themselves.⁴⁷ After 1945, the years of misuse of music in the service of National Socialist community building and warfare changed the attitude of many Germans towards group singing and folk songs in particular. Although in some places singing simply continued, omitting explicitly anti-Semitic or militaristic lyrics, democratisation also provided the impetus for new repertoires and styles in amateur music groups. The opportunity to support a social reorientation with the means of music was closely linked to looking beyond national borders.

Music education in the cause of peace

An example of the democratic reorientation of singing and music-making is the association of teachers from different countries who came together in 1949 as the Sonnenberg Circle, initiated after a Danish–German meeting involving German prisoners of war and Danish resistance fighters.⁴⁸ From modest beginnings, a network with many national member organisations developed (the Sonnenberg Circle consisted of 24 national organisations in 2024).⁴⁹ The explicit aim was to ‘create confidence for a new democratic start in Germany’ by conveying a comprehensive understanding of political education via the Sonnenberg members.⁵⁰

During the weeks spent working together in the rapidly expanding seminar house, singing and making music played an important role as the basis for community building. However, there was a lack of appropriate songbooks for the circle’s international aspirations. Fritz Jöde was therefore commissioned to develop a representative songbook to express the ‘spirit of Sonnenberg’ and support the educational work of the members instead of an initial, provisional collection.⁵¹ Fritz Jöde, now retired but still active in the interests of the youth music movement, worked together with his young colleague Willi Gundlach. As a result, the Sonnenberg songbook was published in 1957 with a trilingual subtitle: *Liederbuch / Song-Book / Recueil de Chants. Lieder für internationale Begegnungen / Songs for International Meetings / Chants pour les Rencontres Internationales*.⁵²

This songbook reflected a pacifist and democratic attitude with a new, deeper understanding of future European unification through the mutual knowledge of songs and song cultures. The book contains songs

from 29 countries. German and Austrian songs make up only 17 per cent of the total; 30 per cent come from Scandinavia and 10 per cent from Great Britain. Each song is printed in the original language as well as in German. The melodies are provided with a second voice in bass register as well as indication of the chord accompaniment (with guitar). The names of the sources and translators indicate the broad network on which the editors were able to rely.⁵³

The songbooks that were most used in youth and choir groups were less ambitious in terms of music and peace policy, but also contained references to the editors' understanding of international issues. A traditional German folk song repertoire often formed the basis, varied by specific songs for the respective group. The *Mundorgel*, for example, caused a sensation in Christian circles because of its many joke songs. It was first published in 1953 in a small format and has since been expanded and republished many times. Internationality was dealt with under headings such as 'The globe squeaks and squirms', with many stereotypes.⁵⁴ In youth alliance circles, *Der Turm*, which was published in 1952 in unbound issues, served as a reference and source for their own compilations.⁵⁵ The third issue of the *Turm* from 1953 was already dedicated to songs 'in foreign languages'. Songs that had been discovered in other (European) countries were recorded with great freedom, some were translated, some were rewritten and some were printed in the original. The 'discovery' of songs also took place under violent circumstances, such as those of German soldiers in occupied countries during the world wars. Now, however, these songs were to be practised in groups in preparation for planned group trips by young people, for example, to Spain or France. In contrast, the song 'Ich kenne Europas Zonen' (No. 408) articulates the young generation's scepticism towards political positions and visions: 'Ich kenne Europas Zonen / vom Ural bis westlich Paris / Die Händel der großen Nationen / der Klassen und Konfessionen / sind für mich nur fauler Beschiß' (I know Europe's zones / from the Urals to western Paris / The dealings of the great nations / of classes and denominations / are for me just dirty tricks). Whether youthfully curious, disillusioned and sceptical, or politically ambitious, songbooks show how young people in Germany after 1945 took up the new perspective of 'Europe', thus relativising the chauvinistic indoctrination of the Nazi era and being open to new sounds.

'Europe' as a cultural perspective in the post-war period

These observations tie in with the pro-European work of political actors as part of the European Youth Campaign.⁵⁶ From 1952 onwards, in the

slipstream of Europe's economic integration, a movement was organised which – partly politically controlled, partly initiated by young people themselves – aimed to convey pro-European experiences to a new 'European generation'. The focus was on reconciliation between France and Germany, symbolised by the initial youth camp at the Loreley on the Rhine, the border river between the two countries, in the summer of 1952. Over the next few years, educational work was carried out with the help of ideologically diverse youth organisations in the individual countries, such as the internationally well-connected social democratic Falcons, who organised French–German encounters and democratic learning with their IUSY camps in the spirit of the campaign.

In the field of music, a number of European choirmasters, including some men who had previously served as soldiers in enemy armies, came together in the same spirit under the motto 'Europa cantat'.⁵⁷ They developed a transnational event format that was intended to provide the participants with intensive musical but also communal experiences. Since 1960, the multi-day Europa Cantat Festival has been held regularly in different European cities, such as in Leicestershire (England) in 1976. On the German side, this international work was shaped by the Arbeitskreis Musik in der Jugend (Music in Youth Working Group), in which Fritz Jöde and other music educators had come together after 1945. French and German songs determined the first *Europa Cantat* songbook with the prelude 'Réunis aujourd'hui' and the madrigals 'Summer Is A-coming In' and 'Come Follow Me' from England.⁵⁸

Another example of the appeal of the European idea are the European Youth Weeks at Ludwigstein Castle in Germany. They were launched in 1953 by a committed European and teacher, Hella Heynmöller (1913–86), and have since then brought young folk dance groups from different European countries into contact with each other for a week.⁵⁹ Heynmöller identified the youth meeting on the Loreley in 1952 as the impetus for this foundation. Workshops and reciprocal performances form the core of the Ludwigstein series of events.⁶⁰ Politically, the founding generation of these youth weeks belonged to the middle-class, anti-communist spectrum, which wanted to oppose both the Eastern bloc and the USA with a strong Western Europe of 'peoples' and ultimately sought a revision of the European post-war order in the course of the Cold War. This understanding was also reflected in the ranks of the Deutsche Jugend des Ostens (German Youth of the East), in which young people from the former settlement areas of Eastern Europe came together to make music and dance.⁶¹ 'Europe' thus proved to be a cultural cipher that was interpreted in

very different and sometimes reactionary political ways in Germany, but in cultural terms offered an opening towards new international programmes.

European songs in *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book*

The Woodcraft Folk had proven itself as an important organisation during the fascist era and was committed to helping persecuted children in Austria and Germany as part of international workers' solidarity.⁶² Its position within the working-class milieu had to be adjusted in times of Stalinism and rampant anti-communism, on the one hand, and the new youth culture dominated by America, on the other, but its overall world outlook and commitment to internationalism did not change. As other chapters in this volume demonstrate, the Woodcraft Folk had to not only respond to the changing nature of Europe after 1945 but to Britain's role as a former colonial power.

The extent to which this constellation is reflected in the association's song repertoire will now be discussed using the example of *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book*, which had previously been published under the title *Songs for All*.⁶³ The edition, which was published between 1955 and 1960, contains 99 songs.⁶⁴ The vast majority of them contain no indication of origin, that is, there is no regional differentiation within Great Britain. As many as 16 songs are explicitly of non-English origin. This diversity is explained in the foreword as 'pure folk songs of many lands'; the selection was based on 'fellowship and international understanding'. Songs from Germany, Italy, France, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, Sweden, America, Australia and Russia are represented. A comparison suggests that the high proportion and selection of non-English songs is indeed characteristic of the Woodcraft Folk, as in the Boy Scout Association's *Scout Song Book* (1954), only 6 of 107 songs were not from Great Britain: two from France and four from America. From Germany, six songs were included in *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book* and translated into English, which indicates a broad knowledge and lasting acceptance of this tradition: 'Farewell and a Last Goodnight', 'Hans Spielman', 'March, March', 'We Are Young', 'The Winter Has Blown Over' and 'Youth Song'. The songs represent both the German folk song and the common songs of socialist youth organisations. The association, far from distancing itself from German songs, was much more concerned with an overarching understanding of music as an expression of internationalism and friendship between peoples. These aspects can also be found in the other texts: the

Russian-Soviet contributions are programmatically socialist songs. And even a Swedish song with the title 'Hallo! Hallo!', which appears to be apolitical, not only remains light and summery but also ends with the invitation: 'The path to new life we are paving. A-singing as we go! Hello Hello!'. Songs that appeal to the common interest of young people in peace, understanding, the dismantling of borders, and overcoming poverty and hardship characterise this songbook by the Woodcraft Folk.

Conclusion

Singing songs together triggers emotions, creates community and transports cultural references across time and borders. The elementary experience of the group song around the campfire is still an integral part of the practice and identity-building of youth associations today; it has asserted its place within conditions for experiencing music that have completely changed commercially, technically and medially. In this respect, the question 'What should we sing?' remains topical and can best be answered by searching through songbooks, whether printed or purely digital.

Songbooks represent a selection that helps a group to find the 'right song' and suggest what the group should sing. In this respect, songbooks can serve as a source from a historical perspective, providing insight into the specific intentions and cultural ideas of the publishers and their target audience through the song selection and design.

In this chapter, printed songs and dances were interpreted as cultural practices which, beyond political and national differences but also beyond the required international unity of the working class, influenced the development of the Woodcraft Folk and shaped the development of youth movements in both England and Germany. With their ambiguity, folk songs in particular can always be recognised as 'new' in very different contexts. With its discovery of old German songs and dances, the Wandervögel shaped a completely new youth culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, which was transmitted to England with powerful effect.

After the First World War, folklore concepts, which were based not least on national song traditions, gained new relevance. Both in England and in Germany, Baden-Powell's Scouting system was questioned and challenged with cultural innovations. New youth organisations emerged and took up the cultural heritage for themselves. While the Woodcraft Folk found its specific location among a mainly working-class milieu as an alternative to Kibbo Kift, the youth music movement established itself

in Germany as a cross-class pedagogical response to young people's interest in music. The latter used intensive contacts with England as a source of innovation, but also accepted German nationalist or 'Nordic-Aryan' positions within its ranks. In this respect, National Socialism was able to occupy and revalue existing structures of youth cultural work in Germany after its opponents, not least the workers' youth organisations, had been eliminated. After the war, Germany was faced with a new beginning in which, from a cultural point of view, there was a cross-party focus on the European perspective in particular. In England, but also in the German working-class milieu, it was possible to build on older traditions, such as internationalism, following on from opposition to National Socialism. While the Woodcraft Folk's programme for 'fellowship and international understanding' seemed to find its way into the central songbook as a matter of course in the 1950s, peaceful internationalism had to be relearned in Germany. Beyond pop cultural influences, particularly from America, the educational contribution of the '*Jugendmusikbewegung*' to democratisation in Germany should not be underestimated in this respect. Increasing importance was also attached to the more intensive cultural-organisational interdependence within Europe, a development in which England also played its natural part.

Notes

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3. Michael John Mertens, 'Early Twentieth Century Youth Movements, Nature and Community in Britain and Germany' (PhD diss., University of Birmingham, 2000); Malcolm Chase, 'North Sea and Baltic: Historical Conceptions of the Youth Movement and the Transfer of Ideas from Germany to England in the 1920s and 1930s', in *Historikerdialoge: Geschichte, Mythos und Gedächtnis im deutsch-britischen kulturellen Austausch (1750–2000)* [Historian's Dialogues: History, Myth and Memory in German-British Cultural Exchange], ed. Stefan Berger, Peter Lambert and Peter Schumann, 309–30 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2003). A current example of transnational connections between youth organisations is: Mischa Honeck, 'Das verspielte Imperium: Die Pazifizierungsarbeit der Boy Scouts of America in den Philippinen und Westdeutschland' [The Playful Empire: The Pacification Work of the Boy Scouts of America in the Philippines and West Germany], in *Jugend – Gewalt: Erleben – Erörtern – Erinnern (Jugendbewegung und Jugendkulturen. Jahrbuch 18)* [Youth – Violence: Experience – Discuss – Remember (Youth Movement and Youth Cultures: Yearbook 18)], ed. Meike S. Baader et al., 73–86 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2023).
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5. John Springhall, *Youth, Empire and Society: British Youth Movements, 1883–1940* (London: Croom Helm, 1977).
 6. Otto Lensch, 'Photoalbum mit Englandfahrt des Altwandervogels' (7 July–13 August 1909) [AdJb, F3 No. 31].
 7. Susanne Rappe-Weber, 'Bündische Jugend', *Historisches Lexikon Bayerns* [Historical Lexicon of Bavaria], published on 22 August 2018 (updated version 24 November 2021), www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Bündische_Jugend (accessed 14 February 2024).
 8. Wilfried Breyvogel and Stephan Schrölkamp, 'Alexander Lion. Gründung der Pfadfinderbewegung und erster Scout Deutschlands: Ein biografischer Abriss' [Alexander Lion. Founder of the Boy Scout Movement and First Scout in Germany. A Biographical Outline], in *Pfadfinderische Beziehungsformen und Interaktionsstile Vom Scoutismus über die bündische Zeit bis zur Missbrauchsdebatte* [Scouting Relationships and Interaction Styles: From Scouting to the Youth Movement to the Abuse Debate], ed. Wilfried Breyvogel, 27–100 (Wiesbaden: Springer, 2017).
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 10. Elise Hopffgarten, *Das Pfadfinderbuch für junge Mädchen: Ein anregender, praktischer Leitfaden für die heranwachsende vorwärtsstrebende weibliche Jugend* [The Scout Book for Young Girls: A Stimulating, Practical Guide for the Emerging, Forward-Looking Female Youth] (München: Spamer, 1912).
 11. Stephan Schrölkamp, "'Jugendsport in Feld und Wald": Zur Wahrnehmung der Pfadfindergründung in der Presse des Kaiserreichs' ['Youth Sports in Field and Forest': On the Perception of the Founding of the Scouts in the Press of the Empire], *Historische Jugendforschung: Jahrbuch des Archivs der deutschen Jugendbewegung* 5 (2009): 28–36.
 12. John Hargrave, *Das Wigwam-Buch* [The Wigwam Papers] (Regensburg: Der weiße Ritter, 1921); John Hargrave, *Stammeserziehung* [Tribal Education] (Berlin: Der weiße Ritter, 1922); John Hargrave, *Das Totem spricht* [The Totem Talks] (Berlin: Der weiße Ritter, 1923); John Hargrave, *Die Kunst Einsamkeit – Waldläufertum* [Lonecraft] (Berlin: Der weiße Ritter, 1924); Franz Ludwig Habbel, *Kibbo Kift: Die Waldverwandschaft* [Kibbo Kift: Forest Kinships] (Regensburg: Der Weiße Ritter, 1921).
 13. Hargrave, *Wigwam-Buch*, 9.
 14. Rüdiger Ahrens, *Bündische Jugend: Eine neue Geschichte (1918–1933)* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015).
 15. Habbel, *Kibbo Kift*, 74.
 16. Habbel, *Kibbo Kift*, 75.
 17. Habbel assigned girls and women to the helpful 'home army', that is, they themselves had no place within the Kibbo Kift, which was reserved for the boys; Habbel, *Kibbo Kift*, 76.
 18. Susanne Rappe-Weber, 'Pfadfinderführerin, völkisch-nationale Feministin und nationalkonservative Politikerin – Zur Biographie von Katharina "Erda" Hertwig (1875–1953)' [Scout Leader, Ethnic-National Feminist and National Conservative Politician – On the Biography of Katharina "Erda" Hertwig (1875–1953)], in *Pfadfinderinnen* [Girl Scouts], ed. Bremer Breyvogel, 81–96 (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020).
 19. Rappe-Weber, 'Pfadfinderführerin', 84.
 20. Frauke Schneemann, 'Konstruktionen von Internationalität und Weiblichkeit: Die Auslandskontakte der deutschen Pfadfinderinnen (1910–1933)' [Constructions of Internationality and Femininity: The Foreign Contacts of the German Girl Scouts (1910–1933)], in *Pfadfinderinnen* [Girl Scouts], ed. Bremer Breyvogel, 97–116 (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2020); Kristine Alexander, *Guiding Modern Girls Girlhood, Empire and Internationalism in the 1920s and 1930s* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).
 21. Rappe-Weber, 'Bündische Jugend'.
 22. Hauptvorstand des Verbandes der Arbeiterjugendvereine Deutschlands, Berlin [Main Board of the Association of German Workers' Youth Clubs, Berlin], ed., *Das Weimar der arbeitenden*

- Jugend: Niederschriften und Bilder vom ersten Reichsjugendtag der Arbeiterjugend vom 28.–30. August 1920 in Weimar* [The Weimar of the Working Youth: Minutes and Pictures from the First Reichsjugendtag der Arbeiterjugend vom 28–30 August 1920 in Weimar], ed. E. R. Müller (Magdeburg: Pfannkuch).
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 25. Bodo Brücher, *Die Sozialistische Erziehungsinternationale 1922–1970: Das politisch-pädagogische Selbstverständnis der Sozialistischen Erziehungsinternationale von ihren Anfängen bis 1970* [The Socialist Educational International 1922–1970: The Political-Educational Self-image of the Socialist Educational International from Its Beginnings until 1970] (Oer-Erkenschwick: self-published, 1995).
 26. Malte Lorenzen, "'Denkt an die Arbeit der Brüder Grimm': Die Jugendbewegung und das Märchen" ['Think of the Work of the Brothers Grimm': The Youth Movement and the Fairy Tale], in *Märchen, Mythen und Moderne: 200 Jahre Kinder- und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm* [Fairy Tales, Myths and Modernity: 200 Years of Children's and Household Tales by the Brothers Grimm], 2 vols, ed. Claudia Brinker Von Der Heyde et al., 813–24 (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 2015).
 27. Hans Breuer, *Der Zupfgeigenhansl* (self-published, 1909).
 28. Claudia Selheim, 'Der Wandervogel: Eine Quelle der Volkskunde' [The Wandervogel: A Source of Folklore], in *Aufbruch der Jugend: Deutsche Jugendbewegung zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Verführung* [Awakening of Youth: German Youth Movement between Self-determination and Seduction], ed. Ulrich G. Großmann, 92–97 (Nürnberg: Germanisches Nationalmuseum Abt. Verlag, 2013).
 29. Ute Brüdermann, 'Fritz Jöde', Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung [Youth Music Movement Theme Portal], 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de/fritz-joede (accessed 17 February 2024).
 30. A. Flechsig, 'Georg Götsch', Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung, 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de/georg-goetsch (accessed 17 February 2024).
 31. Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley, eds, *Rolf Gardiner: Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011); see also soon: Tanya Harrod, 'Rolf Gardiner (1902–1971) and Musische Bildung in a World of Anarchic Noise', in *Jugend – Musik – Bewegung: Mobilisierung und Formierung im 20. Jahrhundert* [Youth – Music – Movement: Mobilization and Formation in the 20th Century], ed. B. Mrozek and S. Rappe-Weber (Brill Deutschland GmbH, 2025).
 32. Georg Götsch, *Englandfahrt 1926 der Märkischen Spielgemeinde* [England Trip 1926 of the Markische Spielgemeinde] (Wolfenbüttel: Kallmeyer, 1927).
 33. See [Chapter 9](#) in this volume.
 34. Götsch, *Englandfahrt 1926 der Märkischen Spielgemeinde*, 26.
 35. Ute Brüdermann, 'Das Musikheim Frankfurt/Oder' [The Music Home], Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung, 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de (accessed 17 February 2024). The effect can still be seen today in concert programmes and in the performance practice of early music in many places in Europe.
 36. The marriage ended in divorce in 1938. An opponent of National Socialism, Katharine Trevelyan, fled Germany in December 1936 with the couple's two children.
 37. Franziska Meier, *Ein bündischer Kulturmarkt entsteht: Die deutsche Jugendbewegung und Jugendmusikbewegung als Katalysator für den Aufbau von Kulturmarktunternehmen, 1918–1933* [A Cultural Market Is Created: The German Youth Movement and Youth Music Movement as a Catalyst for the Development of Cultural Market Companies, 1918–1933] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2022).
 38. Andreas Eschen and Josef Holzhauser, *1923–2023: Hundert Jahre Musikschule City West* [1923–2023: One Hundred Years of the City West Music School] (Berlin: Selbstverlag, 2023).

