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Youth Activism and Global Awareness: The Emergence of the *Operation Dagsverke* Campaign in 1960s Sweden

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In recent years, school strikes and street protests for climate justice have drawn international attention to young people's mobilisation and activism on global issues. This article addresses the need to map the history of global awareness among young people by exploring the origins of the *Operation Dagsverke* (Operation Day's Work) campaign in Sweden during the early 1960s. Drawing primarily on material from the student-led school council organisation SECO, the aim is to show how young people mobilised support for addressing global issues. The results show that the campaign format was initially developed by university students in 1960, after which it was adapted by students in secondary education. It is argued that the campaign was successful in transforming time, a resource that young students possessed, into economic contributions. On the organisational level, the structure of the student council organisation SECO was important for the campaign's initial success.

Introduction

On a chilly Friday morning in March 1962, more than 15,000 students from thirty-four secondary schools in Stockholm donned white armbands and headed for workplaces, public squares and subway trains, instead of going to school.¹ They were the participants in a new city-wide campaign, *Operation Dagsverke* ('Operation Day's Work', henceforth OD), to raise money for international development projects, and their presence made a noticeable impact on the Swedish capital that day.² It was not the first large-scale fundraiser involving children and youth in Sweden, but it stood out as a youth-led campaign, raising money for projects in so-called underdeveloped countries.³ Pioneering the concept of pupils dedicating a work day – or rather a school day – for charitable purposes, Operation Day's Work went on to become a national campaign, organised annually by student-led school councils across the country and set up in several other countries, including Norway and Finland, and eventually also Denmark, Germany, Italy, Belgium and the United States. With thousands of young people raising money to build schools in Third World countries, OD became a symbolic and material manifestation of global consciousness and activism among the younger generation.⁴

¹ In the following, the Swedish term *elev* is translated into 'student', to describe pre-college learners in secondary education.

² The event resulted in press coverage from all major newspapers based in Stockholm. The event was covered on the front page of *Dagens Nyheter* and *Svenska Dagbladet* on 10 Mar. 1962. Evening tabloids *Aftonbladet* (9 Mar.) and *Expressen* (10 Mar.) also documented the campaign.

³ Fundraisers for starving children or other humanitarian campaigns typically involved students donating money or committing to donate a small monthly sum. In 1961, the Swedish school council movement supported a campaign for hunger relief, as well as the national foreign aid campaign *Sverige hjälper*. Verksamhetsberättelse för Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation 1961, Riksarkivet (RA), SECO, A2:1, 3.

⁴ The history of the OD campaign in Sweden has received limited scholarly attention. A popular account written by two former members of the Swedish school council movement was published in 1981; see Erik Söderberg and Bertil Östberg,

Beyond the noisy, cheerful and carnivalesque setting, the campaign sought to convey a more solemn message: that world poverty drove rapid population growth, causing a spiral of poverty which could in turn only be broken by investments in education and health.⁵ During the OD campaigns, students from secondary schools not only raised money for this purpose, they did so while seeking to convey knowledge about a global problem and its potential (albeit perhaps naïve) solution. Thus, the light-hearted entertainment and everyday chores of Operation Day's Work also carried a vision of global commitment that reflected notions of post-war Swedish self-image and foreign policy. The campaign provided an example of youth *below* college-level manifesting international solidarity at the beginning of a decade that has been labelled 'The Global Sixties'.⁶ However, the strong emphasis on university student radicalism of this era has obscured how younger children and youth, including students in secondary education, engaged with political issues.⁷ The OD campaign thus anticipated a cultural and political turn primarily associated with (university) student radicalism and anti-authoritarianism of the 1968 generation by several years.⁸

The fervour and frictions of the OD campaign resonate in contemporary political discourse on youth-led global activism as well. Since Greta Thunberg initiated her school strike outside the Swedish parliament in 2018, youth climate activism has received considerable public and scholarly attention.⁹ Illustrating that young people are not merely passive bystanders to the events that shape their experiences and everyday lives, the widespread notion that climate activism represents a new form of political mobilisation runs the risk of establishing a compelling but teleological narrative of progress, accepting a priori that 'Youth activism today is more globalised, more networked, more open and collaborative than in the past'.¹⁰ While acknowledging that social and technological change