39. See also: Ute Brüdermann, 'Walther Hensel, Olga Hensel', Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung [Youth Music Movement Theme Portal], 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de (accessed 16 February 2024).
40. Walther Hensel, *Finkensteiner Liederbuch* [Finkensteiner Songbook], 2 vols (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1963).
41. See also [Chapter 8](#): 'We will go singing to the fashioning of a new world'.
42. Reichsarbeitsgemeinschaft der Kinderfreunde Deutschlands, ed., *Die Falken singen: Eine Auswahl von 100 unserer Lieder und Kanons* [The Falcons Sing: A Selection of 100 of Our Songs and Canons] (1930). Archiv der Arbeiterjugend [MA 324].
43. A. Flechsig, 'Musikarbeit der Hitlerjugend', Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung, 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de (accessed 17 February 2024).
44. J. Papenburg, 'Olympische Jugend: Lautsprecher und "zarte Freilandmusik" bei Carl Orff 1936' [Olympic Youth: Loudspeakers and 'Tender Open-Air Music' by Carl Orff 1936], in *Jugend – Musik – Bewegung* [Youth – Music – Movement], ed. Bodo Mrozek and Susanne Rappe-Weber (Brill Deutschland GmbH, 2025).
45. Georgina Boyes, 'Potencies of the Earth: Rolf Gardiner and the English Folk Dance Revival', in *Rolf Gardiner: Folk, Nature and Culture in Interwar Britain*, ed. Matthew Jefferies and Mike Tyldesley, 65–94 (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011).
46. Doris Werheid, *Gefährliche Lieder: Lieder und Geschichten der unangepassten Jugend im Rheinland, 1933–1945* [Dangerous Songs: Songs and Stories of the Non-conformist Youth in the Rhineland, 1933–1945] (Köln: Emons, 2010).
47. Sascha Lange, *Meuten, Swings & Edelweißpiraten: Jugendkultur und Opposition im Nationalsozialismus* [Gangs, Swings & Edelweiss Pirates: Youth Culture and Opposition in National Socialism] (Mainz: Ventil, 2015).
48. Sonnenbergkreis: Homepage, www.sonnenberg-gb.org/ (accessed 28 February 2024).
49. In 1954, the Sonnenberg Group was founded in Great Britain, which still exists today; see also concerning Great Britain as a member of the Sonnenberg-Kreis: www.sonnenberg-gb.org.uk/ (accessed 16 January 2025).
50. Kurt Neumann, 'Der internationale Arbeitskreis Sonnenberg' [The International Working Group Sonnenberg], *Internationales Jahrbuch für Geschichtsunterricht* 9 (1963–64): 314–17. For political-pedagogical work, see Arbeitskreis Sonnenberg, ed., *Politik und Bildung* [Politics and Education] (Braunschweig: self-published, 1963). This anthology includes an article on the BBC's educational mission.
51. Willi Gundlach, ed., *Lieder für europäische Begegnungen: Sonnenberg-Liederbuch* [Songs for European Encounters: Sonnenberg Songbook] (Wolfenbüttel: Mösel, 1952).
52. Fritz Jöde and Willi Gundlach, eds, *Sonnenberg-Liederbuch Pro Musica. Liederbuch / Song-Book / Recueil de Chants. Lieder für internationale Begegnungen / Songs for International Meetings / Chants pour les Rencontres Internationales* (Wolfenbüttel: Mösel, 1957).
53. Ude Brüdermann, 'Exilanten', Themenportal Jugendmusikbewegung, 2022, www.adjb-jugendmusikbewegung.de (accessed 17 February 2024). For example, Eduard Zuckmayer, who played a leading role in shaping music education in the young Turkish Republic after his forced emigration from Germany, contributed the Turkish song 'Bitlisin daglarinda'.
54. Christlicher Verein Junger Männer (Köln), *Die Mundorgel: Lieder für Fahrt und Lager* [The Mouth Organ. Songs for Travelling and Camp] (Köln: self-published, 1960).
55. Konrad Schilling, Helmut König, Dieter Dorn, Hans Schwarm and Hannes Jahet, eds, *Der Turm: Lieder für Jungen* [The Tower: Songs for Boys] (Bad Godesberg: Voggenreiter, 1952–54).
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58. Gottfried Wolters, ed., *Europa Cantat* (Wolfenbüttel: Mösel, 1961).
59. Hella Heynmöller, *Europa ... aber wie? 10 Jahre europäische Jugendtreffen auf der Jugendburg Ludwigstein* [Europe ... but How? 10 Years of European Youth Meetings at Ludwigstein Youth Castle] (Witzenhausen-Ludwigstein: self-published, 1964).
60. Europäische Jugendwochen, Homepage: <https://eurowoche.org/hella-heynmoller/> (accessed 28 February 2024).

61. A. Hamel, *Die deutsche Jugend des Ostens. Interessenpolitik junger Vertriebener im Spannungsfeld von Heimat, kultureller Identität und Integration* [The German Youth of the East: Interest Politics of Young Displaced Persons in the Area of Conflict between Homeland, Cultural Identity and Integration] (Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2024).
62. In addition to this section, see [Chapter 9](#).
63. See also [Chapter 9](#).
64. *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book*, c. 1955–65, 86 pages. London: Woodcraft Folk, 13 [YMA/WF/106].

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We will go singing to the fashioning of a new world

Douglas Bourn and Richard Palser

Throughout much of the Woodcraft Folk's existence, singing and dancing featured prominently in the life of the organisation. Songs in particular, sung in unison or simple harmony and with limited or (more often) no accompaniment, provided an easily generated form of communal entertainment during group nights, camps and hikes. Though more dependent on musical accompaniment, dance too was a regular feature of events, with the participation of everyone being achieved through experienced dancers acting as 'callers'. With a bit of 'polish', these songs and dances were also performed at more public events organised by the labour movement and at the 'open days' which became a regular feature of Woodcraft camps. They were also the main content of a Woodcraft delegation's presentation of its 'national culture' at camps abroad.

Like the Scouts and other voluntary children's organisations which prioritised outdoor activities, the Woodcraft Folk nationally facilitated a common repertoire of songs by publishing song sheets and songbooks which both groups and individual members were encouraged to acquire. The first of these is shown in [Figure 8.1](#). Though there were no dance compilations equivalent to these songbooks, suggestions as to which dances should be used, and sometimes music and choreography, did appear in other Woodcraft newsletters and magazines, and reference was often made to outside organisations and publications that could also be consulted. Though not a precise indicator of the extent to which the individual songs and dances mentioned in these actually became an active part of the life of the organisation at any given time, these written records do give a good indication as to which were *selected* for that

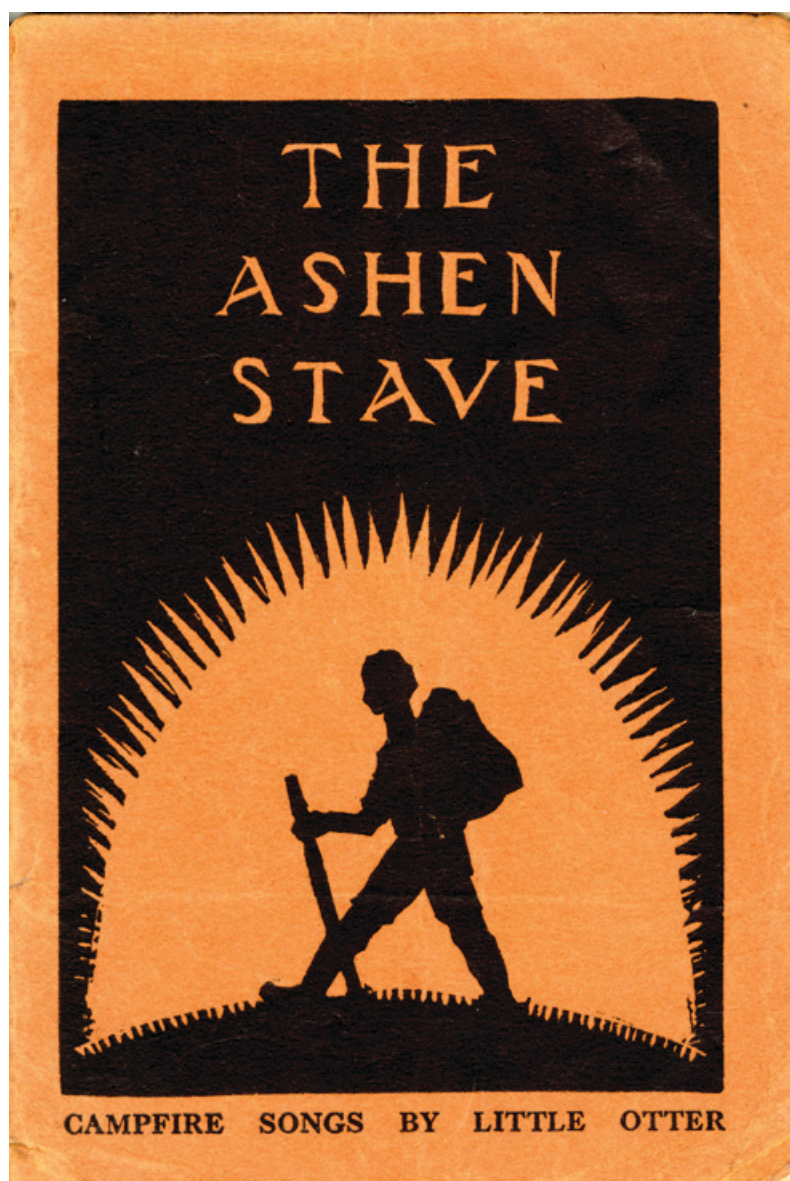


Figure 8.1 *The Ashen Stave* – campfire songbook. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/106.

purpose – the selection usually being made by the national Education Committee or the editors of newsletters and magazines.

In [Chapter 7](#), Susanne Rappe-Weber makes use of these song selections to increase our understanding of the cultural linkages between the English and German youth movements. In this chapter we will make use of these selections to throw further light on how the Woodcraft Folk responded to broader social movements as they emerged in the twentieth century. We will sketch the broad changes in the type of songs and dances selected at different times during the first 75 years of the Woodcraft Folk's existence, attempting to relate these changes to broader cultural, social and political shifts taking place in British society. These impacted not only how the organisation understood its educational goals but also the cultural milieu within which it positioned itself – and from which it 'borrowed' for inclusion in its own song and dance repertoire.

Before that, however, we need to consider how the organisation saw the overall role of song and dance in its educational programme.

How the Woodcraft Folk understood the educational purposes of song and dance

This was spelt out in Leslie Paul's first attempt to formalise the aims and methods of the newly formed Woodcraft Folk in 1926. One of the goals of the Woodcraft Folk, he stated, should be the emancipation of the children of the workers from 'cultural slavery'.¹ He argued that the 'megaphones of the existing order' (the press, the pulpit, the advertising industry) encourage these children to be 'inert and passive so that capitalism may prosper in peace'. While all of the methods of the new organisation should contribute to countering this, of particular importance was 'the principle of active recreation rather than passive amusement'. To illustrate the difference between active recreation and passive amusement, he gave the examples of folk dancing and cinema. The former he considered active recreation, presumably in so far as the individual is directly contributing to the activity, and there is no separation of participants and audience. Cinema he saw as passive amusement, presumably in that the individual's role is limited to that of the audience, and they merely observe the images created by others.

Paul linked this 'principle of active recreation' to what he termed 'social recreation'. Children, he said, should be encouraged to 'look to the Gang for amusement and social intercourse'. Whether through 'pageantry, mumming, folk-dancing, ceremony, council fires and gleemotes',

Woodcraft Folk members should actively and collectively generate their own communal entertainment and amusement.² This approach dovetailed with Paul's view on how the Woodcraft Folk's camps should be organised. The Woodcraft camp was to be a co-operative community in miniature. Just as all participants in the Woodcraft camping community, whatever their age and abilities, should participate in the work required to keep the camp running and contribute to the decision-making of the 'Council Circle', so too they should all contribute to the communal entertainment of this co-operative community.

This emphasis on the collective was not counter-posed, in Paul's view, to individual creativity in the arts. On the contrary, his aim was that in the course of their Woodcraft life a child should 'become increasingly conscious of his [sic] growing individuality' and be encouraged to express their thoughts and ideas 'through the medium of symbolism, arts and crafts'. The development of song and poetry in particular were seen as 'essential in a vitalist movement such as ours'. A common Woodcraft activity at that time was for an individual to carve their own totem, and Paul suggested that 'it should be a tradition, for instance, to write one's own totem song'. Yet this very example indicates that Paul wished to channel this individual self-expression in a definite direction. The use of totems was, after all, an expression of the early Woodcraft Folk's desire to model itself on the 'Ideal Indian' as portrayed by Ernest Thompson Seton, and so enable the recapitulation of humanity's earlier stages of development (see [Chapter 4](#)). The totem song which encouraged the artistic creativity of the individual would at the same time be a contribution to collectively 'playing Indian'. Where Paul saw both the individual and collective creative endeavours converging was in their use to express the organisation's 'aims and ideals and our conception of the life struggle'.

Throughout the twentieth century these three elements – active recreation, social recreation, expression of the organisation's aims and ideals – provided the framework in which specific songs and dances were selected for inclusion in the Woodcraft Folk repertoire.

1925–1934: songs written by Leslie Paul for the Woodcraft Folk

This is the approach taken in the first book of songs published specifically for Woodcraft use, which appeared in 1928. It contained 12 new songs, all with lyrics penned by Leslie Paul for singing to existing 'traditional'

tunes.³ That Paul felt the need to write these entirely new song lyrics is not surprising when we consider the broader aims and ideals he was setting for the Folk at this time, and his recent involvement in the Kibbo Kift Kindred. That organisation had seen engaging in the creative arts as integral to their eugenic goals. Their harking back to ‘the primitive’, as justified by the theory of recapitulation, was simultaneously combined with a modernist reaching for new cultural forms that would anticipate the improved race of human beings they sought to evolve. They too had sought to write their own songs that more adequately expressed these aims and ideals, their ‘conception of the life struggle’ as Paul put it.⁴ Paul had adapted the Kindred’s eugenic strategy by linking it to a regeneration of the labour movement for socialist change, something he regarded as unique to the Woodcraft Folk, and this required new songs to express these specific aims and ideals.

However, his songs, like the words of his Woodcraft ceremonies, were not overtly didactic – they relied upon poetical allusion, encouraging reflection on their meaning rather than seeking immediate recognition of their message. Their poetic qualities were intended to heighten a sense of belonging to an outdoors community quite separate and distinct from that of members’ everyday lives. In his songs the ‘civilised’ city folk are the slaves of the great god grind, whereas the wearers of the green jerkins are outlaws, vagrants, wayfarers or rebels. In ‘Vagrant Song’ Paul calls on Woodcrafters to:

Raise your totems, blaze your symbols,
Let your outcry stir the earth
Let your vigour raise the people
To ways of freedom, songs of mirth.

In ‘The Vow We Have Made’, Paul evokes walking across hills and along grassy trails cut previously by the ‘Flint Men’, the Saxons and the Celts, and asks to be made strong and brave for ‘England’s sake’ – yet it is a different England to that of ‘Rule Britannia’ found in the songbooks of the early Scouts.⁵

Not for war and not for greed,
Not for pomp or glory,
But for the help our brothers need,
Do we sing this story,
Our vows are green, our hearts are brave,
We pledge them thee by ashen stave.⁶

In 'A Wayfarer's Life', Paul describes the freedom of tramping through the countryside, of fellowship at the camp and fireside, and ends by alluding to the evolutionary goal of the Woodcraft's outdoor life.

Civilised folk under capital's yoke,
Worshipping the great god grind,
Come away to the wild and live undefiled,
And perfect the body and the mind, the mind,
And perfect the body and the mind.

One song in the collection, 'Youth Song', was labelled as 'translated from the German'. When first formed, the Woodcraft Folk, following on from Kibbo Kift, was inspired by the pre-war Wandervögel and sought to make contact with like-minded groups during camping holidays in Germany (see [Chapter 7](#)). It seems likely that this is how they came across this song.⁷ In May 1929, the *Herald of the Folk* editorialised:

A vital people demand a life in the open, combined with a balanced understanding of real things, things that matter. In Germany the urge finds expression in the bands of 'Wandering birds' [Wandervögel] who tramp the country taking delight in all things natural, but as yet displaying little interest in the economic problems that face their country. They are not organised to any great extent, never-the-less we should watch them closely ... As most Folk are aware we have made contact with two groups of German students which will prove of value.⁸

The first verse of 'Youth Song', which is also repeated as the last verse, expressed the optimism of the youth that they represented a better future.

Youth and Maiden side by side
To the tramp of feet we're singing,
To the world new hope we're bringing,
Hope of life with us abide.

However, the song also suggests a working-class perspective on how that future will differ from the present, one which would have appealed to the Woodcraft Folk:

Mine and workshop freedom take
But we shall not ask for pity
Who have come from out the city,
We ourselves the chains will break.

The community singing movement

Of course, not all the songs included in his songbook were chosen by Paul because they expressed the Woodcraft Folk's shared aims and ideals. Some were included simply because they were suited to setting a pace when hiking, to singing in rounds at the campfire, had tunes and words that were easily picked up by newer members, or were just fun – in short, they were easily incorporated into the active, social recreation of the Woodcraft community. Where original Woodcraft lyrics were created, the tune to which they were set was normally 'borrowed' from other sources.⁹ Some songs were borrowed from elsewhere and kept largely as in the original, and some had the lyrics modified to fit with the outdoor life of the organisation.¹⁰ It seems likely that there were many such songs in the early Woodcraft Folk's singing repertoire that were not in Paul's book, but some of these did find their way into the 'song sheets' published by the Woodcraft Folk in the later 1930s.

One source of well-known songs well suited to communal singing was the community singing movement which came into being in 1925. For the next two years, high-profile community singing events took place, including concerts at the Albert Hall and Hyde Park which were broadcast by the BBC. These and similar local concerts consisted of a programme of songs chosen by the organisers because they would be widely familiar to the audience (some because they were sung in schools) and not taxing for untrained singers. The *Daily Express* played a major role in promoting the movement, won sponsorship rights for the first pre-match community singing at the FA Cup football final in 1927, and published its own *Community Song Book*. Other newspapers quickly followed in its wake, publishing their own songbooks.¹¹ These included songs like 'Cockles and Mussels', 'Green Grow the Rushes O' and 'John Brown's Body' and 'Shenandoah', songs which also appeared in Woodcraft song sheets between 1935 and 1939.¹² As the Woodcraft song sheets only contained the lyrics of the songs, one song sheet recommended the *Daily Chronicle Community Song Book* as the best source for their music – as well as a source of other songs recommended for group singing.¹³

1935–1945: songs of the international socialist movement

The songs selected because they expressed the Folk's aims and ideals underwent a change during the later 1930s. The organisation's attention

was now focused on the rise of fascism in Europe, and from 1936 it was actively involved in the movement in support of the Republican side in the Spanish Civil War. Gradualist eugenic notions of the creation of a 'caste of Hardihoods' were increasingly sidelined by a sense of urgency in response to the threatening international situation. Added now to the existing repertoire were songs borrowed from the international working-class movement – including 'The Red Flag', 'The Internationale', 'Bandiera Rossa', 'Whirlwinds of Danger' and 'The Red Army March'. It was not unusual for these and similar songs to be sung at labour movement events at this time – indeed, the first three remained part of the Labour Party repertoire well into the post-war years. The Woodcraft Folk saw itself as aligned with that labour movement and the inclusion of these songs in its repertoire would have seemed quite natural to its members, particularly since it had now affiliated to the Socialist Educational International.

Although some attempts were made at new, original songs similar in character to Paul's first collection, these were very different in style to the socialist songs now being borrowed.¹⁴ If the former were hiking songs, the latter were marching songs – and the message of class struggle was often conveyed using military metaphors. In them, comrades were asked to rally behind the flag dyed red with the blood of martyrs and to heed the clarion call for the last fight even as they see their brothers falling, as the bourgeoisie must be whipped to heel and the workers' army prevail. The poetic allusion of Leslie Paul's early songs now gave way to a more strident call to action. This change in tone was also reflected in some of the songs expressly written for, or adapted for, the Woodcraft Folk.

We are the Woodcrafters marching through the land;
 Liberty our clarion cry; Unity our bond.
 Marching as comrades – marching to be free,
 'Till poverty is banished and tyrants flee.
 March! March! March with a song!
 The people's flag unfurled.
 March! March! Marching along.
 Our cause will conquer the world.¹⁵

Post-war sources of Woodcraft songs

The post-war *Songs for All Folk* (1950), with over 100 song lyrics, was more than twice the size of anything previously produced by the organisation and is probably fairly representative of the songs most

used by the Woodcraft Folk up until then.¹⁶ We estimate that around a quarter of the songs were either written by Woodcrafters or had been adapted by them to give them a Woodcraft stamp. A similar proportion of the songs were most likely borrowed from the community songbooks of the 'numerous daily newspapers', these being acknowledged as one of the compilers' sources. A further ten songs were widely sung by the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides movement, though they too may have borrowed them from the various community songbooks.

Ten songs were translated from Dutch, French, German or Swedish, and very possibly came to the Woodcraft Folk through its early contacts with the Wandervögel and later the socialist Falcon movement. In post-war Europe the Falcon organisations in Germany and Austria were keen to promote the idea that the young must now lead the way in building a new Europe in which the hatreds stirred by the Second World War would be put behind them, reflecting a broader desire for greater European integration. For example, in 1952 the international camp at Schwangau in Germany was called 'Falcon State Young Europe', which was symbolically pre-figuring a 'peacefully united Europe'.¹⁷ As Susanne Rappe-Weber discusses in [Chapter 7](#), this also spawned initiatives for the international exchange of songs that expressed pacifist and democratic values, like the songbook produced by the Germany-based Sonnenberg Circle. The Woodcraft Folk too was keen to draw upon international song sources as a cultural expression of its efforts to 'Span the World with Friendship'. However, language differences appear to have proved a considerable barrier to the direct exchange of songs between countries, even where efforts were made to surmount these. In 1951 a duplicated songbook was produced by Woodcrafters for the Debden international camp which contained songs of the continental Falcons in their original languages. As the foreword noted, learning each other's songs at camps was a difficult business, and it wasn't until well after camp that you got to know the song fully. This was why they had reproduced the words of songs as they appeared in different Falcon songbooks, and they hoped that these would appear in Woodcraft songbooks in the future, either in their original language or in translation. As far as we have been able to trace them, only one of the 14 songs contained in this publication did subsequently appear in a Woodcraft songbook.¹⁸

Getting special mention as a source of songs in the 1950 *Songs for All Folk*, including songs from abroad, was the Workers' Music Association (WMA), with which the organisation now had a close working relationship. Over 80 Woodcraft members had assisted with stewarding and programme selling at its 'Workers' Pageant of Music' at the Albert Hall in

1938, with 50 taking part as actors and dancers.¹⁹ The WMA was credited as the source for most of the songs of the British and international labour movement that appeared in the various Woodcraft song sheets and song-books up until 1950. Just over a tenth of *Songs for All Folk* were of this nature, including three from the Soviet Union translated from Russian. It was these songs that provided the ammunition for the first attempt during the Cold War to red-bait the organisation by accusing it of teaching communism (see [Chapter 5](#)). When these ‘adult’ borrowings from abroad are added to those from the Wandervögel and the Falcon organisations in Europe, the overall proportion of borrowings from abroad in the Woodcraft publications is quite substantial. (See [Chapter 7](#) for Rappe-Weber’s analysis of the 1955–60 *Woodcraft Folk Song Book*.)

Also getting special mention as a source of the songs in this 1950 collection was the English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS). Though individual songs were seldom acknowledged as having come from that specific source, we estimate that 12 of the *Songs for All Folk* were of that genre. Perhaps more importantly, the EFDSS was a source of instruction and music for folk dancing – something growing in popularity among woodcraft groups. The ‘savage dancing’ borrowed by Leslie Paul from Ernest Seton Thompson’s ‘Woodcraft Indians’ remained popular at campfires and, like the use of totems and woodcraft names, contributed to the ‘otherness’ of Woodcraft life (though the handmade green jerkins were, by this time, being abandoned in favour of manufactured green shirts). Like the singing of rural folk songs, folk dances provided a self-generated form of communal entertainment which also chimed with the organisation’s celebration of the countryside and things rural. This was a continuation of its practice prior to the war, but now it also chimed with a broader desire to celebrate ‘English’ culture then gaining ground in British society.

This broader desire to celebrate ‘English’ culture was in large part a response to the new youth culture that emerged in the 1950s. A generational conflict over culture, moral meanings and values appeared to be emerging as a result of young people – young workers in particular – having a higher disposable income and being targeted as consumers. The growing commercial popular culture, led in large part by American films and music, was seen as undermining established values in a search for immediate gratification. Schools saw themselves as the custodians of tradition and established values in an attempt to halt cultural decline.²⁰ A similar response to the new youth culture was also evident in the International Falcon Movement and the Woodcraft Folk, which regarded the post-war child as facing the presentation of false values in films,

television and pop music, resulting in a passive and uncritical teenage public. While the Woodcraft Folk did not see itself as championing the ‘traditional values’ that the school system was trying to shore up, it did see itself as countering the commercial youth culture, and here its use of folk song and dance coincided with that in the schools. Country dancing rather than ‘savage dancing’ was used at public displays to promote the Woodcraft Folk and when Woodcraft delegations at international camps presented their ‘national culture’ (see [Figure 8.2](#)). At the ‘Festival Day’ of the 1961 camp at Deurne in the Netherlands, the Woodcraft delegation’s girls dressed as Nell Gwynne and the men all had new costumes for a Morris dancing display.²¹

The EFDSS was not, however, the only source to which the organisation could turn for folk songs. In the 1950s the WMA too was turning its attention to, and promoting in songbooks and on record, the ‘people’s songs’ being written and performed in the United States by people like Pete Seeger and The Weavers. These carried on the pro-union tradition of the singer-songwriters of the Great Depression such as Woody Guthrie. Less strident than the workers’ songs borrowed during the 1930s, additions such as ‘The Banks Are Made of Marble’ and ‘Joe Hill’ gave the Woodcraft repertoire songs of class struggle without the military imagery.²² However, by 1960 a far more powerful influence began to shape the borrowing choices of Woodcraft songbook compilers.



Figure 8.2 Woodcraft Folk members from south-west London performing a folk dancing display at International Co-operators Day, 1953. UCL Library Special Collections, YMA/WF/361/11.

1959–1979: Aldermaston marches and folk clubs

The emergence of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, with its vibrant songs of protest, coincided and intersected with the flowering of folk clubs which marked the increased momentum of the second folk revival in Britain.²³ The young adults and older teenagers of the Woodcraft Folk were increasingly immersed in both, learning new songs on the Aldermaston marches and (often the same songs) in their local folk clubs – and were bringing them to the Woodcraft ‘merry-moots’ and campfires. By the mid-1970s some two-fifths of the 1950 *Songs for All Folk* had disappeared from the Pioneer and Venturer songbooks, while the combined Woodcraft songbook repertoire had increased in size by a similar amount. Songs borrowed from the CND included anthems such as ‘The H-Bombs Thunder’ and ‘Family of Man’. The connections between the British and American folk revivals made easier the borrowings from the American civil rights movement such as ‘Back of the Bus’ and ‘We Shall Overcome’. Included too were a few songs in the ‘protest folk’ idiom by the singer-songwriters of both America and Britain, such as Bob Dylan’s ‘Blowin’ in the Wind’ and Ewan MacColl’s ‘Dirty Old Town’. Les Rice’s song ‘A New Day’ was the inspiration for the name of the new Woodcraft magazine which began publication in 1975. However, the main category of new borrowings was ‘traditional’ songs that were new to the Woodcraft Folk, such as ‘The Foggy Foggy Dew’, ‘The Bold Grenadier’ or ‘The Cutty Wren’.²⁴

By this time the Folk identified itself culturally as being firmly within the folk song and dance revival. In the manual for the training of leaders produced in 1978, a chapter was devoted to discussing its use of song and dance, entitled ‘Making Music – Folk Song and Dance’.²⁵ While stating that ‘the cultural heritage of our people cannot ever be confined to one type of music’, its preference for folk music over the ‘electronic pop so beloved of millions of young people’ is clear:

Folk Music, song and dance, all have their roots in popular appreciation but this does not equate with commercial ‘pop’ which, we must remember, is artificially promoted by the mass media. Played often enough any ‘number’ is sure of a place at the top of the charts and is also certain to earn its makers a great deal of money.

This cannot be said of the popular music of early times. Its popularity and long-lasting qualities were assured by the people who enjoyed it. The folk songs that ‘made the charts’ in the Middle Ages, and stayed at the top for hundreds of years in hundreds of

places, were never artificially plugged With the exception of the few pennies made by those who sold broadsheets in fairs and market places, folk music never made a profit for anyone.

Thus the rhetorical question included for discussion by trainee leaders:

Does 'pop' music really reflect a human and universal love of musical sound, or is it the product of a highly profitable industry which deliberately exploits that love?

Another question for discussion was:

Do you allow for any kind of 'pop' music in your Group programme?
If so, justify its inclusion.

The authors appear to think that this might indeed be justified – but under certain conditions. One suggested leaders' training activity was a discussion on the Tom Robinson Band's song 'Power in the Darkness'. At that time, Rock Against Racism was providing the soundtrack to the rallies of the Anti-Nazi League, and the manual describes Robinson 'and other "rock" band leaders like him' as 'putting protest music into the charts'. But even when conceding this example of something positive in pop music, the authors suggest that Robinson here is standing within the American folk music tradition – extending the tradition of Woody Guthrie, who in the 1930s carried a sign on his guitar saying 'This Machine Kills Fascists'.

In the section on 'The Content of Woodcraft Singing', emphasis is placed on the words of the songs which 'are the expression of content which the musical accompaniment should enhance'. The background reading suggested is A. L. Lloyd's *Folk Song in England*, and the training manual's authors echo his views on the social content of folk songs. 'The Cutty Wren', 'Peat Bog Soldiers', 'The Manchester Hiker's Song' and 'Joe Hill' are all songs, they say, that were written with a purpose, and 'behind each one there is a chapter of a people's history'.²⁶ The authors saw the Woodcraft repertoire of songs as being within a long tradition of English folk song. The existence of folk music had been threatened by the Industrial Revolution, the manual explains, because the old (largely rural) communities that sustained it had lost their social identity, but luckily the first Folk Revival had brought many of the songs back into circulation. However, their 'vitality and earthiness' had been reduced by middle-class professional and amateur performers, so more recently singers like Ewan MacColl and A. L. Lloyd had attempted to interpret folk

music in the way it was originally sung. However, for the Woodcraft Folk that tradition extended into the future:

For healthy survival folk music must change and grow. The protest song movement has made a big contribution to this development. Traditionally the people's songs of protest are part of folk song. The Woodcraft Folk is making its contribution to this developing tradition by encouraging its young composers and poets to make new folk songs. This kind of creative activity should be encouraged in our senior groups.

Yet where 'Blowin' in the Wind' and 'Universal Soldier' were both included in the Woodcraft repertoire by this time, Lloyd's book had made it explicit that songs by a Dylan or Donovan were not, 'by any workable definition', folk songs. It appears that the Woodcraft Folk were prepared to extend the category of 'folk' to songs which Lloyd considered part of the 'insubstantial world of the modern commercial hit'.²⁷ Any song – even one written by an American and commercially successful – that could easily be incorporated into its communal singing repertoire and so qualify as part of an active social recreation, and even more so if it expressed its aims and ideals, could be awarded the label of folk music by Woodcraft.

Even more so than Woodcraft songs, its folk dancing placed it firmly within an English cultural tradition. Accepting that persuading children, particularly boys, to participate in this activity can be difficult, the manual suggests that by talking to children about the historical background of folk dancing, and the way in which 'young and old participated as a matter of course', they will be less likely to feel self-conscious about joining in 'a twentieth century version of an old practice'. However, clearly not confident that tradition is sufficient an argument for prioritising folk dancing, it is anxious to make an educational argument for it. The competitive element, it says, is missing from folk dancing as nobody 'wins'. Folk dancing is 'strongly educational, teaching the child that the value of his [sic] part in the dance lies in the way he contributes to the success of the whole community – or dance-set'.

In its publicity leaflets of the 1970s, the Woodcraft Folk explained its activities as including 'folk singing and dancing' alongside craft work, drama, hiking and camping. Folk songs and dances formed the centrepiece of its public displays. This, coupled with its emphasis on the benefits of hiking and camping in the countryside, helped create a contradictory public image of the organisation. On the one hand, it appeared culturally to be looking backward to a bygone rural England, and inward to a

white English tradition. At the same time it was attempting to present its educational approach as one addressing children's contemporary needs, as inclusive and looking outwards into the broader world. For it was also in the late 1970s that the Woodcraft Folk began addressing anew its educational goals.

1979 onwards: the Woodcraft repertoire under scrutiny

Although explicit reference to educating children for socialist change had been removed from the Woodcraft constitution in the 1950s, a large and active core of the adult membership who had 'come of age' prior to the post-war boom continued to regard their organisation as essentially socialist, as many elements of its practice remained unchanged. The new social movements spawned by youth radicalisation, and the start of an influx of new members who were participants in or were influenced by those movements, were forcing a re-examination of both past methods and formal policies. In 1979, changes to the Woodcraft Folk constitution expanded the organisation's formal stance beyond working for a world of peace and co-operation to include opposition to all forms of racialism and prejudice, equality for men and women, and the protection of the urban and rural environment (see [Chapter 6](#)).

The songs of the organisation came up for scrutiny as a consequence. One area of conflict was over the 1930s songs of the workers' movement. For many of the adult membership who had 'come of age' prior to the post-war boom, these songs, along with the later 'people's songs' of the American folk revival, gave expression to their socialist ideals. These were, however, also the songs that had enabled sections of the press and the media to criticise the organisation for being 'communist' in the first phase of the Cold War, and again in 1975 the Conservative Party had written to all its constituency branches asking them to look out for activities of the Woodcraft Folk because of the inclusion of songs such as 'Red Army March' and 'The Internationale'.

Reflecting on this period of political attacks on the Woodcraft Folk, one Woodcraft leader noted that when a television crew came to film them, they asked about which songs they sang from the Pioneer songbook, and specifically if they sang 'The Red Flag'. The response from the children was 'No, we don't know that song.'²⁸ In 1981, the Education Committee proposed that 'March, March' (quoted earlier in this chapter) and three similar songs be left out of the next songbook as they had 'fallen into disuse'. However, objections were raised to the continued inclusion

of 'Children of Workers' and 'The Internationale', not only on the grounds that they were rarely sung by Woodcraft Folk groups but also because they no longer expressed accurately the aims and ideals of the organisation. The organisation no longer saw itself as an organisation for the children of workers (as it had in the interwar years), and it was argued that these songs implied closer links with the socialist movement than the organisation actually had by then.²⁹ By the 1990s, these two songs also had been removed from the songbooks.

However, abandonment of the workers' anthems of the 1930s did not see the removal of all songs identifying with the working-class movement. Songs like 'Joe Hill' were joined by new songs as a direct result of Woodcraft districts hosting the children of striking miners during the 1984–85 dispute over pit closures (Billy Bragg's 'Between the Wars') and the rising unemployment of the Thatcher years ('Ordinary Man', written by Peter Hames and popularised by Christy Moore).

Another hangover from the interwar years was the 'Red Indianism' taken over from Ernest Thompson Seton. Although 'savage dancing' had now completely disappeared in favour of country dancing, a remnant of playing Indian was still present in a song designed specifically to explain the Woodcraft Folk to the broader world. Entitled 'Who Are These Folk?' its chorus was:

Hark the beating of our Tom-tom,
See the sign upon our Totem
And the Fire before our Wigwam,
We are the Woodcraft Folk.

Later contacts made with Native American organisations resulted in a re-examination of its 'playing Indian'. The organisation had long used what it wrongly believed to be a Native American greeting – the palm of the hand held up and outwards while saying 'How'. The proposal to abandon this practice raised awareness of the debates over cultural stereotyping and appropriation of Native American culture, and the practice was abandoned – yet the song 'Who Are These Folk?' was never removed from the songbooks.

New influences and new borrowings

But it was not just the earlier songs that came under scrutiny in the 1980s – songs that became part of its repertoire in the 1960s were

also questioned. The Woodcraft Folk had turned towards the renewed upsurge of the CND in response to cruise missile deployment in Europe, and among the new recruits to its ranks were many young people, many of them parents involved in establishing new groups, who had been influenced by the second wave of feminism. At its 1982 conference a debate was opened up on the use of gendered language in songs and ceremonies – with songs such as ‘The Family of Man’ featuring as examples of this in the debate. There were those who argued that you needed to understand the context in which such songs were written and, pointing to the difficulties of rewording songs, suggested instead that having non-gendered lyrics should be a criterion for deciding which new songs could be added to the organisation’s repertoire in the future. Others argued that as a co-educational and progressive educational movement, the Woodcraft Folk needed to be giving clear leadership to its members over issues of sex equality.³⁰ ‘The Family of Man’ remained in the songbooks in its original form, but it is noticeable that among the new entries appearing by the 1990s were songs that were originally from the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp. The songs borrowed make no mention of nuclear weapons, reflecting more the spirit of determination of the Greenham women to work for peace (‘Sarah’s Song’, ‘You Can’t Kill the Spirit’) and their sense of sisterly solidarity (‘Building Bridges’). However, whether by accident or by conscious choice, the lyrics of the songs chosen just fall short of suggesting that these are women-only attributes.³¹

The changed priorities of the organisation and the new membership now being attracted to it saw other borrowings that expressed a stance on contemporary issues. Examples of songs concerning the environment included ‘I Want to Know It’s Real’ by naturalist P. J. Plew and the Albion Band’s ‘Why Have You Stolen Our Earth?’. In the later 1980s, the organisation had adopted a policy opposing discrimination against gay and lesbian people, and in Holly Near’s ‘Singing for Our Lives’ the protagonists describe themselves not only as justice seeking, but also as being ‘gay and straight together’.

Though many of the new songs in the repertoire originated from abroad, songs that found their way into the Woodcraft repertoire as a direct consequence of its international work seem surprisingly few in number. Those that did include ‘Nkosi Sikelel’ I-Afrika’ (words in Xhosa, Zulu and Sotho) and the protest song ‘Children of Africa’ (translated into English). Their inclusion was a product of the organisation’s close association with the anti-apartheid movement.

The writing of songs by Woodcraft members continued. Seven new songs by Woodcrafters were included in the 1994 songbook, though

more had been written for specific events. An example of the latter was the song written by Peggy Aprahamian and Alan May for the sixtieth anniversary in 1985, the first two verses of which were:

We sing of the years when our founders
Gave the Woodcraft Folk to this land.
Of the girls and the boys together
Who belonged to that first young band.

We sing of the brave new outlook
They passed down the years to us all,
For friendship and peace to all people
Is still our creed and our call.

Not all songs produced by Woodcraft Folk members were so earnest. Cambridge Woodcraft Folk wrote two songs in the late 1980s and early 1990s which perhaps have had more direct meaning to children in terms of their camp experiences.³² The first, to the tune of 'Fog on the Tyne' and called 'Bogs in a Line', recounts the experience of having to empty the chemical toilets:

No one will come near us, but everyone can hear us
Humming as we go along,
Picking up the Elsan, slosh it in the loo pan
Keeping away the pong.

The other, entitled 'Anglia Camp Blues' from an East Anglian Camp in the 1990s, includes this opening verse:

I woke up this morning
It's my first day at camp
I can't find my cutlery
And my sleeping bag's damp.

Blues music was already well established in British popular culture, having made the 'cross-over' in the late 1960s – many middle-aged Woodcraft leaders would have been well aware of it in the 1990s. However, one of the songs in the 1994 *Songs for the Woodcraft Folk* suggests that by then younger members were becoming more aware of the new musical forms in popular music which followed the punk wave – and specifically new musical forms coming from the Black British experience. It was in the

1980s that rap first emerged in the UK from similar conditions that pertained in the US, and the 1990s saw it integrated into various indigenous urban musical forms.

U.S. hip hop, then, became part of the British popular cultural scene, as second generation West Indian youth began to look to hip hop culture as an alternative cultural frame. In doing so, they forged a new identity – one that relied on the aural and oral imagery of expressive cultures from black America through the medium of hip hop culture, adding a new dimension in what it meant to be young and black.³³

The words of ‘Woodcraft Rap’, which are credited as being written by Chorlton Elfin in the 1994 songbook, are clearly an attempt to emulate the rhythmic and rhyming speech of rap music – though the imagery and dialect remains very ‘white English’:

On Monday evenings, if the weather is fine,
We play outside and have a good time.
We sing great songs and we sometimes dance;
Everyone is given a chance.
Chorus:
It’s a rap, it’s a Woodcraft rap
It’s a rap, it’s a Woodcraft rap.

Conclusion

As we hope we have demonstrated in this chapter, over time the songs selected for inclusion in Woodcraft songbooks were modified according to the extent to which they were seen as expressing ‘Woodcraft values’. Furthermore, these changes reflected not only modifications in how the organisation saw its educational role but also changes in the cultural, political and social milieu in which it positioned itself. It responded to social movements outside of itself, and in doing so changed its song repertoire.

However, in the twenty-first century there appears to have been a change in the nature of the Woodcraft Folk’s engagement with musical forms outside of its own ‘folk music’ repertoire. While campfire singing is still a core activity, especially at group and district camps, no new version of the Woodcraft songbook has been produced nationally since the

1994 *Campfire Songs for Woodcraft Folk* (itself merely a shorter selection of songs from the 1988 *Songs for the Woodcraft Folk*). Though still part of Woodcraft life, folk dancing is now far more an occasional activity rather than a standard part of the group night programme. At International and Venturer camps the hiring of professional bands is now more commonplace, bringing with them a range of popular musical forms. The reasons for these changes, and how the organisation views the educational role of song and dance in the twenty-first century, are, however, beyond the scope of this chapter.

Notes

1. Little Otter, 'Memorandum on the Activities of the Woodcraft Folk', presented to the Folk Council, 8 February 1926, Woodcraft Heritage website, <https://heritage.woodcraft.org.uk/archive/item/little-otters-memorandum-to-the-folk-council/> (accessed January 2024).
2. 'Gleemote' was a Kibbo Kift term for cultural camps where Kinsfolk performed mumming plays and dances for each other.
3. *The Ashen Stave: Campfire Songs by Little Otter*, 1928 [YMA/WF/106]. Little Otter was the woodcraft name of Leslie Paul. In his introduction, Paul explained that most of the songs have appeared in Woodcraft or Co-operative publications and are sung regularly at Woodcraft Folk Council Fires. It mainly referred to the tunes that his lyrics were to be sung to as 'traditional'.
4. For comprehensive overviews of Kibbo Kift, see Annebella Pollen, *The Kindred of the Kibbo Kift: Intellectual Barbarians* (London: Donlon Books, 2015); Cathy Ross and Oliver Bennett, *Designing Utopia: John Hargrave and the Kibbo Kift* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers, 2015). For a discussion of Kibbo Kift's use of song specifically, see Cathy Ross, 'All Hael! All Hael! Singing with the Kibbo Kift', 22 September 2016, folkloretuesday website, <https://folkloretuesday.com/folk-music/hael-hael-singing-kibbo-kift/> (accessed November 2023).
5. Arthur Poyser, ed., *The Scout Song Book* (London: Arthur Pearson, 1919). In *The Ashen Stave*, Leslie Paul used the tune to 'Rule Britannia' for a 'snatch' about 'when life first arose from out the primeval sea' and calling for the thinker to 'speed the liberation of the race'.
6. 'The Vow We Have Made', in *The Ashen Stave*.
7. In 'Impressions of Germany', *Herald of the Folk*, July 1930, reference is made to a big weekend gathering in Cologne where groups arrived singing the 'German Youth Song' [YMA/WF/331].
8. This appears to be an editorial. *Herald of the Folk*, no. 3, May 1929 [YMA/WF/331].
9. Many of the tunes are described as 'traditional' with no further explanation, but 'Vagrant Song' was to the tune of 'Clementine' and 'Great God Pan' to that of 'Old King Cole'.
10. 'I Went to the Animal's Fair' is an example of the former, whereas 'Campfire's Burning' was an adaptation of 'London's Burning', and 'One Man Went to Camp' of 'One Man Went to Mow'.
11. See Dave Russell, 'Abiding Memories: The Community Singing Movement and English Social Life in the 1920s', *Popular Music* 27, no. 1 (2008): 117–33.
12. The archive contains three 'song sheets', one from 1935 [YMA/WF/66], one from 1936 and one from 1938 or 1939 [YMA/WF/106].
13. The *Daily Chronicle* merged with the *Daily News* to become the *News Chronicle* in 1930. In the same year, the *News Chronicle Song Book* was published – this may well actually be the song-book that was being referred to as the *Daily Chronicle Community Song Book*.
14. Basil Rawson, who became Woodcraft's President, contributed two new songs that were very similar to Paul's in style.
15. 'March, March', *The Woodcraft Folk Song Sheet*. This song sheet is undated, but the contact addresses make us confident it was published in 1938 or 1939. The 1975 *Songs for Pioneers* credited Basil Rawson with its translation from the German – if that is so then he clearly adapted it by inserting mention of Woodcrafters [YMA/WF/106].