Skolan och elevrörelsen: Skoldanser och elevinflytande (Stockholm: LT, 1981). A brief introduction to the Norwegian campaign is offered in Ylva Frøjd, 'Who Cares? Operation Day's Work's Booklet Covers as Appeals for Humanitarian Aid', *Scandinavian Studies*, 89, 4 (2017), 548–72. A master thesis has also chronicled the history of the Finnish OD campaign: Risto Ahonen, 'Teinien Taksvärkki: Ykskaks Maailma Paremmaks!', University of Helsinki, 2000.

⁵ Although the global population challenge became more widely debated internationally after the 1968 publication of Paul Ehrlich's *The Population Bomb* and the Club of Rome report *The Limits to Growth* in 1972, the Swedish biologist Georg Borgström had voiced similar concerns in several books, beginning with the 1953 publication *Jorden – vårt öde* ('Earth – Our Destiny'). His next book, *Mat för miljarderna* ('Food for Billions'), was published in Mar. 1962, the same month as the Stockholm 1962 OD campaign. See Björn-Ola Linnér, *The World Household: Georg Borgström and the Postwar Population-Resource Crisis* (Linköping: Linköping University, 1998); Sunniva Engh, 'Georg Borgström and the Population-Food Dilemma: Reception and Consequences in Norwegian Public Debate in the 1950s and 1960s', in Johan Östling, Niklas Olsen and David Larsson Heidenblad, eds., *Histories of Knowledge in Postwar Scandinavia: Actors, Arenas, and Aspirations* (London: Routledge, 2020).

⁶ Molly Geidel, *Peace Corps Fantasies: How Development Shaped the Global Sixties* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2015); Karen Dubinsky, Catherine Krull, Susan Lord, Scott Rutherford and Sean Mills, eds., *New World Coming: The Sixties and the Shaping of Global Consciousness* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2009); Chen Jian et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of the Global Sixties: Between Protest and Nation-Building* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁷ Judith Bessant, *Making-up People: Youth, Truth and Politics* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 153–82; Essi Jouhki, "'Then We Were Ready to Be Radicals!': School Student Activism in Finnish Upper Secondary Schools in 1960–1967", *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 46, 3 (2021), 383–407; Daniel Lövheim, 'En alternativ skollöftid: Invigningen av Göteborgs Experimentgymnasium 1969', in Joakim Landahl and Sara Backman Prytz, eds., *Skolans högtider: Ceremoni, fest och firande i svensk skolhistoria* (Uppsala: Föreningen för svensk undervisningshistoria, 2020).

⁸ Christoph Kalter, 'A Shared Space of Imagination, Communication, and Action: Perspectives on the History of the "Third World"', in Samantha Christiansen and Zachary A. Scarlett, eds., *The Third World in the Global 1960s* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013), 23–38; Quinn Slobodian, *Foreign Front: Third World Politics in Sixties West Germany* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012); Pieter Dhondt and Elizabethanne Boran, eds., *Student Revolt, City, and Society in Europe: From the Middle Ages to the Present* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

⁹ Amanda Thomas, Raven Cretney and Bronwyn Hayward, 'Student Strike 4 Climate: Justice, Emergency and Citizenship', *New Zealand Geographer*, 75, 2 (2019), 96–100; Sarah Pickard, Benjamin Bowman and Dena Arya, "'We Are Radical in Our Kindness": The Political Socialisation, Motivations, Demands and Protest Actions of Young Environmental Activists in Britain', *Youth and Globalization*, 2, 2 (2020), 251–80; Joost de Moor, Michiel De Vydt, Katrin Uba and Mattias Wahlström, 'New Kids on the Block: Taking Stock of the Recent Cycle of Climate Activism', *Social Movement Studies*, 20, 5 (2021), 619–25.

¹⁰ Nicola Ansell, *Children, Youth, and Development* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), 234.

has altered the conditions for *how* young people engage with global issues, the extent to which the climate strike movement should be considered new is a matter of debate. This ambiguity highlights a need for further historical research on young people's global consciousness, agency and activism that may uncover a longer continuity of imagining and activity. To do so, historians can look beyond how technology and mediatisation has altered the landscape of contemporary activism, and instead envision the climate crisis as one of several global issues that have caught the attention of younger generations in the modern era. In this article, *global issues* are thus construed as ecological, political or social problems that affect the world as a whole and require global-level solutions.¹¹ This framework clarifies the interconnectedness of 'new' issues such as climate change with problems of poverty, environmental degradation or population growth – which were widely discussed global issues in 1960s Sweden.¹²

Addressing the lack of historical knowledge of the processes that have shaped global commitment among youth in Europe, this article chronicles the formation of the OD campaign in early 1960s Sweden. By addressing how the events were organised, by whom and for what, and how fundraising sought to raise global awareness, the article uncovers how the young campaign-makers addressed practical and political challenges, while providing an in-depth look at how they responded to increased calls for international solidarity in the early stages of the first United Nations 'Development Decade'.¹³ By doing so, I also suggest a rethinking of the postwar politics of globality is needed. While global consciousness is by no means unique to recent decades, it has been argued that notions of globality, or 'consciousness of the world as a whole', accelerated in the post-war era.¹⁴ This article challenges the notion that this global shift of scale and spatial vision was driven by 'cosmopolitan elites', as the OD campaign brings attention to an instance where such commitment can be understood as framed from below, by school students calling for action.¹⁵ Ultimately, it suggests that the postwar shift of global consciousness contained a grassroots dimension which included young people organising local and national campaigns to address issues of global magnitude.

The role of young people in political and social affairs has often been overlooked in historical research, but in the last few decades a growing number of historians have sought to demonstrate the various ways in which young people have shaped society and culture through social and political engagement.¹⁶ Accordingly, scholars have also argued that young people's participation in transnational processes must be critically examined.¹⁷ In international relations, the role of everyday

¹¹ John Seitz and Kristen Hite, *Global Issues: An Introduction* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley & Sons, 2011).

¹² Along with issues like peace (especially the threat of nuclear war and opposition to the war in Vietnam), poverty, 'over-population' and environmental degradation became important in Swedish public discourse on the future of the planet during the 1960s. David Larsson Heidenblad, *Den gröna vändningen: En ny kunskapshistoria om miljöfrågornas genombrott under efterkrigstiden* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2021).

¹³ As designated by the United Nations General Assembly in Dec. 1961, just three months before the city-wide Operation Day's Work campaign in Stockholm. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 1710 (XVI) adopted 19 Dec. 1961. A/RES/1710 (XVI).

¹⁴ Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), 8. Rens van Munster and Casper Sylvest, *The Politics of Globality since 1945: Assembling the Planet* (London: Routledge, 2016). For an example of early modern global imagining, see Ayesha Ramachandran, *The Worldmakers: Global Imagining in Early Modern Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).

¹⁵ The term cosmopolitan elites is used by Perrin Selcer, *The Postwar Origins of the Global Environment: How the United Nations Built Spaceship Earth* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018). See also Annika Berg, Urban Lundberg and Mattias Tydén, *En svindlande uppgift: Sverige och biståndet 1945–1975* (Stockholm: Ordfront, 2021).

¹⁶ A recent discussion in the *American Historical Review* has provided valuable insights to the state of the field of childhood history and the agency of children in historical research. See Sarah Maza, 'The Kids Aren't All Right: Historians and the Problem of Childhood', *The American Historical Review*, 125, 4 (2020), 1261–85; Steven Mintz, 'Children's History Matters', *The American Historical Review*, 125, 4 (2020), 1286–92; Bengt Sandin, 'History of Children and Childhood – Being and Becoming, Dependent and Independent', *The American Historical Review*, 125, 4 (2020), 1306–16.