16. The archive contains two different versions of *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book*, and there is another with that title on the Woodcraft Folk Heritage website. All these are of the same 24-page size and format and we estimate their production being between 1941 and 1949 [YMA/WF/66 and 106]. There are two versions of *Songs for All Folk*, one published in 1950 and one in 1951, only seven of the songs being different [YMA/WF/361/9].
17. 'Junges Europe – Zeitung für all lagerteilnehmer' [Newspaper for All Participants] [YMA/WF/154].
18. *International Song Book*, a Beehive Publication, Deben Green, 1951 [YMA/WF/361/9]. The song that did subsequently appear, in translation, in Woodcraft songbooks was 'We Are Young'.
19. 'Folk News', *Helper* 4, no. 1, April 1939 [YMA/WF/333].
20. Ken Jones, *Education in Britain: 1944 to the Present* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2003).
21. Woodcraft Folk 1961 Annual Report [YMA/WF/4A].
22. These first appear in *The Woodcraft Folk Song Book*, which had the same design and format as the later *Songs for Pioneers* and *Songs for Elfin*s. Judging by the contents this *Song Book* was published roughly between 1955 and 1965 [YMA/WF/106/2].
23. Among the many sources available which we have consulted on these are: Julia Mitchell, *Postwar Politics, Society and the Folk Revival in England, 1945–65* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021); Michael Brocken, *The British Folk Revival 1944–2002* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2003); Robin Denselow, Robert Shelton, Karl Dallas and Dave Laing, *The Electric Muse Revisited* (London: Omnibus Press, 2021); John Minion and Philip Bolsover, eds, *The CND Story* (London: Allison and Busby, 1983); Lawrence S. Wittner, *Confronting the Bomb* (California, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).
24. During the later 1960s and early 1970s, the Woodcraft Folk began publishing songbooks for different age groups. These include: *Songs for Venturers* first version and second version [YMA/WF/361/9]; *Songs for Pioneers*, 1969 [YMA/WF/361/9] and 1975 [YMA/WF/106/1].
25. *The Woodcraft Folk Leaders' Manual*, Part 1, 1978. Section 5: Making Music; Folk Song and Dance [YMA/WF/56, Box 1].
26. The authors noted that children may well miss the significance of these songs, so one of the training activities was to discuss how to explain where the song comes from and what it is about. How often this was done in practice is unclear, and leaders would not have been helped in doing so by the fact that none of the Woodcraft songbooks actually contained such explanations until the *Venturer Song Book* of 1983.
27. A. L. Lloyd, *Folk Song in England* (St Albans: Paladin, 1975), 385. Definitions of what constitutes 'folk music' have been highly contested by folk enthusiasts and critics alike, particularly during and since the 'second' or 'post-war folk revival'. For a carefully considered contribution on this by a former Woodcraft member, see Steve Roud, 'Is There Such a Thing as Folk Song, Anyway?', in *Folk Song in England*, 15–35 (London: Faber & Faber, Paperback edition, 2021).
28. Chrys Salt and Meryn Wilson, eds, *We Are of One Blood* (London: Co-operative Retail Services, London Region Member Relations Committee, 1985), 27.
29. 'Proposed changes to the Pioneer Song Book' by Julian Cheek for the Education Committee dated 13 September 1981; 'Comments of proposed changes to Song Books' by Doug Bourn dated 23 September 1981 [YMA/WF/361/10].
30. See 'Moving Beyond Gender', *Woodcraft Focus*, February 1982, and 'New Thinking About Language' and 'Letters' in the May 1982 issue [YMA/WF/M3199/12 and 12a].
31. There are many modified versions of Greenham songs. The original version of 'Building Bridges' appears to have included the line 'Sisters we can make such a sweet harmony'. In the Woodcraft version, as in many other published versions, 'Sisters' is not present. See Anna Reading, 'Singing for My Life: Memory, Nonviolence and the Songs of Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp', in *Cultural Memories of Nonviolent Struggles: Powerful Times*, ed. Anna Reading and Tamar Katriel, 147–65 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan), https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032720_8, 158.
32. Cambridge Woodcraft Folk, *It's on the Lorry: Ten Years of Cambridge Woodcraft Folk 1981–1991* (Cambridge Woodcraft Folk, 1991), 21–23.
33. Raymond Codrington, 'The Homegrown: Rap, Race, and Class in London', in *Globalization and Race: Transformations in the Cultural Production of Blackness*, ed. Kamari Maxine Clarke and Deborah A. Thomas, 179–99 (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 182.

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Part IV

Changing role of young people

Youth is not wasted on the young

Delilah Wallbank

‘Youth is not wasted on the young’, claim the Woodcraft Folk – but who are the young within Woodcraft and what are they doing with their youth?

This chapter focuses on the District Fellows (DFs); aged between 16 and 21, they make up the oldest group of ‘youth’. The DFs function as a semi-autonomous movement within the Folk, running their own camps, committee and website, as well as managing their own bank account. This liminality, the space the DFs occupy somewhere between the categories of child and adult, young person’s charity and autonomous youth moment, provides an interesting starting point from which to explore the Woodcraft Folk’s own theories of youth. As I will show, observing the practices of young people can provide us with innovative strategies for thinking about more general issues.

When I started this research, I was Chair of the DF committee and had previously been responsible for organising DF events. In this chapter, I combine my own experiences as a longstanding member of the Woodcraft Folk with my study as an anthropologist, bringing together research into the history of the DFs and ethnography of their present-day practices. I draw on a diverse range of sources: from semi-structured interviews with people involved in the 1980s, when the DFs had just been set up, to participant observation of contemporary DF events. I supplement this with archival research, drawing on the special collection held at UCL, the personal collections of previous members and the DF’s digital archives.

From my conversations with DFs, old and new, I was able to discover both how the DF movement came about and become engaged with what more there is to be learned from the DFs as an organisation. They are not only an example of youth empowerment but also demonstrate

techniques for inclusive, democratic and co-operative organising in general, disrupting the socially constructed distinction between children and adults. This chapter records and describes the history and practices of the DFs to acknowledge their work and to showcase what they have to offer to wider society.

Axiom

In Shulamith Firestone's *Dialectic of Sex*, a radical claim is made: 'down with childhood'.¹ She argues against the claim of the child as a biological reality and instead claims that the difference between children and adults is a social construct.² Within this chapter, I take this idea seriously and ask what happens when we don't distinguish youth from adults. This opens up space to recognise the organising practices of the DFs as relevant to more than just other youth movements but to how young people are engaged in society as a whole.

Firestone shows that what we mean by 'youth' is contested. The characteristics associated with children are socially constructed, two major opposing themes being 'fun' and 'trouble' (understood here as linked to lack of experience). The DFs offer an opportunity to explore both these characteristics and to move beyond the dichotomy of child and adult. They are not just an example of young people organising themselves but have also had a considerable influence on the way in which the Woodcraft Folk functions as a whole; the relationship between the Woodcraft Folk and DFs is one of mutual support. Furthermore, the possibility of learning from the organisation of young people is not something that should be ignored. After all, one of the major social distinctions between children and adults is lack of experience, but this is not restricted only to the domain of youth. Not knowing what to do or not feeling adequately experienced is something that can occur at any time in the life course.

What is youth?

Firestone writes about childhood as a classed and gendered concept, drawing out a history of the child linked to the development of the nuclear family and modern schooling.³ She argues that what really reveals childhood to be a social construct is the way in which it has been unevenly distributed. Childhood has historically been a category applied only to

those who would at some point achieve the status of full humanity; thus, various groups have been excluded.⁴ Firestone points out the experience of women and the working class, but this can also be seen in the lives of Black youth who are observed and treated as adults by the police.

Segregation of children from adults served to further increase the inequalities between these two categories. Firestone distinguishes between adults and children based upon experience, stating that 'adults are, after all, simply larger children with worldly experience'.⁵ While Firestone's work is useful for bringing our attention to the social construct of childhood, this clean-cut idea of experience distinguishing between the adult and the child risks reproducing the very distinction Firestone argues against. I would point out that while it is true that generally an older person will have had more worldly experience than a younger one, age does not always imply greater experience. It is entirely possible for a younger person to be more experienced than someone older than themselves. Thus, while experience is certainly a better way of distinguishing between children and adults than some idea of immutable biology, it still creates a barrier between the two groups.

Another lens through which to consider youth emerges from the sociology of the 1920s and the ethnographic study of young people in cities. Here, youth is understood as a period of transition between childhood and adulthood; youth in this liminal capacity is a danger.⁶ Youth are imagined as violent and as trouble for society.⁷ They are untrained and uninitiated in its rules; the trouble of youth stems from their lack of experience.

Dick Hebdige describes further ideas of youth that arose in the 1950s: 'youth at its leisure: exotic, strange, youth-as-fun'.⁸ This is linked to a growing consumer culture where the key distinction between the teenager and the child was that of money. This concept of youth is no less a social construction than Firestone's childhood, as can be seen in the fact that Hebdige acknowledges that the early study of youth was that of boys. Youth being a category only extended to include girls at a later date.⁹

This social construction is further emphasised by the idea of youth as a liminal stage. In his seminal text exploring liminality, Victor Turner uses rites of passage from childhood to adulthood as a key example.¹⁰ Liminality is described as a state outside of classification, 'at once no longer classified and not yet classified'.¹¹ Liminality is importantly a cultural process rather than a biological one.¹²

If we bring each of these ideas of youth together, we have an interesting mix of juxtapositions. On one side there is youth as a problem to

be solved, as troublemaker; on the other we have youth as fun, as leisure but also as innocence. We also have the idea of youth linked to lack of experience and knowledge. As I stated in response to Firestone's distinction between adults with experience and children without, I would posit that initiation is a process that is not inherently linked to age. We will all, at points in our lives, enter new environments – places with rules and procedures we are unfamiliar with and which we must learn to understand. Thus, to relinquish the distinction between adults and children opens up new possibilities for thinking about how experience and skills can be gained and shared.

Organisations who want to include new members and to adapt to new ideas and influences need to think about how to induct those with less experience into their decision-making structures. If children are considered to be the epitome of those who lack experience, then the methods of inclusion for their voices and ideas within organisations become a possible model. By looking at how youth inclusion occurs, we can learn how to better include all those with less experience, children or otherwise. The premise of my argument is that we can learn something from the organisational capacity of young people, especially when we no longer dismiss their efforts as childish and ignore the importance of both fun and trouble. To explore this requires an example of youth organising and leadership; the DFs provide an ideal case study as they shed light on all the aspects of youth I have so far detailed while also existing as a genuinely youth-led organisation. Thus, while nominally they are organised based on assumptions of age-based skill and experience, in actuality, they provide a space from which to question these ideas.

Who are the DFs?

Leslie Paul set up the Woodcraft Folk in 1925 when he himself was just 19 years old; however, by the 1970s young adults of this age had become a problem for the Woodcraft Folk.¹³ While becoming adult members at 16, having a vote at the annual delegate conference and expected to run younger groups, they had little space to make actual change within the movement. Furthermore, as young people increasingly moved away from the places where they had grown up, for work or for education, the Folk found that its sources of young leaders were diminishing.

DFs would become a solution to existing issues of retention as children aged into young adults. It was intended that the District Fellowship would be less managed than the younger groups but instead be required

to commit time and energy into their local district, alongside organising their own activities.¹⁴ However, while DFs were certainly guided in their creation by the aims of the movement as a whole, they were also always influenced and structured by young people themselves. This was especially the case for a group of under 25-year-olds on the National Council at the time, who supported the establishment of the first DF committee.¹⁵

In the late 1970s, it was recommended to the Woodcraft Folk's National Council that a new age group should be formed, one that could replace the existing category of Senior Venturers (16- to 17-year-olds), which had not been taken up widely.¹⁶ This new age group was seen as a way to better meet the needs of both young people and the districts (local groups). In 1977, a letter was sent with recommendations from the Folk's education committee imagining a new role for over-16s within the Woodcraft Folk.¹⁷ The emphasis of this letter was on each district finding its own way of working alongside 16-year-olds to keep them involved with the movement.

Stating that Districts must take a hard look at the way they are working with the 16 plus age group. A programme must be worked out between District Leaders and the over 16s that is satisfactory to all concerned and complies with the recommendations with respect to commitment and is acceptable by National Council.¹⁸

As this letter shows, from the very beginning of the DF movement, young people were considered to be key actors in shaping these new developments.

Initially, District Fellowships existed in several ways around the country. A typical programme for this new age group varied from the standard weekly meeting of younger groups; it was instead a range of activities from discos and sports days to camps, money raising and helping with district tasks such as fixing tents.¹⁹

There were also attempts to bring the separate DF groups together at regional and national events. From 1978, District Fellowship rallies were organised by the National Council with rules for good behaviour: silence at 11pm and a requirement to wear the folk shirt.²⁰ The content of such weekends included workshops on social issues and the purpose and planning of DF groups as well as social elements such as dances.²¹ Feedback on the first conference in 1978 from National Council members Bev Wight and Jess Cawley described it as a useful 'interchange of views' which at points developed into a sharp examination of the role of a DF in their local area.²² While in the early years of the District Fellowship much of its activity seems to have been guided by districts themselves and National Council, these reports reveal that DFs were active participants in conferences when they were held even if their input

was not always acknowledged. Wight in particular discusses her frustration that the DF conference was treated as secondary to the district leaders conference held on the same day, arguing that 'the DF rally has much broader implications in the long term' and pointing out that the DFs are 'one of the most aware sections of our movement and are quick to scent variances of feeling. This must be acknowledged and used.'²³

DF groups were a success in terms of retaining young people within the movement. By 1983 there were 21 registered District Fellowship groups,²⁴ compared to only 3 Senior Venturer groups in 1976.²⁵ As their numbers grew so did the DF interest in self-organisation; in 1984 this became more concrete with the establishment of a national DF committee at the District Fellowship Weekend. This was an attempt by the 50 DFs who attended to create a movement that was 'self controlled and self generated'.²⁶ This was an attempt that would be successful, as the DFs were to become a semi-autonomous group within the Woodcraft Folk, with their own committee and eventually their own constitution and democratic procedures.

The new DF envisioned in 1984 and 1985 was one that was guided and run by the ideas of young people themselves. Suggested events were not too different from those described in 1977, except more focus was put on involvement with socially aware and political activities outside the Folk; specifically, it was mentioned that while young people should contribute to their district they shouldn't be expected to become leaders.²⁷ When 1985 was named International Youth Year by the UN, the Woodcraft Folk and the newly formed DF committee tried to organise a series of consultation meetings with 16- to 25-year-olds, which were unfortunately mostly unsuccessful.²⁸ The committee as it had existed in 1985 was not democratically selected by DFs themselves; in July 1986 this committee disbanded in favour of a committee composed of under-21s and elected by them as well.²⁹ This occurred due to the action of young people in the DF movement, who wanted to do things for themselves rather than have activities organised for them by other people; however, resources and time from National Council were still requested.³⁰ By 1987, a DF committee of ten members had been elected; plans were established for regular national forums to bring together DFs to discuss the issues of their age group; and a DF info pack was envisioned to help educate both DFs and other young people on social issues as well as on the inner workings of the Woodcraft Folk.³¹

The first ten years of the DFs were tumultuous: what started as a strategy for keeping young people involved in the Folk soon became an outlet for young people to express their own aspirations for self-organisation. However, the occasional splits between the desires of

National Council and of DFs themselves can also be seen as less diametric than may have been felt at the time, as it is only through the support and work of both National Council and young people themselves that DFs were able to establish themselves and become the movement they are today.

While the DFs were argued for on the basis that they would train up future Woodcraft leaders, they were also always a genuine attempt to include young people on their own terms. The stated purpose of the District Fellowship, as implied by its name, was to create a support network of young people to help run districts, but DF groups were also spaces for young people to organise themselves.

For some, however, the creation of the DFs in fact returned them from the status of adult leader back to that of a beneficiary and thus a child.³² One person I spoke to, who became a DF in the 1980s, just as they were starting to become more organised, described feeling conflicted about receiving the news that, at 16, they were a DF rather than simply being treated as an adult leader. DFs, to them, meant a reduction in responsibility because it returned 16-year-olds to the category of children rather than recognising them as leaders in their own right. The DFs, from this perspective, could be seen as a group that extends and reinforces the category of youth.

It is true that the Woodcraft Folk, with its age-based delineation of children, in some ways reifies the idea that age is the primary factor in the development of learning and experience, in line with Laura Tisdall's categorisation of non-utopian progressive education in the UK.³³ Tisdall distinguishes between two approaches to the concept of childhood: the utopian where children are seen as innocent in contrast to neurotic adults,³⁴ and which focuses on the inclusion of children through the use of school councils;³⁵ and the non-utopian that aims to teach children how to be good adults and focuses on meeting specific developmental needs linked to age.³⁶

I would argue that the structure of the DFs can be seen to straddle these two ideas. Young people are both included as participants in decision-making and in the formation of their own organisation and considered a specific age group of children who need to be guided into becoming co-operative adults. However, it is precisely this ambiguity that establishes the DFs as an interesting example through which to question the distinction between adults and young people. Both the utopian and non-utopian approaches to progressive education continue to uphold an idea that children and adults are biologically distinct and therefore require different methods of organising. The question remains: how to

get beyond this distinction when the social effects of such a distinction are very much felt? How can we truly appreciate the capacity of young people to organise when they are continuously distinguished from adults and their efforts dismissed? In this case, it is the very fact that DFs are separated from adults and also from other children as an age group that allows them to question this distinction. The ‘adult’-free spaces created at DF events mean that, experientially, youth comes to have no meaning as it no longer has an ‘other’ against which to define itself. At DF events everyone is a young person and thus no one is.

How do the DFs organise?

Camps

Around 25 young people, in various states of sleepy disarray, sit in a circle of chairs, waiting for the morning meeting to start. They chat to their neighbours, eat breakfast from plastic plates or simply take the chance to nap. When everyone has gathered, or in some cases been dragged from their beds, ‘WOODCRAFT’ is called; ‘FOLK’ is shouted in response. This is the sign to quieten down because someone has something important they need to say – something that could range from a request for help to an announcement of snacks (meaning it is always in your best interest to shut up and listen just in case it gets you first chance at a new packet of biscuits). In this case, the call starts the beginning of a short meeting that is supposed to happen at the beginning of each day of camp, where the organisers go over who is on shift,³⁷ what each clan’s job is,³⁸ and the programme for the day.

As the activities are being announced, it becomes clear that there is a gap in the schedule, originally set aside for a session on ABBA opera singing, which has been cancelled as the DF running it could not make it to camp. In this gap, I see an opportunity: I can run my planned group discussion as a workshop on ‘doing anthropology’ – I announce this in the circle as a morning activity.

Quite a few people volunteer to join in, but then there is not much else on, and eventually I gather around 15 people in a circle slightly smaller than that morning’s. They start chatting immediately, debates on everything from card game rules to the best way to eat egg bread fill the room. When the time comes for the discussion to begin, I start with an icebreaker, well known to most Woodcraft members: going round the circle and encouraging each person to introduce themselves by their name,

pronouns and what they like about Woodcraft.³⁹ This is not an individual interview but instead a chance for me to combine asking a few pre-written questions about people's experiences of DFs with an observation of what District Fellowship is actually like. Throughout the discussion people move into and out of the space, heading to dorms, searching for food or company. Sometimes people join in, some just sitting, others coming into the circle and talking, or interrupting from outside of it. People talk to one another and respond to me, telling the stories they want to tell. A few people speak more than others; some people don't speak at all. It is a fun conversation, as much filled with in-jokes as it is serious reflection. One thing that strikes me is the mention that District Fellowship seems to be well organised; from my own experience of organising events, this is not exactly the case. I've experienced midnight phone calls the night before camp trying to make sure someone has booked the food delivery, or last-minute changes to camp dates due to unexpected train strikes. From my interviews with older members, this has always been the case. While talking about some of the earliest camps, a last-minute desperate shopping trip was described to me, occurring when a van full of DFs who hadn't booked turned up at a weekend event, doubling the number that had been catered for.⁴⁰ This sentiment is supported by the people on the committee or involved in co-ordination in the room who shake their heads. Of course, this disorganisation may not be obvious to most DFs, as even when these problems occur, they very rarely actually mean a camp is cancelled; instead, a solution is found and the event goes on.

The major outcome of DF organising and also where they are most actively 'adult' free, both physically and in planning, are camps. While DFs were, for some, originally seen as a reduction in responsibility, for others I interviewed, the start of the DF movement meant creating a space for those aged 16 to 21 to be young, to have fun and to not be forced into acting as a leader before they felt ready to.⁴¹ One way in which DFs create space for this is at camps where 16- to 21-year-olds can come together without supervision.

While camps have always been an important part of Woodcraft Folk organising, being seen as a place in which members could actually live the principles of the Folk,⁴² they are even more central to the DF movement. Most districts do not have enough DFs to support weekly meetups, and only a few groups meet even monthly, so it is at camps that DFs get the chance to come together and experience what it would be like to live co-operatively.

The majority of DF energy has always gone into national or regional activities. In 1988, this meant a weekend-long DF conference (the first

one organised by DFs for DFs), where the structure of DF committee was discussed and criticised, amendments to the Woodcraft constitution were written, and topics such as sexuality and apartheid were raised.⁴³ It was also a social event, bringing together 60 young people and giving them the space to get to know one another and to be young together. In 1990, this had expanded and a second national event was introduced: the DF camp, a week-long event in the summer that involved both DFs and an international delegation, inspired by the international camp hosted by the Woodcraft Folk the year before.⁴⁴ These events continue to be organised by volunteers from within the DF movement; co-ordinating teams work together to book sites, order food and plan activities. With each event they successfully organise, DFs both carve out a space for themselves to have fun and prove that they are just as capable as any older member of the Woodcraft Folk.