¹⁷ Paula S. Fass, *Children of a New World: Society, Culture, and Globalization* (New York: New York University Press, 2007); Mischa Honeck and Gabriel Rosenberg, 'Transnational Generations: Organizing Youth in the Cold War', *Diplomatic History*, 38, 2 (2014), 233–39.

activities and ‘the voice from below’ has attracted increased attention and demonstrates the importance of examining non-state actors and mundane activities beyond diplomatic history and foreign policy in order to understand how foreign relations have taken shape and affected people’s lives.¹⁸ It has been argued that children and youth have played important roles in twentieth-century international relations and that they were identified as key actors of transnational cooperation and ‘natural facilitators of international friendship’.¹⁹ Until now, however, this perspective has influenced European historiography to a very limited extent.

This article examines global awareness and international assistance, which relates to the elusive concepts of global and transnational history. Historians of youth have accentuated transnational activity as a constituent of modern youth, as well as an integrative cultural and political force that shaped modern youth as a social category and cultural construct.²⁰ Research has shown that young people were not passive bystanders in these processes, but also contributed to transnational integration and exercised influence as transnational grassroots actors by engaging with global issues.²¹ NGOs appealed to the idealism and youthfulness of young people to inspire participation in international fundraising campaigns, directing children and youth towards global citizenship.²²

In other words, children and youth became a powerful force in the symbolic rejuvenation of the post-war era, in quests for peace, freedom and international understanding. As such, their contributions were also mobilised in the symbolic realm of Cold War conflict.²³ In the United States, members of international youth movements were activated in international friendship programmes and the ‘Junior Marshall Plan’.²⁴ In communist countries too, schoolchildren were involved in efforts to promote international solidarity by tangible actions, such as the large-scale East German letter-writing campaign in support of jailed US activist Angela Davis.²⁵

In Scandinavia, the post-war rise of global consciousness coincided with a reorientation of foreign policy after the Second World War, where the governments of Denmark, Norway and Sweden sought to establish the region as a leading force of peace-making and international development.²⁶ Foreign aid

¹⁸ Quote from Christopher Hill, ‘“Where Are We Going?” International Relations and the Voice from Below’, *Review of International Studies*, 25, 1 (1999), 107–22. See also Christopher Endy, *Cold War Holidays: American Tourism in France* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Julie Reeves, *Culture and International Relations: Narratives, Natives and Tourists* (London: Routledge, 2004).

¹⁹ Donna Alvah, *Unofficial Ambassadors: American Military Families Overseas and the Cold War, 1946–1965* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 11; Helen Brocklehurst, *Who’s Afraid of Children: Children, Conflict and International Relations* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006); Honeck and Rosenberg, ‘Transnational Generations’.

²⁰ Richard Ivan Jobs and David M. Pomfret, ‘The Transnationality of Youth’, in Richard Ivan Jobs and David M. Pomfret, eds., *Transnational Histories of Youth in the Twentieth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 1–19; Richard Ivan Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017).

²¹ Anna Bocking-Welch, ‘Youth against Hunger: Service, Activism and the Mobilisation of Young Humanitarians in 1960s Britain’, *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d’histoire*, 23, 1–2 (2016), 154–70; Tamara Myers, ‘Local Action and Global Imagining: Youth, International Development, and the Walkathon Phenomenon in Sixties’ and Seventies’ Canada’, *Diplomatic History*, 38, 2 (2014), 282–93.

²² Marie-Luise Ermisch, ‘Children, Youth and Humanitarian Assistance: How the British Red Cross Society and Oxfam Engaged Young People in Britain and Its Empire with International Development Projects in the 1950s and 1960s’, PhD Diss., McGill University, 2014.

²³ Margaret Peacock, *Innocent weapons: The Soviet and American Politics of Childhood in the Cold War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014).

²⁴ Jennifer Helgren, *American Girls and Global Responsibility: A New Relation to the World during the Early Cold War* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017); Sarah Fieldston, ‘The Junior Marshall Plan: Children, World Friendship, and Internationalism after World War II’, in Susan Eckelmann Berghel, Sarah Fieldston and Paul Renfro, eds., *Growing up America: Youth and Politics since 1945* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2019).

²⁵ Kathrina Hagen, ‘Ambivalence and Desire in the East German “Free Angela Davis” Campaign’, in Quinn Slobodian, ed., *Comrades of Color: East Germany in the Cold War World* (New York: Berghahn, 2015), 157–87; Olivia Landry, ‘East German Letters to Angela Davis: From Myth to Solidarities Unfolding’, *Feminist Media Studies*, 21, 7 (2021), 1237–52.

²⁶ Mary Hilson, *The Nordic Model: Scandinavia since 1945* (London: Reaktion, 2008); Ole Elgström and Sarah Delputte, ‘An End to Nordic Exceptionalism? Europeanisation and Nordic Development Policies’, *European Politics and Society*, 17, 1 (2016), 28–41.

became a crucial component in this effort and has been discussed as an adoption of the social democratic welfare state ideology on international affairs.²⁷ Civil society played a crucial role in these processes, and programmes for citizenship training of young people that had previously centred on national identity increasingly embraced notions of transnational citizenship.²⁸ The Operation Day's Work campaign presents an example of how such ideas were put into action by young grassroots activists seeking to implement visions of transnational awareness.

From the start, OD fundraisers in Sweden were administered by school councils and soon coordinated by their national body SECO (*Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation*). The large-scale establishment of student councils in Swedish secondary schools commenced after the Second World War, as part of a school democracy movement that reflected how self-reliance and democracy became new core components of education in citizenship.²⁹ In 1952, a national organisation (SECO) was formed, initially dominated by members of the Stockholm district. The organisation took a leading role in advocating educational reform on issues from smoking to secularisation, promoting individualism, democracy and anti-authoritarianism.³⁰ SECO was politically unaffiliated, but it has been described as a hotbed for the Liberal Party (*Folkpartiet*) and its youth wing during the 1960s, with several of its high-ranking officials eventually becoming members of parliament.³¹ It was also part of a larger Nordic school student movement, with similar organisations in the other Nordic countries.³²

Youth and Youthfulness

The article draws from sources produced by young people as well as adults. For historians researching childhood and youth, not least self-organised youth movements, the availability of source material is a recurring challenge. From this viewpoint, SECO has preserved a comparatively rich source material, including protocols, correspondence and annual reports as well as published sources. As members of SECO were students in secondary education, the voices of young people are plentiful in these archives. Nevertheless, there are notable gaps in the material and documents have sometimes been filed without apparent structure or chronology.

This leads us to important questions of age as a category of analysis and young people's agency. Today, the age of eighteen is often used as the upper limit of childhood, in accordance with the definition presented in the United Nations' International Convention on the Rights of the Child. If we were to apply this definition retrospectively in historical research, however, the risk of anachronistic results is apparent. A more suitable vantage point for historians of childhood and youth is arguably to regard age categories as historically malleable, thus making the distinction an empirical question. As historians of youth have pointed out, not only age but also social conditions (employment for example) have determined the boundaries between childhood, youth, and adulthood in the past.³³

²⁷ Thorsten Borring Olesen, Helge Pharo and Kristian Paaskesen, eds., *Saints and Sinners: Official Development Aid and Its Dynamics in a Historical and Comparative Perspective* (Oslo: Akademika Pub, 2013), 352.

²⁸ Björn Lundberg, *Naturliga medborgare: Friluftsliv och medborgarfostran i scoutrörelsen och Unga Örnar* (Lund: Arkiv, 2018), 181–266.

²⁹ Johan Östling, *Sweden after Nazism: Politics and Culture in the Wake of the Second World War* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2016), 169–233; Gunnar Richardson, *Drömmen om en ny skola: Idéer och realiteter i svensk skolpolitik 1945–1950* (Stockholm: Liber, 1983).