DF events of various sorts have been held throughout the years, from a trip to Peru in 1997, where UK 19-year-olds travelled the Andes alongside young people from Lima who would never normally have got the chance to leave the city,⁴⁵ to protests against the treatment of asylum seekers at Yarl's Wood; and many successful music-based fundraising events, such as the Brighton-based Summer Madness which ran each year from 1999 until 2002.⁴⁶

These social events are important, but they are not the only thing organised by the DFs, and it is to another type of DF event that I turn to next, once called the DF conference and now known as Althing. These events are where DFs discuss and make decisions about their movement, as well as elect a committee to manage their activities.

Things

Alongside social events DFs have always also met to discuss issues and make decisions related to their own internal structures, the wider Woodcraft Folk and the world in general. Originally called DF conference, an annual weekend event open to all DFs, since 2000 this event has been called Althing, the original name of the Woodcraft Folks' annual conference and 'an Icelandic Parliament ... open to any adult over sixteen years'.⁴⁷ An important aspect of an Althing, in the historical Icelandic sense, is that as well as being a place for business and discussion it is also a festival.

The DF movement is run by a committee, elected annually at Althing, that has taken on many forms over the years. From 1987 until 2007 it was split up into regional delegate positions, with a chair,

secretary and treasurer being elected from within the delegate pool. However, as early as 1998, changes were beginning to be made. In recognition of the fact that not all of the regional roles were being filled, the DF conference decided to turn any unfilled regional posts into alternative elected positions called Other, open to all members of the DFs.⁴⁸ This also led to the addition of specific roles to the committee, including rainbow network,⁴⁹ workers' beer,⁵⁰ and international opportunities rep.⁵¹

Until 1999, the DF committee met four times a year to discuss the organising of national events and any projects that they were working on, such as DF hoodies or poetry books.⁵² However, this meant that, unless you were one of the few DFs elected to the committee, many discussions and decisions were made without consultation with the wider movement. In a 1999 edition of *DF News*, an article entitled 'Large Debate on Committee' was submitted; it responded to criticisms aimed at the DF committee's secrecy, bureaucracy and cliquiness with an invitation to join the giant debate on the committee.⁵³ While the exact form this debate took is not recorded, a later *DF News* of the same year announced the new DF forum, which replaced committee meetings with a weekend event open to all DFs who wanted to discuss 'the DF movement, forthcoming events + other woodcraft stuff'.⁵⁴ These forums (now called Things) were to rotate around the country, visiting each region and ensuring the maximum possible engagement from the national movement. These Things are 'supposed to be enjoyable as much as it is business'.⁵⁵ This can be seen in the reports of Things found within *DF News*, the front cover of which is shown in [Figure 9.1](#), throughout the early 2000s where discussions are interspersed with games, and evenings are set aside for 'copious amounts of fun'.⁵⁶

At Things I have attended, fun is achieved in a variety of ways: ranging from time reserved to hang out and play games after and around discussions to the assertion of any individual's right to take a break and encouraging the use of fidget toys or activities such as knitting during meetings. The right to fun is also asserted through jokes and play. This can be a tool to reappropriate more formal practice such as calling any other business (AOB) Area of Bike (a reference, at the time, to the many DFs who cycled to events). Or complaining about RON, that annoying guy who's always standing for election; RON here stands for ReOpen Nominations in the single transferable vote system used by the DFs. This can also be a way to break up the often long and serious discussions with more light-hearted proposals and motions, for example, a proposal to acknowledge the elephant in the room.⁵⁷ These jokes and techniques are not always the same but what does remain is a commitment to the idea

DF NEWS

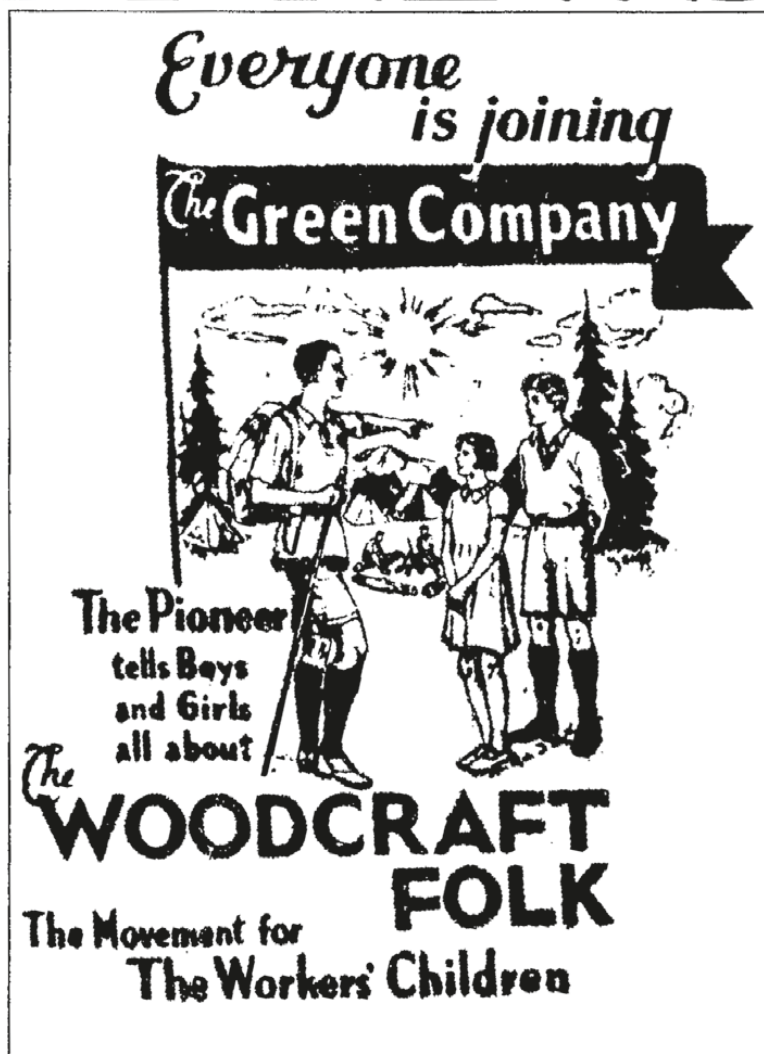


Figure 9.1 DF News, 2001. Illustration courtesy of Woodcraft Folk.

that business should also be fun. This practice is also intended to include those with less experience and make them feel welcomed into the democratic processes of the DF movement.⁵⁸

Another noticeable feature of Things is their facilitation, which is undertaken by the Chair of the DF committee, a role that does not imply leadership but a more practical responsibility for the literal chairing of meetings and pastoral support.⁵⁹ Things and discussions are facilitated through the use of hand signals, which help to keep the discussion flowing but also provide space for other interventions such as the jargon-buster hand signal, which signals a request for a specific term or reference to be explained. While generally these hand signals are followed, in my observations of Things there were also times when the discussion descended into a less structured but in some ways more engaged chat. In an online Thing I attended, this occurred more obviously later on, after three hours of discussions and a half-hour break. While this deviation from structured discussion slowed down the progression of the meeting, it also allowed for those involved to make jokes and riff off of one another. I could feel the energy in the otherwise quite tired Zoom call rising, as voices overlapped and became louder. So, while hand signals and structured discussion are important for the creation of non-hierarchical structures within DF organising, the space around this to relax and joke was also important for engagement in the meeting and participation in discussion.

Constitution, policies and procedures

The final aspect of DF organisation I am going to explore is that which is represented through their documentation and physical resources. While I am interested in identifying the aspects of DF organisation that could be usefully applied elsewhere, this also allows me to recognise that they do not operate in a vacuum.

In 1999, DFs introduced a set of guidelines, inspired by the Woodcraft Folk's national aims. They dealt with general behaviour, participation, drugs: legal and illegal, hygiene, child protection, sanctions and organisation.⁶⁰ Over the next 25 years these guidelines would develop into the DF constitution and policies.

The main influence on these documents continues to be the principles of the Woodcraft Folk itself; many of the formal procedures followed by the DFs reflect the Woodcraft Folk's own policies and structures. One reason for this is that while the DFs operate semi-autonomously, four spaces are reserved for them on the Woodcraft Folk's general council. Models of democracy and organisation observed by DF delegates are thus

brought back to the DF committee as possibilities to try out and experiment with. This could be further formalisation of agendas and papers for meetings, or attempts to review the aims and principles of the movement such as the DF strategic review 'Grooving to a Phatter Bassline' in response to the Folk's equivalent 'Dancing to a Stronger Beat'.⁶¹

DFs are also influenced by external forms of political organising, as can be seen in DF pamphlets (as shown in [Figure 9.2](#)) where mention is made of practices such as non-violent communication and the organising principles of groups like the Zapatistas.⁶² DF events, as well, have often invited and involved connections with other groups. They have been linked with and played host to a range of movements over the years, most obviously the co-operative movement but also the National Deaf Children's Society,⁶³ as well as young asylum seekers who were invited to attend a DF camp.⁶⁴

DF organisational practices must thus be understood as being influenced by a range of organisations and ideas which are brought into and out of focus as different members bring their experiences into the group. This leaves the DF structure with a certain elasticity of practice that allows for every new generation to gain their own sense and experience of what organising could be like; and to add to and change its shape.

In trying to describe the specific ways in which DFs organise, I have been confronted with the fact that the DFs are a movement that changes year on year. Everything from the camps they hold to the structure of their organising committee, and the specifics of their policies, is open to debate and is available for new generations of DFs to edit as they please. DF organisation must be understood as it is, that is, flexible and playful, guided by ideas of democracy and always ready to learn from its own mistakes.

In this section, I have made links between DF organisation and the Woodcraft Folk in general; in the next I consider the reverse: the impact that DFs have had on the Woodcraft Folk, showing that young people are capable of more than just organising a movement for themselves but also influencing the structure and practices of a national charity.

Learning from the DFs

The relationship between the DFs and the Woodcraft Folk is not a one-way system. As I have shown, the District Fellowship is often a place for young people to experiment with ideas they have learned throughout their time in the Folk: practising skills acquired through organising international

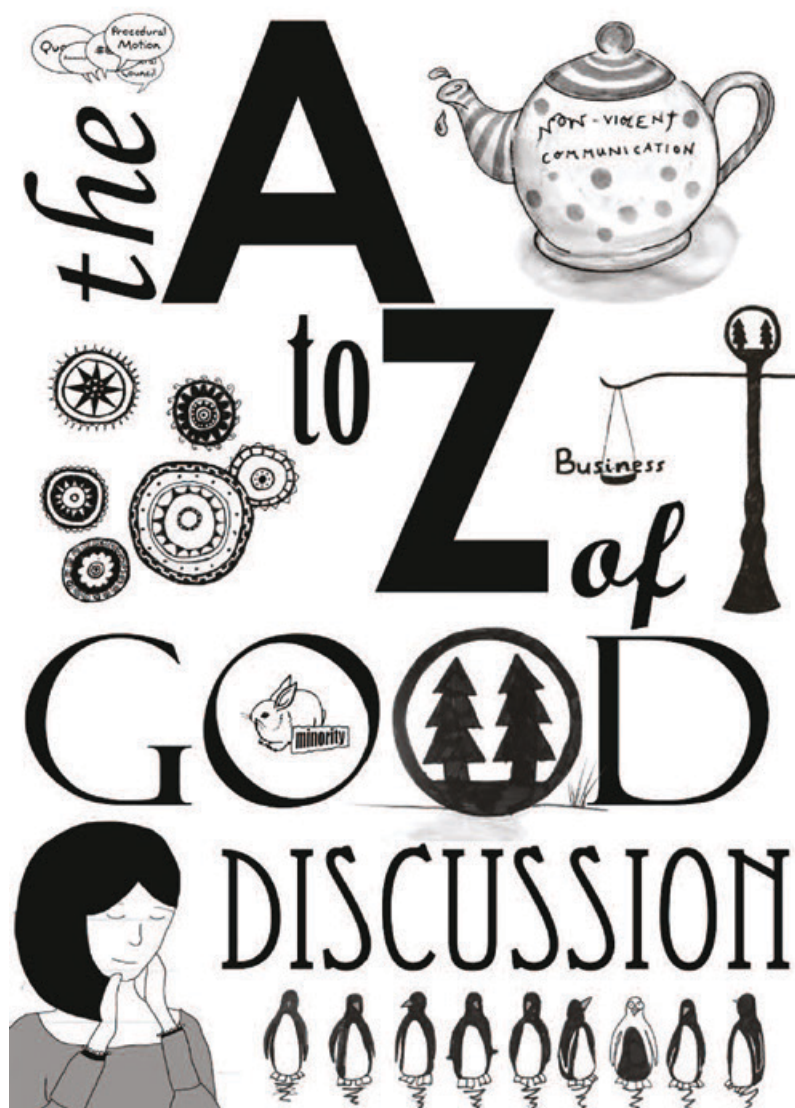


Figure 9.2 *The A to Z of Good Discussion*, booklet for District Fellows. Illustration courtesy of Woodcraft Folk.

campus and trying out different forms of organisational structure taken from interactions with the Woodcraft Folk's general council.

The District Fellowship has also always been an outward looking movement, from its membership, some of which comes from pre-existing Woodcraft groups but also includes new members who have never been

in the Folk before, to its connections with other youth organisations and its engagement in wider political issues. DFs are as much a conduit for bringing new ideas and ways of organising into the Woodcraft Folk as they are a product of its teachings.

Richard Palser has written about how the culture of the Woodcraft Folk changed in the 1980s due to the influx of new parents who had been involved in the youth movements of the late 1960s. These parents moved the Folk away from tradition and ritual, connecting it with the political campaigns of the time.⁶⁵ I argue that the DFs contributed to sustaining these changes within the Woodcraft Folk and continued to open it up to new political movements. This can be seen in the 1990s when they helped to develop positive approaches towards sexuality, and in the 2000s up to the present day where their work on increasing support for volunteers can be linked to the Occupy movement's focus on activism that is emancipatory, both in its results and in its practices.

In 1996, DFs formed the Rainbow Network, which was a space to provide support for those who identified as gay, lesbian or bisexual and to promote awareness of related issues in society. The DFs also wanted to influence national Woodcraft policy in regard to issues of sexuality in the Folk.⁶⁶ This was not the first time sexuality had been discussed within the Woodcraft Folk (in reaction to Section 28 the annual delegate conference passed a motion encouraging and supporting gay and lesbian members; while the motion passed, it was hotly debated and some districts even walked out),⁶⁷ but the work of the Rainbow Network went beyond this. It held workshops at Venturer camps (for 13- to 15-year-olds) and at national DF gatherings. The importance of this group was recognised by the creation of a role on the DF committee tasked specifically with the co-ordination of these activities.⁶⁸ In 2002, a DF written motion sent to the Woodcraft Folk's annual conference was passed; it instructed the General Council to actively support the expansion of the Rainbow Network to the wider Woodcraft Folk.⁶⁹ This involved formalising a commitment to host Rainbow Network events at all future gatherings and producing and distributing Rainbow Network materials.

The Rainbow Network is not the only DF project that has influenced the wider Folk; debuting at international camp in 2001, MEST-UP is the Mediation, Education, Support Team Umbrella Project.⁷⁰ It originally drew upon training in conflict resolution and peer listening that a group of DFs had received at a mediation seminar in Strasbourg the year before. They were encouraged to adopt the model after successfully practising it over the summer of 2000, when they helped to resolve arguments that occurred at an Austrian international camp.⁷¹ MEST-UP originally

worked closely with the Rainbow Network and eventually combined with it, extending its support programme to more general services and continuing to teach young people about conflict resolution. As MEST-UP developed, it also became integral to the functioning of DF events. Current policy requires MEST-UP representatives to take on shifts at all camps which the DFs run; their major role is to support the mental wellbeing of their peers but also to provide information on sexual health, alcohol safety and questions around sexuality. I would argue that the Woodcraft Folk's pioneering position in relation to gender and sexuality, which include the Rainbow Network's resources for under-12s on LGBTQ+ issues,⁷² is due to the work done on these topics by the DF movement. MEST-UP's presence, which is deemed so essential at DF events, has also started to influence practice at Woodcraft camps in general, with the introduction of volunteer support roles and wellbeing spaces at international camps, and an increasing emphasis on the satisfaction of volunteers.

What more can be learned from DF modes of organising? Looking at the DFs demonstrates that they already hold a vast wealth of experiences from which Woodcraft, other youth movements and indeed wider society can draw on. In particular, that lack of experience can actually be generative for the production of new ways of thinking. Due to its age range, the District Fellowship has a high turnover rate; thus, it often has issues with organisational memory and the passing on of knowledge and skills. Rather than holding them back, this seems to provide DFs with the space to experiment with new modes of organising.

Furthermore, experience is shown to not be an issue distinctive to youth. Within the Woodcraft Folk young people, due to their time within the DFs, they often have more experience than adult volunteers. If the trouble with youth – their lack of experience – is not confined only to young people, I argue we should seriously consider the extension of youth's other associated quality – fun – to the organisation of adults as well.

David Graeber explores the role of play in emancipatory organisation and education. In various writings he has described the key role of the carnivalesque in creating space for the possibility of imagining a different future. What I want to highlight is his ethnographic description of the organisation of direct action in the context of early anti-globalisation activism, specifically what he describes as 'silly fantasies'.⁷³ Through his observations of the planning process for an anarchist action at the Summit of the Americas, held in Quebec City in 2001, Graeber identifies the suggestion of the absurd as key to achieving the aims of a movement that wants to change the very parameters of what is currently considered to be possible.⁷⁴

The Canadian press keeps framing this as some kind of alien invasion. Thousands of American anarchists are going to be invading Canada to disrupt the Summit. The Quebecois press is doing the same thing: it's the English invasion all over again. So my idea is we play with that. We reenact the battle of Quebec.⁷⁵

In Graeber's text, this plan is further embellished through discussion, with the addition of outfits combining hockey jerseys and the group's signature chemical jumpsuits. It is then clarified as involving climbing a 180 ft cliff, a further 15 ft of chain fence, and finally fighting past 2,000 riot police, all in order to present a petition to Bush, a conclusion added just because it would be 'really funny'.⁷⁶ This plan is a silly fantasy, but what Graeber argues is that even when the conversation has gone on too long and devolved into unstructured play, 'what goes on in meetings, the structure of decision-making, is critical to the movement'.⁷⁷ It is this playfulness and experimentation that integrally produces a space both for creating new forms of democracy but also for revealing the inherent hypocrisy and contradictions of the capitalist world system. What may seem to be silly, the discussion of a seemingly impossible protest task or in the context of DFs the elephant in the room, is still a process of trying out and of practising important skills. It requires people to speak up and express their ideas and opinions, to listen to the thoughts of others, to come to a final decision. By being silly it does all this without taking itself too seriously; its playfulness opens up more space to be wrong, to make mistakes and thus to get involved. The liminal space of youth, not quite adult and not quite child, has meant that for the DFs business has always been something that should be engaging and fun, something you can enjoy doing.

The defining feature of DF organisation is the very Woodcraft process of learning by doing. This emphasis on experience as important for learning is already acknowledged in adult theories of education; what is left out is the other side of DF organisation: the element of fun or leisure. From its start, the District Fellowship has been about the balance between extending Woodcraft beneficiary status to those up to the age of 21 and preparing young people to become leaders of their own groups. This process can be seen within their self-organised social events, which are advertised as festivals but require the young attendees to learn and use skills in admin, site management, safeguarding, first aid and cooking. As all attendees to camps will have clan duties, DFs require active engagement rather than passive consumption in order for events to happen.

One of the arguments for the separation of children from adults is based around the need to protect youth from the hardships of the adult

world. What this assumes is that being an adult requires the abandonment of fun and leisure or at the very least its limitation. Shulamith Firestone makes the point that actually, 'what we ought to be protesting, rather than that children are being exploited just *like* adults, is that *adults* can be so exploited. We need to start talking not about sparing children for a few years from the horrors of adult life, but about eliminating those horrors.'⁷⁸

Carole MacNeil has explored the possibilities for applying adult leadership theory to youth leadership development.⁷⁹ What about the other way round? What if the importance of play in the education and organisation of young people was extended to adults as well?

Conclusion

The central axiom of this chapter has been that we should attempt to understand children and adults together rather than as biologically distinct beings. From this starting point many questions could be raised; I have focused on only one of these: what can be learnt from an organisation of young people? I have approached this question from the assumption that youth is socially constructed, but this does not mean that the way young people are viewed does not have an impact on how they interact with the world. In deference to this, I have explored how youth has been understood, drawing out two key traits that also define my argument; youth as linked to lack of experience, and to fun.

The effects of this social construction is what makes the DFs an ideal point of focus. Most of the time, they are seen as young people, but occasionally they are able to come together to create spaces that question that categorisation; in which, by being free of adults, they are no longer defined in relation to that which they socially are not.

Through the example of the DFs and my articulation of one social definition of youth I have shown that we all lack experience sometimes; thus, questions of how we organise to include those without experience are essential. Furthermore, if lack of experience is not solely limited to youth, then the other side of youth, that of fun, could also be extended to the daily lives of adults.

Through articulating some of the methods by which the DFs make things happen, I have provided examples of different possibilities for organising more generally. Theory exploring more enjoyable ways of organising and more equal ways of educating already exists, but it is through concrete examples of how fun can be incorporated into work, and experience can be gained through failure, that the DFs become a

useful source of inspiration for thinking about how to create better and more inclusive organisations.

Some questions do remain: the DFs are in a privileged position of being only semi-autonomous; when things work well, they are able to act independently but if things go wrong, they can also retreat to the Woodcraft Folk for support. The negative consequences of failure as a learning technique are much higher without this safety net. Another question is how to encourage fun without being patronising. As anyone who has ever done an icebreaker knows, it is incredibly awkward to feel like a child in a work environment. It is that feeling, however, that is exactly what this chapter contests, the idea that it is bad to feel like a child once you are older than 21. Throughout our lives we will all, at times, experience a lack of knowledge or skills. At the same time, we all deserve enjoyment and to have fun even while organising. If we want to create organisations and spaces that are welcoming to everyone and that can continuously engage new volunteers, then we need to learn from the DFs.