³⁰ There is yet little historical research on the Swedish school council movement, but a research project is presently conducted at Stockholm University, led by Daniel Lövheim and Joakim Landahl. <https://elevrorelsenshistoria.wordpress.com/about/>. For previous publications, see Joakim Landahl, *Stad på låtsas: Samhällssimulering och disciplinering vid Norra Latins sommarhem 1938–1965* (Göteborg: Daidalos, 2013), 35–58.

³¹ Examples include Lennart Rydberg, Ernst Klein, Gabriel Romanus and Olle Wästberg. Later, several future Social Democratic politicians were high-ranking SECO officials.

³² Jouhki, 'Then We Were Ready'.

³³ John R. Gillis, *Youth and History: Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770 – Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974). For Swedish conditions: Henrik Berggren, *Slekets ungdom: retorik, politik och modernitet 1900–1939* (Stockholm: Tiden, 1995); Jonas Frykman and Orvar Löfgren, *Den kultiverade människan* (Lund: Liber, 1979).

In this article, I have preferred to use the terms ‘youth’ and ‘young people’ for all students in secondary education, avoiding the term children, although many of the participants in the OD campaign were children by contemporary standards, i.e. below eighteen years of age.

We must also ask whether youthfulness by definition equals agency ‘from below’. Clearly, students in their final year of secondary education had other resources than their younger peers. Moreover, many of the front figures of SECO had academic and/or middle-class backgrounds and attended renowned schools in the Swedish capital. When regarded in a broader perspective – whether national or global – it is evident that categories such as gender, age, social background and race or ethnicity affected the ability of young students to make their voices heard – not least in campaigns that concerned global issues. In relation to ‘cosmopolitan elites’ (leading public officials and politicians, advocates in international organisations, etc.), I nevertheless argue that the school council movement provided an instance of grassroots organisation ‘from below’.

Asymmetrical Internationalism in Sweden after 1945

Described by the organisers as ‘a form of practical internationalism’,³⁴ the OD campaign was emblematic of the ‘asymmetrical internationalism’ that took root in Sweden after 1945.³⁵ Rather than seeking to establish peace and friendship by accentuating mutual understanding, as had been common in the early twentieth century, transnational activism of the post-war era rested on notions of privilege, affluence and moral obligations to help the unprivileged.³⁶ During the 1950s, the Swedish government also took its first steps towards a policy for international development assistance and foreign aid. It began modestly in 1952, with the formation of CK, the ‘Central Committee for Swedish Technical Assistance to Less Developed Areas’, consisting of more than forty civil society organisations, as well as representatives of government agencies and the business sector.³⁷ Its main task was to coordinate foreign aid campaigns of NGOs, contributing to the UN efforts for humanitarian and technical assistance from the 1940s onward, and to raise public awareness of global issues such as poverty, starvation and so-called underdevelopment. It has been argued that in the early information campaigns coordinated by CK, NGOs and government agencies cooperated in their efforts to supplant the perceived isolationism of the general public in Sweden for a global conscience that instilled action and awareness.³⁸ The first nationwide foreign aid campaign, ‘Sweden Helps’, was organised in 1955, but although it met its fundraising goals, the response from the general public was less enthusiastic than the organisers had hoped.³⁹

During Dag Hammarskjöld’s tenure as Secretary-General of the United Nations (1953–61), Swedish media coverage of global political issues, including international development, increased. A new iteration of the Sweden Helps campaign in the winter of 1961 was more successful, and it coincided with a domestic political debate regarding the need for increased government spending on foreign aid.⁴⁰ In September 1961, Dag Hammarskjöld was killed in a plane crash in Rhodesia, triggering widespread grief. Hammarskjöld was given a state funeral and a memorial foundation was quickly established to advance policy on international cooperation and development in his name.⁴¹ Less

³⁴ *Ungdom hjälper ungdom – En specialtidning från SECO och Expressen*. RA, SECO, B1:2.

³⁵ Lundberg, *Naturliga medborgare*, 201–11.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 91–7, 172–6, 203–11, 244–58.

³⁷ Annika Billing, ‘Support to Civil Society within Swedish Development Cooperation’, *Perspectives*, School of Global Studies, University of Gothenburg, 20 (2011), 13.