Notes

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17. 'The Role of the 16 Plus in the Folk'.
18. 'The Role of the 16 Plus in the Folk'.
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27. London, UCL Special Collections [YMA/FH_20b].
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30. London, UCL Special Collections [YMA/[FH_20b].
31. London, UCL Special Collections [YMA/[FH_20b].
32. Interview with Delilah Wallbank (Zoom, 17 May 2023).
33. Laura Tisdall, *A Progressive Education? How Childhood Changed in Mid-Twentieth-Century English and Welsh Schools* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020).
34. Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 1.
35. Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 2.
36. Tisdall, *A Progressive Education?*, 3.
37. Being on shift means being responsible for the health, safety and wellbeing of all of those on the camp. There are day shifts and night shifts, and for those over 18 being on shift also means staying sober. There are various rules about how many people need to be on shift, dependent on how many people are at the camp, but generally there will be at least two camp organisers or committee members (orange hi-vis), one first aider (yellow hi-vis) and one MEST-UP rep (pink hi-vis). MEST-UP is the DF name for those trained to look after the emotional and mental health of their peers.
38. Before camp, everyone attending is put into a group (which is called a clan and often has another name inspired by the theme of the camp – in this case, they were all ABBA themed). These groups are assigned different chores each day, generally cooking, washing up or tidying. This way, everyone is involved in keeping the camp running.
39. This final point can be and is swapped for any small fact, ranging from favourite biscuit to political hero.
40. Interview with Delilah Wallbank (London, 13 August 2023).
41. Interview with Delilah Wallbank (London, 13 August 2023).
42. Annabella Pollen, ‘“The Most Curious” of All “Queer Societies”? Sexuality and Gender in British Woodcraft Camps, 1916–2016’, in *Queer as Camp: Essays on Summer, Style and Sexuality*, ed. Kenneth B. Kidd and Derritt Mason, 31–50 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019), 22.
43. London, UCL Special Collections [YMA/FH_20b].
44. Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 1989 (London: Marx Memorial Library and Worker’s School, Woodcraft Folk Collection); interview with Delilah Wallbank (Zoom, 21 May 2023).
45. *DF News*, May 1996, 7; Interview with Delilah Wallbank (Zoom, 25 May 2023).
46. *DF News*, Summer 1999, 2; *DF News*, Summer 2002, 6.
47. *We Are of One Blood: Memories of the First 60 Years of the Woodcraft Folk 1925–1985* (London: Marx Memorial Library and Worker’s School, Woodcraft Folk Collection), 4–5.
48. *DF News*, Winter 1998, 3.
49. The DFs’ sexuality and identity working group.
50. The main liaison was with Worker’s Beer, an organisation which employs members of trade unions and left-wing campaign groups to work on bars at events and festivals, providing the volunteers with free access to these events and funding to the groups they represent.
51. In charge of organising and advertising opportunities for DFs to get involved in international projects, often through the Woodcraft Folk and IFM-SEL. *DF News*, May 2001, 11–13.
52. *DF News*, Summer 1999, 8.
53. *DF News*, Summer 1999, 8.
54. *DF News*, Winter 1999, 3.
55. Personal communication.
56. *DF News*, Spring 2001, 2.
57. Interview with Delilah Wallbank (Lockerbrook, 19 August 2023).
58. *DF News*, Summer 2004, 19.
59. A distinction made tangible by the existence of the DF chair, a hand-sized carved wooden chair that symbolically holds the leadership power of the movement to emphasise a commitment to lack of hierarchy.
60. *DF News*, Winter 1999, 9.
61. *DF News*, Winter 2002, 2.
62. *The A to Z of Good Discussion*, personal collection.
63. *DF News*, Spring 2009, 14.
64. *DF News*, Autumn 2003, 4.

65. Palser, 'Learn by Doing, Teach by Being', 13.
66. *DF News*, Spring 1996, 6.
67. Interview with Delilah Wallbank (Zoom, 15 August 2023).
68. *DF News*, Summer 1997, 4.
69. *DF News*, Summer 2002, 4.
70. *DF News*, Winter 2000, 5.
71. *DF News*, Winter 2000, 2.
72. Pollen, "'The Most Curious" of All "Queer Societies"?'', 21.
73. David Graeber, *Direct Action: An Ethnography* (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2009), 1.
74. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 2–3.
75. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 1.
76. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 2.
77. Graeber, *Direct Action*, 11.
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79. Carole MacNeil, 'Bridging Generations: Applying "Adult" Leadership Theories to Youth Leadership Development', *New Directions for Youth Development* (2006): 27–43.

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Young people as global citizens and global youth work

Douglas Bourn

As other chapters in this volume demonstrate, the role of young people within the decision-making processes and practices of the Woodcraft Folk became an increasingly important feature of the organisation from the late 1980s. Influenced not only by pressures from within the organisation of young people seeking more of a voice but also by the need to be more closely aligned with youth service priorities, the Woodcraft Folk began a process that linked its educational and international work to these changes. This chapter looks at examples of these changes in the 1990s, highlighting in particular the ways in which international camps were run and the development of a more youth-led approach to its educational work in general. Central to the themes of this chapter when reviewing these developments will be the extent to which they aligned with what was happening in the wider youth service, particularly through the development of the concept of 'global youth work'.

It is also important to note, from a personal perspective, that while I had been involved in some of the initial discussions on the changes within the Woodcraft Folk in the 1980s during my time as National Secretary, I was no longer involved in the organisation in the 1990s when the planning and implementation of these changes in the running of camps took place. I was, however, Director of the Development Education Association from 1993, and in 1995, with others, developed the concept of global youth work. I found my experience in the Woodcraft Folk directly relevant when developing the term, although, as will be shown, global youth work was developed and implemented by a range of youth bodies. While the Woodcraft Folk may not have consciously used the term global youth work in the 1990s, it is a valuable term to use as the basis for analysis of

its practice because it reflects broader changes taking place within youth work and so provides a valuable tool in terms of locating the organisation within these trends.

Woodcraft Folk and the personal and social development of young people

Although the Woodcraft Folk had moved on from recapitulation theory in the 1930s, as discussed in [Chapter 4](#), it tended in its educational publications up to the 1980s to give only marginal attention to the personal and social development of young people. *The Woodcraft Way*, the handbook for leaders of Pioneer-aged children in the 1950s and 1960s, only referred to health and hygiene and still with a strong emphasis on fitness. The 1978 edition of the *Leaders' Manual* could be seen as recognising the need to engage with the changing role of children and young people in society. There are references to the environmental and social influences on children, including a brief discussion of 'the teenager'. However, the emphasis is very much on issues adults need to consider, including topics such as the 'generation gap'. There was at least some recognition of issues many young people face in the form of the following question being posed as a basis for discussion: 'What social pressures and influences threaten a teenager's mental and physical well-being today?'¹

By the 1970s these themes had become central to most youth work policies and practices in England. A range of government reports during this period and into the 1980s put an emphasis on youth work needing to put the needs of young people centre stage rather than the needs of the youth organisation. For example, the Thompson Report in 1982 stated:

In our discussions with *young people* we found they were especially concerned with the general context of their lives and the need for their views about how society was run to be taken seriously. They wanted to have an effective say in the running of organisations and in other decisions concerned with their welfare. They did not accept the claim sometimes advanced that giving young people decision-making authority did not work, and even that young people themselves did not want it; but felt that even those who claimed to believe in young people's right to make decisions were sometimes unwilling to accept the implications of this when decisions were actually made.²

As mentioned in [Chapter 6](#), during the 1980s the Woodcraft Folk was beginning to address the impact of societal changes through its engagement with anti-racist work, and there was evidence of a recognition of youth work themes such as empowerment in the ‘development education’ publications. But it could be argued that a still influential trend within the organisation was seeing aspects of its practices, particularly camping, as an escape from societal concerns. The term ‘fashioning a new world’ at international camps emerged as a popular theme. During this period when I was National Secretary, I wrote an article in a youth work magazine about the Woodcraft Folk and said it could be seen as a ‘haven from the worst excesses of Thatcherism’.³

It was when new members who had experience of the wider health and social service world became active within the Woodcraft Folk that one saw the emergence of new publications which aimed to link the organisation’s philosophy with issues concerning the personal and social development of young people. It became noticeable that the Woodcraft Folk had recognised the need to give greater support to young people within the organisation in terms of both their personal and social development.

Educational publications and projects

During the 1990s, the Woodcraft Folk was successful in securing a range of funding that enabled the organisation to focus more on a youth-led approach to its work. An example of this, published in 1994, was a health promotion resource for 9–13-year-olds called *How Are You Feeling?* This resource as shown by the front cover in [Figure 10.1](#) was produced in an accessible and popular format. Written and co-ordinated by Woodcraft Folk leaders in Leeds, Manchester and Merseyside, it represented a significant departure in terms of the pedagogical approaches within the organisation by starting with the individual needs of young people – their feelings, beliefs, values and how they managed stress, as well as how optimism can be constructed and self-esteem raised. What the resource aimed to do was link well-known youth work approaches such as participation, personal and social development and empowerment to Woodcraft Folk values around co-operation and a sense of equity.⁴

Although the resource did not have the impact that had been envisaged, perhaps because it was too much of a departure from existing group activities and practices, it did demonstrate the ways in which

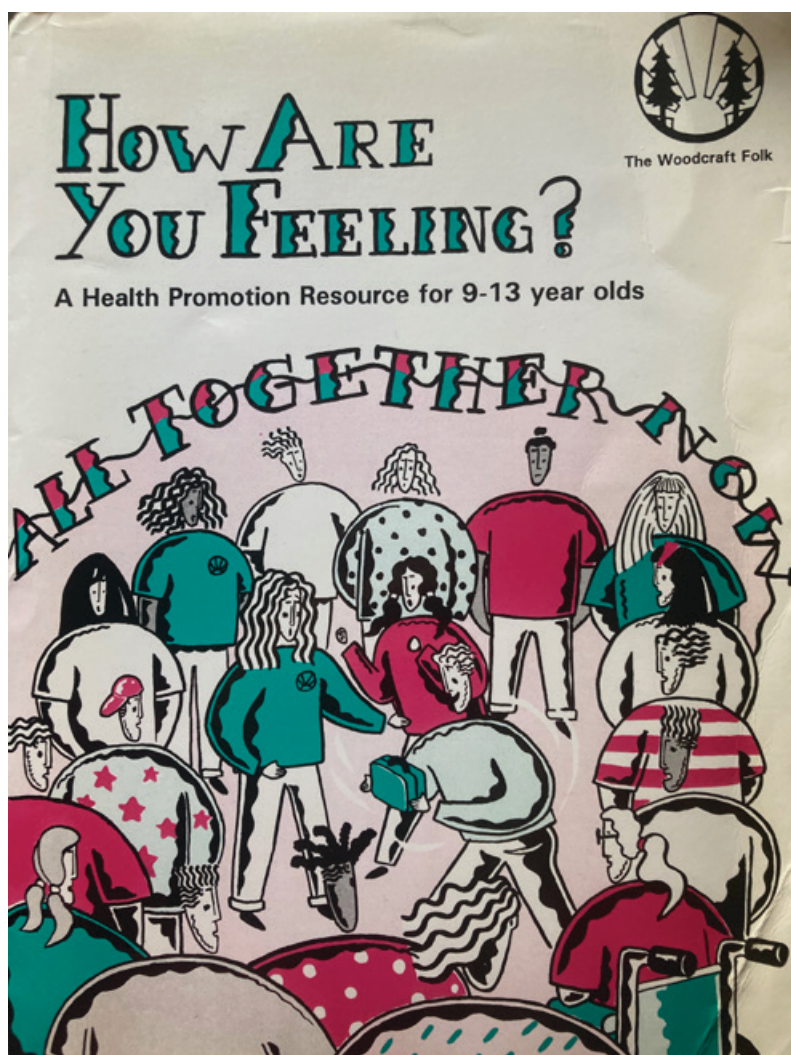


Figure 10.1 *How Are You Feeling?* educational resource pack. Author's collection.

both the Woodcraft Folk and the wider youth work field were moving in the same direction in terms of how to connect young people's concerns and interests with the wider social forces emerging in the world. While the educational resources produced by the Woodcraft Folk, *Getting on with Others* and *Images*, had been well received, there was clearly a

conscious decision that all of this material should be more directly youth work based, which in turn meant a young people-led approach. Indeed, it was the development education material which started this different approach.

Another resource published in 1993 by the Woodcraft Folk, *Let's Take the World in Hand*, which had been funded by the UK government's Ministry of the Environment, had built on this more young person-led approach by having the following as the starting point for activities:

- What does the environment mean to me?
- What do we care?
- Will what I do make a difference?

The stated aims of the resources were to:

... enable young people to explore issues which concern them, to ask questions, investigate and discuss possible answers, to make their own minds up, and then to decide on what action they wish to take.⁵

This resource (see [Figure 10.2](#)) was well received by leaders and the wider youth service but, like similar material produced in the 1980s and 1990s, there was a lack of continual funding to ensure the themes were embedded into ongoing training programmes. What these materials demonstrated, however, was a desire within the Woodcraft Folk to make closer connections to youth work methodologies and at the same time retain its distinctive educational philosophy. Another example was the peer education project co-ordinated from the Folk's Northern Office in the early 1990s. This provided the impetus for the organisation's general direction and policies to take on more of a young people-led approach. The project provided the opportunities for young people within the Woodcraft Folk to exchange information and discuss issues such as sexual health, AIDS, drugs and alcohol.⁶

The rest of this chapter now looks at how these changes were reflected in the organisation's approach to its international work, particularly its international camps, as this is where there is the clearest evidence for reviewing the move towards a more youth-led approach. To assess this, however, it is appropriate to locate these discussions within the debates taking place within youth work in the 1990s and 2000s.

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that there was a need to put the needs and concerns of young people more centre stage in debates on learning about and engaging with the wider world. The result was the emergence of the concept of 'global youth work'. This term emerged from a range of initiatives undertaken by the Development Education Association and its youth work arm, the Joint Agencies Group, in partnership with the leading youth bodies at the time, the National Youth Agency and a range of voluntary youth organisations including the Woodcraft Folk.⁷ It aimed to promote youth work practice that enabled young people to make connections between the personal, the local and the global. It further aimed to encourage young people to question their own assumptions, gain a more critical understanding of the world around them and challenge inequality and injustice.⁸

The main publication that emerged out of these debates was *A World of Difference: Making Global Connections in Youth Work*, published by the Development Education Association (DEA) on behalf of a wide range of youth work and development agencies. The report was framed within an understanding of the forces of globalisation and saw the youth service as a valuable place for the promotion of global perspectives. The report suggested that 'the values underpinning the (youth) service are in line with those of development education'.⁹ A feature of the report was a discussion of the activities of youth organisations and examples of good practice. The Woodcraft Folk was one of the national youth organisations, alongside bodies such as the Guides, Scouts and Methodist Association of Youth Clubs, that demonstrated there was increased interest in promoting learning about global issues. Woodcraft Folk's development education project had clearly started this approach and this was noted in *A World of Difference*. Woodcraft Folk leaders interviewed as part of the research for the project noted awareness of the term development education:

They saw it being implemented through the following:

- project work on other countries;
- weekly group night activities through drama, craftwork and music;
- international exchanges.

One leader saw it being implemented 'like a dripping tap, trying to bring it in wherever one can'.¹⁰

The report also made mention of the Woodcraft Folk 1995 international camp, where 'the right to a home' was one of its main themes.

There was also a section on the Woodcraft Folk's development education project which noted that the materials started with the everyday concerns of children and young people. The resources produced, it suggested, did 'blaze a trail in having, within a development education framework, discussions and activities on self-identity, gender differences, disability and views about the future'.¹¹

Following the launch of *A World of Difference*, the DEA secured major funding to implement its main recommendations, developing the term 'global youth work' as 'an approach, which starts from young people's everyday experiences and engages them in a critical analysis of local and global influences on their lives and their communities'.¹² The use of the term 'global' was deliberate; it aimed to secure a different perspective to those associated with 'development' or 'international'.¹³ As the term was developed and applied by youth organisations, global youth work also became seen as about seeking 'young people's active participation to build alliances and create change, locally and globally'.¹⁴ This reference to participation was seen as being linked to 'bringing about change towards greater equity and justice'.

What distinguished global youth work from previous work such as development education was having young people's own perspectives and experiences as the starting point, as well as focusing on the impact of globalisation on their lives with an emphasis on empowerment and social action.¹⁵ This led the DEA, later renamed as 'Think Global', to put greater emphasis on 'giving young people opportunities to play a key role in the design, delivery and evaluation of projects' through a model entitled 'Connect, Challenge, Change' (CCC). This is how the model was explained:

[W]e help connect young people to the global issues that matter to them. We support them to make the connections between the personal, local and global, and to connect with peers who share their passions and concerns. We encourage young people to challenge themselves, to gain a more critical understanding of the world around them, and to challenge inequality and injustice. We support young people to plan and take action to bring about positive change towards a more just and sustainable world.¹⁶

The themes proposed by the DEA had already gained support within the wider service, as can be seen by the National Youth Agency's own engagement in the area through their 'Blackberries from Mexico' resource. This noted that while there was a longstanding tradition within youth work

of promoting learning about the wider world, it had tended to be seen as a separate activity and that what was now needed was for global issues to be much more central to its provision.¹⁷ Global youth work became an important feature within the youth work landscape. Its principles were taken up by a range of youth organisations, including the Scouts, Boys Brigade and Y Care International. It also became featured within the training standards for youth workers.¹⁸

Woodcraft Folk and global youth work

As already mentioned, the Woodcraft Folk was recognised as a key organisation in the promotion of this new approach to youth work. While there is no evidence that the organisation explicitly used the term ‘global youth work’ in the 1990s, its practices were clearly aligned with bringing a more youth-led approach to both its international and educational work. The youth wing of the organisation, the District Fellows, which are discussed in more detail in [Chapter 9](#), were in the 1990s directly involved in organising their own international exchanges. This included a leaders’ and young people’s visit to the refugee camps of the people of the Western Sahara in Algeria. Influenced by the success of the peer education project, young adults began to play a more central role in the decision-making processes of the organisation. The most evident examples of these changes were in both the content and structures of the Woodcraft Folk international camps. These camps have always acted as the laboratory for the development of the organisation’s educational work, as discussed in [Chapters 6](#) and [9](#). They demonstrated the Woodcraft Folk’s continued commitment to placing global themes centrally in its educational work but now through a youth-led approach.

The first example of this was in 1995 with the seventieth anniversary international camp held in Brockenhurst in the New Forest, England. It showed the growing importance given to a youth voice within both its planning and programme. This included young people playing a major role in the daily newspaper *The Pony Express* and more events for 16–20-year-olds. A big debating point at the camp was a large-scale simulation game on the theme of migration and refugees. This camp also reflected an emerging trend within the organisation of empowerment and action. The Woodcraft Folk had always encouraged its young people to see themselves as world citizens. It also had a strong tradition of concern for the environment which goes back to its earliest days. This move towards a more youth-led, socially active and global outlook can be best

seen by these comments by a leading figure within the organisation when writing about their international camp in 2001:

Youth work can and should offer an environment in which young people can shape their own futures. For the Woodcraft Folk, the fundamental concept underpinning its educational programme is the need for social change. Big changes will be necessary to eradicate poverty, to provide the foundations for peace, to ensure all human beings are respected and have the chance to achieve their potential, and to use the earth's natural resources in such a way as to guarantee a long-term future for our planet.¹⁹

To understand what these changes meant in practice and the extent to which they aligned with the principles of global youth work, it is appropriate to look in detail at the two major international camps of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Sust 'n' Able camp, 2001

This camp, held in Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire, had sustainability as its theme, as can be seen by the logo shown in Figure 10.3, with young people working towards a declaration from the camp to take to



Figure 10.3 Sust 'n' Able logo for camp. UCL Library Special Collections, Woodcraft Folk Archive, DC/15/18, Box 2, Folder 1.

the UN sustainable development conference in Johannesburg. In planning this camp, the organisers were conscious that a camp focusing on sustainable development could lead to negative experiences, in that the changes that were necessary in society were too vast and could lead to young people feeling disempowered.²⁰ So with the goal of influencing the UN Summit on Sustainable Development, the camp consciously encouraged a sense of power and positivity, and that change was possible. This approach to change was seen as relevant both to individual lifestyles and broader systems. An empowerment and action model was developed, whereby key measurable outcomes were identified that were linked to education for social change. An example of this positive approach can be seen a letter from a youth participant at the camp, 16-year-old Neela Dolezalova, in a letter to the *Guardian* newspaper:

The words 'there's nothing we can do' don't exist here ... Here the word apathy is quite dead, and in its place a remarkable optimism, one that I know will stay with me for a long time after the solar showers have been taken down.²¹

The sense of empowerment was able to be achieved because young people within the Woodcraft Folk were involved in both the planning and delivery of the programme of the camp, and educational activities were developed alongside this for Woodcraft Folk group nights. The involvement of young people in planning the camp is where the title of the camp came from:

The programme was to offer ways of helping young people to understand the world's problems – becoming 'sussed' – and also about taking action to make it a better place now and for the future – being 'able'. Both were seen as essential elements in creating a 'sustainable' future.²²

The making of lifestyle changes included a range of activities through which it was possible to secure 'credits' for living more sustainably. These covered areas such as food, energy, health and housing, waste, education, labour, conflict, culture, and co-operation. Representatives from the young people met to oversee how these changes were being implemented at the camp, and to make the challenges more complex a series of natural disasters were included as role plays to demonstrate the obstacles to living more sustainably. As the intention was that the camp would come up with recommendations to influence the UN Summit, a series of role-play

activities were organised with an Earth Summit of participants held on the final afternoon of the camp. Among the issues that emerged were calls for clean water around the world, equal access to health and commitments from the camp participants to work towards switching to using renewable energy. A group of young people were appointed to represent the Woodcraft Folk at the UN Summit following the camp. The young people who participated in the Summit identified three experiences they had not expected:

- Firstly, they had not anticipated the extent to which they would be accepted as equal partners in the process.
- Secondly, the group found that they had been able to make a real impact through their lobbying efforts. One example of this related to discussions on a clause in the Summit implementation document about economic, social and environmental development, and how all three went hand in hand.
- Thirdly, they were delighted to find so many others who shared their views.²³

The young people returned to the Woodcraft Folk with the knowledge that young people can be involved in such events, they will be listened to and they can make a difference.