³⁸ Berg, Lundberg, and Tydén, *Svindlande uppgift*, 66–9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁴⁰ The ‘Sweden helps’ campaign was launched on 23 Jan. 1961, with a radio and television speech by the king. The following day, Swedish government funding of development aid was debated in parliament. See for example *Dagens Nyheter*, 24 Jan. 1961, 14 and *Dagens Nyheter*, 25 Jan. 1961, 6. See also *Dagens Nyheter* op-eds on 19 Jan. 1961, 2, and 23 Jan. 1961, 2, both dedicated to aspects of ODA and the ‘Sweden helps’ charity.

⁴¹ The Dag Hammarskjöld foundation was officially established in Mar. 1962, but plans for the foundation were discussed only days after his death, and fundraising began within two weeks. See for example, *Dagens Nyheter*, 22 Sept. 1961, 46; *Dagens Nyheter*, 26 Sept. 1961, 14; *Dagens Nyheter*, 28 Sept. 1961, 8.

than six months later, the Social Democratic government presented its first development assistance bill, referencing Hammarskjöld in the introduction and his belief that the UN charter supported ‘a right to equal economic opportunity’ among nations.⁴² Despite rapid increase in government spending on foreign aid in the following decade, Swedish civil society retained a strong influence over foreign aid distribution, by administering government-funded aid programmes abroad, and by seeking to strengthen public support for Swedish aid policy domestically.⁴³

In a Cold War context, Sweden’s position as a non-aligned state between the superpowers paved the way for a foreign policy reflecting a national image of ‘small-state idealism’, where Sweden as a neutral, progressive and peaceful democracy could take a leading role on the international scene as an altruistic promotor of development.⁴⁴ In other words, humanitarian assistance and development aid were not merely seen as moral obligations but were increasingly framed as expressions of a new national identity of selflessness, open-mindedness and progress, embodied in the mission of the United Nations to bring peace, freedom and development. For example, in a statement following the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, Prime Minister Tage Erlander and the speakers of the chambers of the Swedish parliament stated that ‘Dag Hammarskjöld fell at his post in his effort to create conditions for understanding and cooperation in a divided world . . . Hammarskjöld is gone. But each and every one can make a personal contribution to carry his legacy forward’.⁴⁵

1960–1961: Tracing the Roots of the Campaign

The first city-wide Operation Day’s Work campaign in Stockholm in March 1962 raised money for the Hammarskjöld Foundation and may be seen in light of the strong sentiment of internationalism that followed the death of Hammarskjöld. However, the term ‘*Operation Dagsverke*’ and its specific campaign format can be traced back to a local fundraiser among students at Lund University almost two years earlier. On 2 April 1960, the Student Union at the university organised a much-publicised event raising money to pay for scholarships for refugee students, including ‘our own South African student’.⁴⁶ Like subsequent OD campaigns in secondary schools, this fundraiser featured students taking a day off from studying to take various jobs, donating their salaries to an international cause. With roots in the tradition of the university’s carnivalesque student culture, the campaign featured a mix of manual labour, such as students helping out in agriculture, and publicity stunts, including students being hired by the local brewery to drink beer, or a young woman appointed chief-of-staff of the headquarters of the F10 wing of the Swedish Air Force.⁴⁷ The day concluded with a high-profiled celebrity tie auction, including ties worn by public figures such as Dag Hammarskjöld, Tage Erlander, boxers Ingmar Johansson and Floyd Patterson, and US Vice President Richard Nixon. It became a notable success, drawing national and international press coverage to the event.⁴⁸ In monetary terms, the campaign raised 78,000 SEK, enough to provide stipends for the aforementioned South African student

⁴² Kungl. Maj:ts Proposition 1962, no. 100, 3. Supplement to the protocols of the Riksdag, 1962.