Global Village camp, 2006

This camp for nearly 5,000 children, young people and adults, held in Kent, was seen as a response by the Woodcraft Folk to the rising enthusiasm from many thousands of young people to be engaged in global issues.

The theme of the camp was to promote awareness and understanding of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and they were helped in this when securing funding from the Department for International Development through their Development Awareness Fund. Reflecting the increasingly central role young people were playing in decision-making within the Woodcraft Folk, a group of them met a year before the camp to decide on the main themes of the event. A feature of their influence could be seen in the promotion of the camp as a youth festival. The camp included a wide range of activities, covering themes such as environment, democracy and peace, but there was also a strong emphasis on empowering young people to take action. This included a 'Politically Active Revolutionary Thinking Youth' centre. This desire for a youth

voice also came from young people themselves. ‘We, too, want our voices heard,’ said student Zoe Waterman. ‘Teenagers want to change things and to contribute. It’s a lot to do with the global political dynamic. The Iraq war woke up so many people.’²⁴ The main central event of the camp was the performance by young people of a story written especially for the event by the author and poet Adrian Mitchell called *The Fear Brigade*, which showed how ‘by working together we can all change the world’.²⁵ Like earlier camps there were delegations from many regions of the world, including some groups from areas of conflict such as the Western Sahara and Palestine. ‘Talking directly to political refugees, hearing stories from Africa and the Middle East, and finding out what is going on in Brazil or Venezuela makes you see the world differently,’ said Robert Jones, aged 15.²⁶

What also became more evident in this camp was the increasingly central role young people were playing in planning the whole event. This included a youth parliament, which acted as a forum for not only sharing ideas but in making decisions as to what the camp believed should be the contents of its ‘Declaration of Empowerment’. The Declaration that was finally agreed by the youth parliament, following extensive consultation, had the following main calls for action:

- Create fairer means of trade and end the exploitation and abuse of children.
- Eradicate severe poverty across the globe.
- Support non-violence in conflicts, especially to stop the deaths and misery for children who are victims of adults and their governments going to war.
- Ensure access to free health care and free education, literacy and skills for life, and develop awareness of global issues.
- Create a permanent, safe and healthy environment for everyone.
- Ensure children’s rights are respected, including freedom to express opinions.²⁷

It was also at this camp that the influence of peer education approaches could be seen – at the MEST-UP tent young people could discuss issues such as drugs, sex, relationships, alcohol and mental health.

These two camps clearly showed global youth work in practice. They both had a clear global theme, be it sustainability or international development. The programmes of both camps reflected these themes through the range of activities that took place, be they related to refugees, global poverty, the environment or fair trade. But what made these

camps distinct from earlier international camps was the emphasis on a youth voice, providing opportunities for young people's views to be heard and taken forward into wider society. It was putting young people at the heart of the learning process, enabling them to make connections between their own lives and the wider world, and providing them with the knowledge and skills to challenge the status quo in societies and to see active social change.

Young people as global citizens

These developments leading to a more youth-led organisation, as shown through its international camps, were built on the continued democratic spirit in which Woodcraft Folk groups were run throughout the country and on the growth in activities of the District Fellowship movement as discussed elsewhere in this volume. It was the combination of being more youth led along with a continued emphasis on internationalism that enabled the Woodcraft Folk to be one of the earliest and most effective practitioners of an approach that resonated closely with global youth work from the 1990s onwards. Through their camps, international visits and broader educational work, young people within the organisation articulated how they saw themselves in relation to the wider world. If peer education is 'youth work with young people learning from each other', then what Woodcraft Folk camps showed was that this can be translated onto a global stage through living together for two weeks under canvas.

Beginning in the 1990s, there were clearly conscious decisions within the Woodcraft Folk to give young people a greater voice, role and major responsibility in the organisation of international camps. This led to camp committees being directly elected and an increased role in decision-making at all levels by young people. The camps provided an opportunity for young people to engage in a range of experiences, look at issues critically and have the skills and confidence to play a major role in decision-making and identification of appropriate forms of action.

Moving forward in global youth work

This chapter has reviewed the ways in which approaches outlined in global youth work have a close resemblance to the development of Woodcraft Folk activities from the 1990s onwards. This can be clearly seen in the ways in which the organisation's international camps

were organised and run since the 1990s. What was evident within the Woodcraft Folk's approach was the ways in which global themes became embedded within the camp's programmes in a form that was framed by young people themselves. It is the ways in which young people frame and own global themes that is relevant to discussions on global youth work.

Global youth work, like many other terms used within the field of work with young people, can all too often be little more than just a slogan with little evidence of implementation and impact. The Woodcraft Folk may not have consciously used the term, but as this chapter has shown, its practices from the 1990s onwards could be said to be putting global youth work into practice and with a distinctly radical edge, particularly in the ways in which young people increasingly became central to the organisation's decision-making. This democracy was framed within the Woodcraft Folk's aims and principles, as well as its emphasis on an internationalist outlook, equity and social justice.

Momodou Sallah, who has been one of the main academic promoters of global youth work in the UK, has stated that the field needs to be seen as a

... disruptive practice deeply rooted in the Freirean tradition of provoking critical consciousness and then supporting those most affected to take action. The first mandate of provoking consciousness is essential in order to connect with and start from where those most affected are at; the second of the duality must be about how action is taken to effect change; towards the construction of a more socially just world.²⁸

If there is a focus where the Woodcraft Folk could perhaps look again at global youth work approaches, it could be to take note of Sallah's comments about the combination of the development of a critically conscious approach alongside action at personal, local and global levels. This is recognised today within its aims and principles promoting education for social change:

Our young people develop critical thinking skills and we support them to become active in their community and the wider world.²⁹

In an era of social media, the need for young people to develop skills that foster a sense of critical consciousness within their vision of a more just and sustainable world could perhaps be posed as key to ensuring global youth work remains central to the organisation.

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3. Douglas Bourn, 'Ideologically Sound Can Be Fun', *Youth and Policy* 28 (1989): 1–8.
4. Christine Beels, *How Are You Feeling?* (London: Woodcraft Folk, 1994).
5. Woodcraft Folk, *Let's Take the World in Hand* (London: Woodcraft Folk, 1993), 9.
6. Woodcraft Folk Annual Report 1994 (London: Woodcraft Folk), 13.
7. In the early 1990s, a range of development organisations such as Oxfam had youth sections and youth organisations had international staff. The Joint Agencies Group, which had existed since the 1980s, was seen as a meeting point of these two groups.
8. Douglas Bourn, *The Theory and Practice of Development Education* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).
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10. Bourn and McCollum, *World of Difference*, 45.
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Young people: impact of Woodcraft Folk activities

Deborah McCahon

This chapter reviews the evidence of the impact of Woodcraft Folk activities on children and young people since 2010. It describes how today's generation of young members engage in the organisational values and the attempts to broaden the reach of participants. The chapter will also share some of the impact of the global pandemic on the organisation, how it adjusted, its recovery and some of the challenges the organisation faces as it approaches its centenary. A theme throughout the chapter explores inclusion and the wider adoption of recognised youth work approaches, including youth participation and engagement. The chapter shares evidence from programme monitoring and recent internal and external research, including the views of young Woodcraft Folk members.

As the organisation's current senior officer, I have been able to draw upon a wide range of internal reports and have an intimate knowledge of the different approaches tested by the organisation over the last 15 years. Woodcraft Folk is by its very nature a resourceful and optimistic youth movement, and this chapter will seek to demonstrate the organisation's desire to increase and widen participation, to achieve education for social change and to ensure future generations continue to benefit from the contributions of its volunteers.

Firstly, it is worth noting that the life experience of today's young people is very different from those joining the organisation's first group in 1925 – their experiences of family life, technology, health and life expectations. As we look back, we imagine the organisation's founders as hopeful youths seeking to build a better world following the ravages of the First World War. It seems that all times have challenges; Woodcraft Folk is today operating in an ever more divided and polarised UK society.¹

In response to this, it can be easily argued that Woodcraft Folk's organisational principles of peace, co-operation and international friendship have never been more needed within local communities. The organisation seeks to encourage communities to adopt co-operative approaches to improving the lives and experiences of all.

Leslie Paul described his motivation, and that of other founders, as a need to create an alternative movement for young people to challenge injustices: 'We are training children for a new world.'²

The desire for a 'new world' of equality and social justice still continues to drive the organisation in its current work with children and young people. While the organisation is well known for its camps and residential, it is a youth movement, using youth work approaches to support the personal and social development of its young members. In recent years, young Woodcraft Folk members have shared their desire for a new world and taken action to raise awareness on a wide range of social justice topics, including:

- Arms trade and global conflict: joining the Campaign Against the Arms Trade, STOP DSEI (Defence and Security Equipment International) and most recently adding their voices calling for a ceasefire in Gaza.
- Racism: participating in an international Choosing Anti-Racism project and engaging in Black Lives Matter activities.
- Climate emergency and climate change through a wide number of projects, at home and internationally.
- Mental health crisis and increasing levels of youth suicide through the #iwill Bereavement project.³
- Refugees: partnering with Cities of Sanctuary, undertaking inclusion activities with refugee communities and raising funds to support those fleeing their home countries.
- UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as part of the international Kids Got Rights project.⁴
- Childhood poverty: engaging in the National Education Union's #NoChildLeftBehind campaign and delivering holiday activity and food programme activities.
- Sexual violence: proactively delivering consent workshops and engaging in the international I Act project to encourage active bystanders to challenge inappropriate behaviour in social settings and among peers.

Young people today are no less passionate about creating a fairer and more equal society; in fact, due to social media they may be more aware of global injustices than previous generations. The Department

for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned research into youth social action which suggested that ‘social media has encouraged participation in social action and raised awareness about social issues among young people’.⁵

Woodcraft Folk’s own online activity during the Covid-19 lockdowns, #DreamBigAtHome,⁶ successfully engaged over 11,000 young people in its weekly topical sessions on the climate emergency, fake news and anti-racism. This online programme attracted engagement from across the globe and demonstrated that young people were keen to engage in issue-based activity and not just fill their time. Global data from public relations and research firm Edelman shows that 70 per cent of Gen Zers are involved in a social or political cause.⁷

Woodcraft Folk continues to work with young people, building their confidence and their co-operative and critical thinking skills. All Woodcraft Folk activities, group or project based, are designed to be age appropriate and start by answering the questions of group participants, supporting them to explore the issues and giving them an opportunity to bring about the change they want to see. Utilising co-operative values of self-help and self-responsibility, Woodcraft Folk young members are active participants helping to shape, develop and deliver group activities. All activities are designed to give young people the confidence, knowledge and skills needed to challenge discrimination and injustice within their communities and the wider world.

How: local groups

The traditional weekly volunteer-run Woodcraft Folk groups remain at the core of the organisation, with many young people participating in activities throughout their childhood and early adulthood. The number of groups declined following Covid-19 interruptions, with group numbers standing at 227 in March 2024, seeing a steady increase but not yet at pre-Covid-19 levels of activity.⁸ Much energy is being spent on recruiting volunteers and young members to support growth in local activity.

The weekly group experiences of children and young people may, in many cases, look very similar to previous generations: games, craft, discussions, hikes and camps. Children and young people learn about and live Woodcraft Folk’s aims and principles, which have not significantly changed since its conception. These include a co-operative approach to life, peace, international understanding, equality and inclusion, one world (sustainable development) and the rights of the child.

Every volunteer group leader can tell a story of how Woodcraft Folk benefits young people, from learning essential life skills of meal preparation to developing their ability to work with and influence others. In 2019, a group of peer researchers interviewed Venturers (13–16-year-olds) to capture the individual voices of young people about how the charity impacts them. Responses showed that young people form strong friendships within the welcoming and non-judgemental environment that Woodcraft Folk creates:

I like the people and the community, everyone's really friendly and I don't feel judged here ... It's nice to feel part of something.⁹

This wasn't the first time that research highlighted young people sharing how much they value the accepting space Woodcraft Folk creates. Young people often describe Woodcraft Folk as one of the few places where they feel safe to be themselves. The supportive relationships developed by peers and between adults and young people have been best captured in an extensive external evaluation project conducted by Catch the Light.¹⁰ Catch the Light recorded a young person as saying:

[Woodcraft Folk] really broadened my circle of friends and I now know a lot about different cultures and accept them and learn a lot about social issues everyone goes through or should know about that we don't learn in school.¹¹

Among the Venturer-led research conducted in 2019, there was also widespread agreement that their Woodcraft Folk experiences can help them become more confident:¹²

I think I'm just a little bit more social now, mainly due to the fact that I had a fear of ... talking to people, but Woodcraft has helped me, mainly just talking to people and being able to socialise more.

I definitely think I've got more confident cos I know a few years ago I wouldn't have even thought about doing stuff with Merrymoots and now I do.

Venturers appreciate the role that their volunteer leaders play in helping them develop their ability to shape their own activities:

[The leaders] help us lead it as best we can, and try and make it as Venturer led as we can, so they give us lots of independence, but if we need help, they will obviously help us.

Venturers feel that they learn practical skills, develop their knowledge of the world, explore how to work with each other and practise putting their views across:

It's made me much more aware of the world, it's made me more aware of climate change and of my footprint.

I've always had the same views but Woodcraft Folk has helped me educate the views I have and to understand them more strongly.

Venturers value the adults who support their groups and seem to have positive relationships with them.

[Our leaders] respect us really well. They respect that we're teenagers and need a bit of freedom.

The young people listen to our leaders, and I think there's a lot of respect for them, as well as a friendship there. And there is a lot of ... we feel like we can talk to them. I definitely feel like I can talk to my leaders.

With respect to the activity programme, Venturers appreciate the range of activities they participate in:

About half of the time we do debates or stuff learning about activism, or learning about lots of things going on in the world. The other half we do random fun things.

The arts and crafts stuff is good, because you're actually making stuff.

Despite these positive comments from young people, Woodcraft Folk groups struggle to recruit sufficient volunteers to support sustainable group activity. The nature of volunteering and family life is changing, and it is increasingly more difficult for adults to volunteer to co-ordinate weekly group activities. The cost of living crisis has made that harder, with some volunteers reporting that they now need to spend more of their time at work to ensure their household's financial security. A once very active volunteer shared (October 2023):

I've been volunteering for Woodcraft Folk for the last ten years. I work part time and in the past my non-work time was my own. I used this time to volunteer, among other things. Since the big rise in the cost of living I am having to take on additional, freelance

work to supplement my usual income. This impacts on my ability to volunteer as I am not reliably available in the way that I used to be. My weekends and evenings are often taken up with work which is exactly when Woodcraft Folk groups and activities take place. Being part of the groups less often means there isn't that same depth of connection with the young people or the other volunteers and I often don't have the headspace or energy to take on the administrative and organisational roles that I previously so enjoyed.¹³

From a local group perspective, the Covid-19 pandemic also created a need to rebuild. Following the pandemic, a large number of volunteers left the organisation, and 22 per cent of groups closed their doors permanently despite a growing demand from children, young people and families to join local groups. Much energy has been invested in recruiting new volunteers and reigniting groups, but still group numbers are below those of pre-pandemic levels. The impact of the pandemic was felt across all volunteer-led organisations; for example, the Scouts reported its biggest slump in membership numbers since the Second World War, with one in ten of its adult volunteers leaving the organisation in 2020–21.¹⁴

There is a glimmer of hope: new Woodcraft Folk group registrations are increasing, especially for the older age groups within the network. Research by KinderCare suggests that one positive of the pandemic is an increase in flexible and hybrid working,¹⁵ enabling working adults to juggle potential volunteering and family commitments. The report also goes on to suggest that parents are seeking to prioritise spending more time with their children and engaging in activities which 'nurture the whole child'.

Youth work projects

As well as local group activities and various camps, young members have opportunities to engage in international and youth work projects. These are designed to support the development of skills, retention of young members and transition to leadership roles. Woodcraft Folk's projects are built on the basic principles of quality youth work, including active voluntary participation and empowerment of young people, utilising young people's view of the world and helping them to develop stronger relationships and collective identities. Youth work should also seek to respect and

value differences while promoting, and indeed amplifying the voice of young people.

In recent years there have been a number of peer education and youth work projects, seeking to equip and empower young people to achieve social change through education. The All Change project is one example;¹⁶ working in partnership with the Future We Want, 17 young people (aged 9–16 years) were trained to become carbon literacy trainers. The team learnt about climate science and the impact of different lifestyle choices, and they then facilitated a series of workshops attended by their peers, teachers and other adults on carbon literacy. Each trainer received accreditation from the Carbon Literacy Trust. Some young people also brought a motion to Woodcraft Folk annual general meeting in 2023 calling for organisational-wide action to reduce the organisation's environmental impact.¹⁷

Another example of a youth work project was the international PeaceCommunicators programme (run by the International Falcon Movement in 2022).¹⁸ Woodcraft Folk young members joined other young people from Austria, Catalonia, Finland, Norway, Palestine and Ukraine. The project launch coincided with Russia's invasion of Ukraine (February 2022), which shocked participants into considering the real-life global realities of peace and conflict. The international project explored peaceful conflict resolution approaches and how best to educate young people to adopt such strategies, producing a toolkit. Programme participant Iolo Walker of Newham said of the event:

The peace education training seminar felt extremely poignant at a severe point of international political distress. We worked through the week identifying what peace means on individual, interpersonal and global scales and developed strategies on reducing harm in our daily lives and the wider world. Creating global definitions of peace and violence was extremely eye opening as they are both so contextual. I am very grateful for the opportunity to have attended the session to explore how we can collaborate to fight oppression wherever we can.¹⁹

Other recent projects have focused on children's rights, bereavement and renewable energy.

The peer education approach is very powerful, creating strong role models for future generations. It also provides a progression opportunity for Woodcraft Folk's young members, those young people who have grown up through the movement but are looking for a

greater challenge than simply participating in local group activities. The youth leadership roles created through the youth work projects not only support retention of young members but support the development of key skills which will help them in their future volunteering roles and careers.

Testing new approaches

Woodcraft Folk continues to evolve, especially in its attempts to engage a diverse range of young people. For decades, Woodcraft Folk has strived to be open and accessible to all, but increasingly in the last 15 years there has been an acceptance that Woodcraft Folk needs to take its educational approach to where young people are and not wait for individuals and families to find their local group!

Woodcraft Folk's most recent strategic plan, 2018–25,²⁰ has focused on increasing and widening participation in Woodcraft Folk's educational values.²¹ The testing and adoption of new approaches to engagement has been a deliberate attempt to engage children, young people and families who would not traditionally attend weekly groups. Taking Woodcraft Folk's values-led education to where children and young people are supports the organisation to have a broader reach. Woodcraft Folk will not achieve its aim of education for social change if it only ever engages like-minded families.

Outreach work isn't new to Woodcraft Folk – the many Play Out initiatives of the 1980s demonstrate this – but there is now an acceptance that remote or project engagement is valuable and doesn't need to lead to engagement in a local group to be meaningful. Short-term focused engagement can still have meaningful impact on the lives of children and young people.

Targeted initiatives in the last 15 years have included partnerships with specialist disability groups, such as SENSE and the National Deaf Children's Society, but have also included school-based work, outreach events, residentials, projects and non-traditional group activities.

In 2012, Woodcraft Folk worked in partnership with Envision and the Co-operative College to deliver one of the National Citizen Service (NCS) pilots – bringing a Woodcraft Folk approach to residentials and youth-led social action projects. NCS participants worked in clans and were given the freedom to create their own social action projects based on community needs they identified. Woodcraft Folk continued to deliver the NCS programme between 2013 and 2015 targeting Black and minority

ethnic communities in West Yorkshire. In the final year of the initiative, Woodcraft Folk engaged 270 young people who shared that they valued developing team-working skills and gaining insight into different communities and faiths – it seemed that there were few initiatives that brought communities together, as many young people experienced school, family and social life activities with people of a similar background and faith to themselves. Social mixing was an essential component of the NCS programme; wider impact evaluation undertaken by Ipsos MORI confirms that NCS helped to build a more confident, capable, connected and compassionate generation.²²

Targeted development work continued with communities in West Yorkshire as part of the Youth United Youth Social Action projects (2014–16), which also saw Woodcraft Folk delivery in the Wirral, rural Wales, Glasgow and Falkirk. The Youth Social Action project was designed to create new Woodcraft Folk groups, targeting schools and delivering Play Out activities in local communities to bring together potential volunteers, children and young people. While few NCS participants went on to engage in local Woodcraft Folk groups, project activity supported the rebirth of the Leeds District, which today has all age groups represented from Woodchips to District Fellows. In total, the project ran outreach activities in 23 schools and held 102 Play Out sessions in public spaces and parks, engaging 10,997 children and young people. A massive 2,561 potential volunteers were engaged in outreach and training activity – 267 of these became volunteer leaders after completing screening and membership checks. The development project created 897 places for new children and young people to join Woodcraft Folk groups, registering 42 new groups and increasing capacity in 17 existing groups during 2015 – the greatest staff-led new group development activity!

Other standalone outreach and engagement work included the Schools Life Skills project (2020–21) in London targeting Key Stage 2 and 3 pupils in disadvantaged wards. The project saw staff and volunteers deliver a six-week programme of co-operative education and climate change education during school time. In total, the initiative engaged 574 children across six schools. Simple hand-evaluation activity showed that the children had fun, enjoyed the activities, with their feedback including comments such as:

I will play with more people during playtime.

Co-operating in Woodcraft is fun.

I will remember how we all got together and we were friendly.

Some comments from pupils also indicated the longer-term influence that good-quality youth work can have on young people, for example:

I am going to join a job like this.

I will recycle more and think of the environment.²³

Similar comments were made by participants who engaged in Woodcraft Folk's Ingenious Project,²⁴ which brought together engineers and young people to explore engineering solutions to climate change.

At the same time, Woodcraft Folk staff teams were involved in delivering the Holiday Activity & Food (HAF) programme – providing food and activities for children in receipt of free school meals during the school holiday periods. HAF activity in the White City area of Hammersmith & Fulham engaged 183 children over a five-week programme in 2021 and successfully resulted in the opening of new Woodcraft Folk groups. Further HAF activities took place in the London Borough of Bromley in 2023.

Following the success of remote engagement in the online #DreamBigAtHome activities, which were initially launched in response to Covid-19 lockdowns, a new remote young member offer was developed. Those young people who can't attend a regular weekly group, whether because of distance, availability or no suitable age group for them, have been invited to join Woodcraft Folk as distanced members, known as Voyagers. These members have participated in Camps for All (2021–present), enabling them to enjoy a Woodcraft Folk residential experience.

Participant demographics for Camps for All suggests that they attract more people of colour and those from poorer backgrounds than typical Woodcraft Folk camps – 22 per cent of Camps for All participants describe themselves as having additional support needs compared to 15.2 per cent of Venturer Camp participants who describe themselves as having a disability or 19.6 per cent who describe themselves as having a health condition which impacts their lives. The greatest difference is the engagement of young people of colour, with 24 per cent of Camps for All participants in 2023 describing themselves as such compared to only 12 per cent of Venturer Camp campers despite events targeting a similar age range. Despite the difference in demographics, they all report positive experiences:

The best parts of the weekend were visiting the farm, splat, wood work, marshmallow roasting, table tennis. (Camps for All participant, age 13)

I don't want to go to school tomorrow because I had a good time here. (Camps for All participant, age 11)

I am going to tell my friends that I really enjoyed camp. (Camps for All participant, age 11)

He came home peaceful, inspired and refreshed. It was absolutely lovely to see! He would love to join another camp in the future! (Parent of Camps for All participant)

The secret to Woodcraft Folk outreach and engagement work has been working in partnership with others – bringing Woodcraft Folk values and activities to existing groups of children, young people and families. For example, joint working with The Kite Trust saw a group of LGBTQ+ young people experience their first co-operative residential and brought groups of young people together to co-create the #iwill Growing with Grief Toolkit.

Woodcraft Folk's commitment to work with like-minded organisations is not new, but there has been a steep increase since the pandemic. Woodcraft Folk's current strategic plan starts by recognising that all children and young people stand to gain massive benefits from Woodcraft Folk, that they deserve the opportunity to benefit and the charity has a duty to offer them access. Volunteer numbers will always limit the number of locally run groups, but by working in partnership with other organisations we can broaden the organisation's reach. Examples include the organisation's relationship with Free to Be Kids, a London-based charity specialising in therapeutic play approaches to support children who experience abuse and disadvantage. In 2023, Free to Be Kids made the Cudham Environmental Activities Centre their permanent home for their residential programme. During the year they brought 203 children to the centre to experience nature and play-based work. Using self-assessments and play worker observations, impact assessment suggests that 88 per cent of the children attending reported positive indicators of improved self-esteem, social confidence and resilience, including reporting feeling believed in, trusted, adventurous and special. These were based on assessments completed before and after their time at the Woodcraft Folk centre. Other impact assessments suggested that 85 per cent of young participants reported trying something they'd previously not thought possible while they were with us. Play worker evaluations reported that 95 per cent of children showed improvement in terms of self-esteem/social confidence over the course of the activity, with 79 per cent of children showing very significant improvement. And finally, to demonstrate

the practical value of hands-on experiences, 100 per cent of children developed or learned new social skills while with us, including making/keeping friendships, relating better with trusted adults and better managing frustration/challenge.

Other partnership examples

Partnership is key to co-operation; here are just two examples:

- Fairplay, a Chesterfield-based charity who provide support to families with children who have life-limiting illnesses. Fairplay delivered Woodcraft Folk Peace Education activities in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which led them to establishing a local Pioneer group for the siblings of children with life-limiting illnesses.
- Partnership work with the Regional Youth Work Unit in Yorkshire & Humber has supported Woodcraft Folk and Lockerbrook Farm Outdoor Activities Centre to provide residential experiences for groups of young people in care.

As well as links across the wider youth work sector, Woodcraft Folk has been building relationships within and across the co-operative movement. Its partnership activity with the Co-operative Academy Trust, including the Ernest Cook Trust funded Green Influencer Scheme (2021–23) successfully engaged a broad range of young people in green social action. By working with a trusted partner in areas of high deprivation, Woodcraft Folk was able to engage a greater diversity of young people, especially ethnic diversity: 38 per cent Asian, 27 per cent white, 12 per cent other ethnicity and 4 per cent Black African Caribbean – compared to 68.4 per cent of Venturer Camp 2023 participants who described themselves as white/British.²⁵

Not only were the participants of the Green Influencers from a broad range of backgrounds but they also benefitted hugely from the project. Outcomes for participants were measured using metrics selected by the funder, the Ernest Cook Trust (ECT), including the Stirling Children's Wellbeing Scale²⁶ questionnaire and Natural England's Nature Connection Index.²⁷ Both measures show a positive impact of participation in the programme, as can be seen in [Figures 11.1](#) and [11.2](#).

Woodcraft Folk's most recent work with the Peer Action Collective, in partnership with the Co-operative Group, Youth Endowment Fund, #iwill and Young Foundation, has seen Woodcraft Folk's young leaders deliver co-operative values education to young people engaged in and at

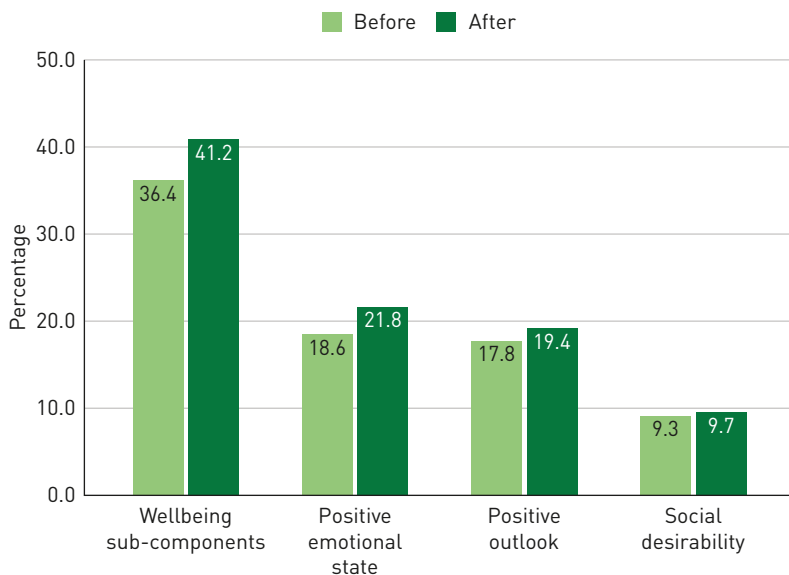


Figure 11.1 Woodcraft Folk children's wellbeing before and after participation in the Green Influencer Scheme (2021–23). Woodcraft Folk.

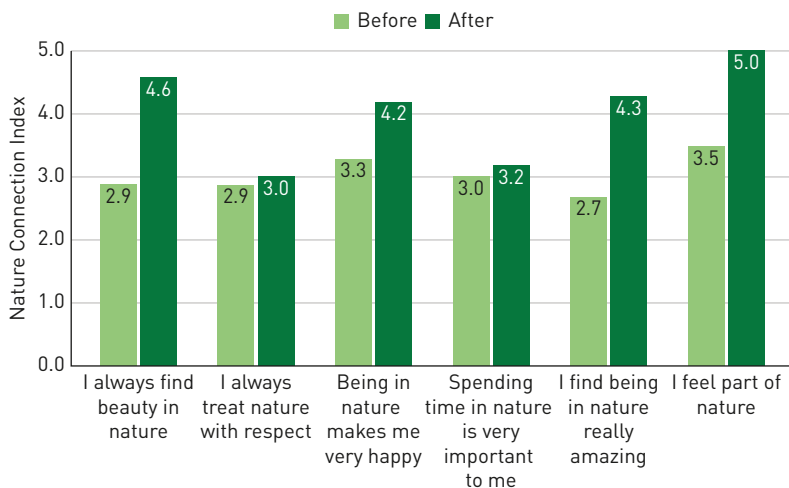


Figure 11.2 Nature Connection Index values before and after participation in the Green Influencer Scheme (2021–23). Woodcraft Folk.

risk of gang-related violence across the UK. At the time of writing, the partnership is in the early stages, with two young Woodcraft Folk leaders delivering an introduction to co-operative values as part of the initiation residential to 70 social action leads and peer researchers.

Reach

Woodcraft Folk targeted project and partnership work has definitely helped the organisation demonstrate that its aims and principles appeal to a broad range of young people. The targeted project work has also had a stronger focus on collecting demographic and impact data, partly due to funder reporting requirements. The very targeted nature of the work means that the activity is more likely to engage young people from disadvantaged communities. The demographic monitoring and impact measurement is now beginning to influence what data is collected from traditional weekly Woodcraft Folk groups, enabling a stronger comparison between the different approaches.

Historical group engagement and demographic data from local groups is often lacking or is unreliable – there has been no universal method to collect such data. Despite the lack of evidence, there has often been the assumption that Woodcraft Folk has attracted middle-class white children to its local groups, in contrast to its working-class origins. Comments from Venturers also suggest a mixed view of how inclusive local groups are. The peer-led researchers (2019) heard from some young people that they felt that Woodcraft Folk in their area was already diverse. However, this wasn't everyone's experience, and many people felt this is a priority to improve:

I think we need to take steps to make Woodcraft more inclusive, more open to everyone ... just making sure other people know about it, because a lot of the time it's quite small and not well known.²⁸

However, postcode analysis of group location against the Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) data published by the Office for National Statistics (September 2019), showed that almost an equal proportion of groups were run in areas with above average (49 per cent) and below average (51 per cent) deprivation.²⁹ The second quintile (i.e. between 20 per cent and 40 per cent most deprived areas) contains the greatest proportion of registered Woodcraft Folk groups (28 per cent), with the eastern and north regions having the highest proportion of groups located in first quintile (the 20 per cent most deprived areas), as can be seen in [Figure 11.3](#).

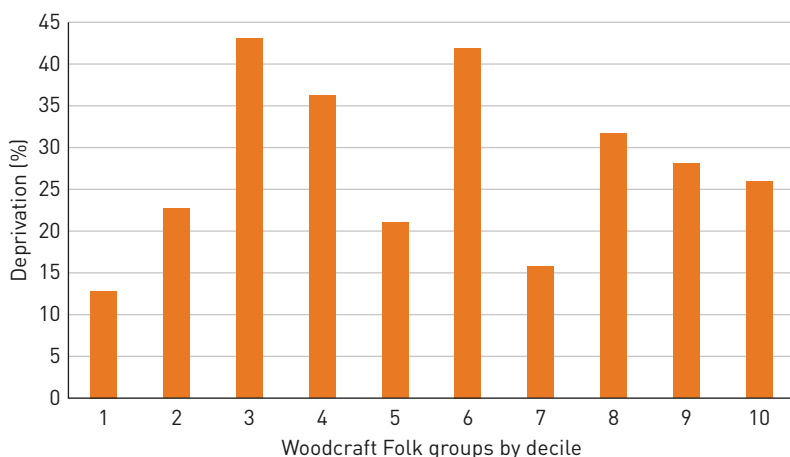


Figure 11.3 Deprivation of Woodcraft Folk group location by decile. Woodcraft Folk.

Recent demographic monitoring from 2023 would suggest that people of colour and those living in poverty are under-represented within traditional Woodcraft Folk groups, whereas Woodcraft Folk has much higher levels of engagement by neurodiverse individuals, both as participants and volunteers. Demographic monitoring at Venturer Camp 2023 suggested that 29.1 per cent of respondents described themselves as neurodiverse; neurodiversity was estimated to be one in seven in the workplace 2016 study by Helen Bewley and Anitha George from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR).³⁰

Young people in decision-making

Despite who engages, or how young people engage, the commitment to supporting young people to make decisions is still very much at the core of the organisation. For the majority of the period 2018–24, Woodcraft Folk’s Chair of the Trustee Board has been under the age of 25. Youth representation on the Trustee Board has been a long-established practice, with eight places reserved for under-25s. Young people have been supported in their transition to the Trustee Board through the age-specific Venturer Committee, established in 2012, and the DF Committee.

Youth decision-making is not restricted to committee representation but also can be seen in the weekly group decision-making of what a group is called, its choice of programme activities and peer-led

activities. Responses to the 2023 annual youth impact survey revealed the following:³¹

We choose what we would like to do each term, sometimes where we will camp or what we would like to do in that session. (age 15)

We do group planning sessions to say what we wanna do in the next term and then the adults put together a plan for it. (age 14)

Youth engagement in decision-making is not unique to Woodcraft Folk, but the age and breadth of the approach is rarely repeated. Only at Woodcraft Folk have children under eight years been involved in developing a budget for an international camp, creating a visual cake representation of how funds should be spent.

Future challenges

Woodcraft Folk, like all youth organisations, needs to make sure it is relevant to future generations. The youth-led nature of the organisation will help it evolve and develop, ensuring it meets the needs and is of interest to future beneficiaries.

The crisis in volunteering will continue to jeopardise the current local group delivery model, but communities are resourceful and models will adapt. Some local Woodcraft Folk groups meet monthly to match volunteer capacity; others have adopted a more ‘open’ age group approach to support group sustainability. Woodcraft Folk’s Membership & Programmes team is investing in additional ways to support volunteers, in order to remove barriers and generally make it easier to volunteer for Woodcraft Folk. Recent changes have included better use of technology, nationally led recruitment campaigns, increased training and greater investment in group night activity resources to help busy volunteers.

As the organisation prepares for its next strategic plan, it will continue to focus on making it easier for individuals to volunteer. Current work with 7PK to review the volunteering experience will hopefully bear fruit and successfully engage a greater number and broader range of volunteers. The organisation has definitely improved its approach to volunteer recruitment, utilising social media to reach new individuals and making a greater investment in volunteer induction and training.

And finally, Woodcraft Folk will continue to evolve its offer to young people, whether they attend local groups, projects, camps or outreach

activities. As a youth movement it will need to move with each new generation as their concerns and priorities set the agenda. Woodcraft Folk's co-operative values support the organisation to be resilient and resourceful, with individuals at all levels taking responsibility for getting things done, reflecting local need, interest and capacity. The breadth of its educational offer is one of Woodcraft Folk's strengths; there is something for everyone and the co-operative approach enables everyone's contribution to be valued and recognised.

This chapter has summarised the diverse ways that young people get to experience Woodcraft Folk and its values-led education – from early co-operative play and environmental activities for Woodchips to peer education activities and decision-making roles adopted by Venturers and DFs, or the more project-based activities that introduce groups of young people to global issues, encouraging them to think, question and engage in their wider world. There is no doubt that a Woodcraft Folk experience benefits children and young people; the embedded benefits are best explored in the organisation's Outcomes Matrix,³² which describes the learning outcomes by age group for each educational aim and principles. It is the embedded and progressive nature of young people's Woodcraft Folk learning that truly seeks to influence and empower young members.

I conclude with optimism. The organisation marches on into its second centenary, still with much to offer communities, demonstrating an adaptability to continue to support young people to fashion a new world. As each new generation grows there continues to be a need for supportive, developmental experiences that give young people the confidence, skills and experiences they need to make the positive change they wish to see.

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Conclusion

Douglas Bourn and Richard Palser

This volume has discussed several key themes within the history of the Woodcraft Folk: the influences on its early development; its relationship to broader social and educational movements; the role that songs and dances have played; its distinctive approach to its international work; and the ways in which the concept of youth has evolved both within and outside of the organisation.

It has not attempted to be a volume that takes an overview of all aspects of its history. Its narrower focus has also been different to that of previous studies. It has not taken the path of Mary Davis, who located the history of the organisation in relation to the changing fortunes and outlooks of the labour movement. She took as her starting point the view that the organisation's fate was never solely dependent on itself but 'was bound up with the fortunes of the labour movement of which it was and remains a part'. Her focus was on what she described as its 'broad brush socialism' and 'Woodcraft's genesis and development within the labour movement'.¹ Nor was its focus that of Sian Edwards, who saw the Woodcraft Folk as an example of organisations wishing to create 'good citizens' within the backdrop of the English countryside in the mid-twentieth century, when children and youth organisations saw the 'problem' of modern youth as being an urban and working-class issue. Consequently, she took a comparative approach, contrasting the Boy Scout Association, the Girl Guide Association, the Woodcraft Folk and the Young Farmers' Club.² Other articles have focused more on the roots and early history of the organisation. There have also been more anecdotal or oral history focused material. There are therefore many ways to approach the same organisation.

The editors of this volume were convinced of the need for an approach that focused on the educational goals and methods of the Woodcraft Folk in the belief that this was a rich and potentially profitable seam of material that was yet to be mined. If there is any single aspect of the Woodcraft Folk that could be said to run consistently through the last century, it is surely its attempt to use informal methods to educate young people for social change, and its sense of internationalism being a core value of those efforts. We believe that each of the chapters contained in this volume tells us something new about those methods and goals, and the changes in them over the course of the century. It is in this sense that the term progressive should be seen. For a number of years, this term was part of the organisation's strapline, but it was found in the 1980s that the term, alongside 'alternative', could be misinterpreted at a time when new forms of educational provision were emerging. In this volume, the term progressive has been seen as part of broader social and political movements with an emphasis on education for social change.

In this conclusion we want to pose two questions. Firstly, do the chapters, when taken as a whole, suggest anything new that was previously overlooked or under-rated about that history? Secondly, what further studies are required to deepen and round out our understanding of that history?

We suggest that there are two key questions that have emerged from the volume. The first is what is meant by being international in outlook. The second is what is meant by youth. Concerning the first, and reflecting the title of this volume, international friendship has been at the heart of the educational work of the Woodcraft Folk. But what does this mean and how is it articulated, and in what ways has it changed and evolved over its 100-year history? What is evident is that internationalism, while having close linkages as a term with the labour and co-operative movement, did evolve in a distinctive way within the Woodcraft Folk.

The second is the concept of youth and the ways in which the term has been used within the organisation and its relationship to trends within society. Chapters in this volume have referred to the influence of recapitulation theory on the early development of the Woodcraft Folk and its usage of the term adolescence. From the 1930s onwards, it was evident that the organisation moved away from being youth led to being much more of a family-based movement. The desire by Leslie Paul to develop a more activist youth-based section within the organisation was

discussed in [Chapter 4](#). It took another 40 years for this youth focus to re-emerge with the development of the District Fellowship age group.

This renewed interest in youth provision reflected broader trends within youth work and a concern that the voices of young people were not being heard, either within organisations or wider society. For the Woodcraft Folk this meant direct engagement with common youth work themes of empowerment and participation. As a consequence, in more recent decades young people have had a greater role in the decision-making processes of the organisation, particularly in terms of its international camps. This has meant that while many local groups and districts within the organisation still have strong family roots, in many ways the Woodcraft Folk has returned to being more youth led. These changes, however, still pose the question as to what is the role of young people not only within organisations but in wider society as a whole.

Both of these questions are of relevance way beyond those merely interested in the history of a youth organisation. They are fundamental to wider societal questions about the values that underpin societies, the nature of democracy and the extent to which they recognise the need for a global outlook. Globalisation has shown us how everyone's lives are interconnected. The issues and concerns that many young people in the Woodcraft Folk have today can be mirrored in many other countries around the world, both in the Global North and the Global South. Questions such as gender, sexuality, the influence of artificial intelligence and a sense of place can be seen around the world. This volume has not aimed to cover all of these issues. They deserve discussion, hopefully in future volumes to come. What co-operation means for an organisation that has the term in its strapline also deserves a volume on its own. What this volume has aimed to do is start the process of discussing key aspects of the history of the Woodcraft Folk within the context of broader social movements, the changing approaches to the education of children and young people, and how to construct what is meant by a youth organisation or movement.

This volume has raised issues that could be seen as controversial. These include the ways in which the Woodcraft Folk engaged with and then moved away from the eugenics movement. The second is how a phrase such as 'One Race – the Human Race' can lead to a process of ignoring the culturally diverse nature of our society. On the other hand, the volume has also identified the positive impact the experience of being involved with the Woodcraft Folk has had on many thousands of children, young people and adults since its formation in 1925. The Woodcraft Folk

has been a place where children and young people have been able to grow and develop into active global citizens, to care about the future of their planet, forge new friendships and above all broaden their horizons. This is why the motto of ‘Span the World with Friendship’ remains such an important part of the organisation today.

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'The Woodcraft Folk has long made the case for progressive education harnessing the outdoor environment. *Span the World with Friendship* offers insightful reflections on how a youth organisation can and should try to change the world.'

Paul Adams, University of East London

Within the histories of progressive educational movements and youth work, one organisation that rarely gets a mention is the Woodcraft Folk. Founded in 1925, it has been consistently at the forefront of promoting radical social change through education. It played a role in breaking down the barriers between East and West during the Cold War, in promoting a co-educational and cooperative-based approach to learning, and in encouraging environmental activism at a time when it was unfashionable.

The Woodcraft Folk's evolving approach to education for social change is explored in *Span the World with Friendship* from a range of disciplinary perspectives, including political and social theory, cultural history, anthropology, educational theory and youth work theory. Through investigation of published and primary sources, including letters, meeting records and oral testimonies, contributors bring scholarship to a narrative that has often been uncritical. Beginning with a biography of founder Leslie Paul, chapters study the Folk's relationship to debates in the labour movement, the extent to which the eugenics movement influenced its ideas and practices, and how the folk songs and dances used within the organisation reflected wider social and cultural trends. Internationalism is a key theme running through this book, which concludes with a focus on how the Woodcraft Folk's progressive nature is moving it increasingly towards being a youth-led movement.

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