⁴³ Lars Diurlin, ‘“Att vidmakthålla och stärka allmänhetens intresse och stöd”: SIDA:s attitydförändrande informationsstrategier’, in Fredrik Norén and Emil Stjernholm, eds., *Efterkrigstidens samhällskontakter* (Lund: Mediehistoria, Lunds universitet, 2019), 317–60; Berg, Lundberg, and Tydén, *Svindlande uppgift*, chapter 22; See also Ebba Gyllensvärd and Svante Sandberg, *Folkets bistånd?: En debattantologi om folkrörelsernas u-landsarbete* (Stockholm: SVS, 1989).

⁴⁴ Johan Östling, ‘The Rise and Fall of Small-State Realism: Sweden and the Second World War’, in Mirja Österberg, Henrik Stenius and Johan Östling, eds., *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011), 129.

⁴⁵ The appeal was signed 22 Sept. 1961, reproduced in letter from SUL, dated 13 Dec. 1961. RA, Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråd (SUL), FX:7.

⁴⁶ *Lundagård*, no. 2 1960, 29.

⁴⁷ ‘F10 i Ängelholm fick ny stabschef’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 Apr. 1960, 64.

⁴⁸ The front page of *Dagens Nyheter*, 3 Apr. 1960, reported that British and American news media were present to document the auction. The *New York Times* published an article on 1 May 1960, 128, to document the auction and the OD campaign in Lund.

and eight refugee students from Eastern Europe.⁴⁹ Other college-level institutions followed, raising money for the World Refugee Year or scholarships for individual students from the Third World. At Uppsala University in September, for example, students raised money for the Student Union's international fund.⁵⁰ The success of these early campaigns varied, but it is nevertheless possible to discern some common elements: Operation Day's Work raised money for educational efforts tied to global development, and participants did so by combining ordinary chores and jobs with light-hearted entertainment, publicity stunts and a carnivalesque setting with 'infinite ingenuity and a lot of noise', as one Swedish newspaper summarised.⁵¹

The campaign format established by university students in 1960 gained nationwide publicity and was followed by the first attempts to organise OD campaigns among upper secondary schools in 1961. Early efforts were made in Malmö and Helsingborg in March 1961, but were dwarfed in terms of media impact by two events during the autumn.⁵² First, the school council at *Sundsvalls läroverk* organised an OD campaign to raise money for an African university student in Sweden⁵³ (Figure 1). Children in grades 7–9 also participated, which made this the first OD campaign to feature students from lower secondary education. In January the following year, the refugee student visited the school in Sundsvall and spoke about oppression under the apartheid regime in South Africa (Figure 2). The school council unanimously adopted a resolution advocating a boycott of South African goods and condemning the use of South African products in publicly-funded school canteens.⁵⁴ Hereby, the fundraising for a refugee student became entangled with political issues regarding economic and political exchange with the apartheid regime of South Africa, highlighting how global issues of development and poverty relief were intertwined with democracy and human rights.

Another significant OD campaign was organised a month later at *Gubbängens läroverk* in Stockholm.⁵⁵ This event featured a slight change of scope, catering to parents and other individuals, rather than business owners, to help out with babysitting, window cleaning or raking leaves.⁵⁶ The day concluded with a ballroom dance, with several live music acts performing for free.⁵⁷ Inspired by the OD campaign at Lund University in 1960, the organisers of this event were a group of friends from the school who wanted to host a similar event. After the death of Dag Hammarskjöld, they decided to organise the campaign in favour of the Hammarskjöld Foundation. Support from the school's principal proved crucial. One of the organisers remembered: 'It went fast. Everything was conjured up in a few weeks'.⁵⁸

1961–1963: Organising a National Campaign

By October 1961, eighteen months after the first OD fundraiser at Lund University, the campaign format had thus been adopted by students in secondary schools and the growing Swedish school council movement. In all, the autumn of 1961 proved decisive in establishing OD as a national fundraiser. Less than two weeks after Hammarskjöld's death, the student union at the Alnarp Institute decided to launch a fundraiser called '*En dag för Dag*' ('A Day for Dag' – a pun on Hammarskjöld's first

⁴⁹ With support from the state for the remaining years.

⁵⁰ The former: Växjö, Konstfack, Stockholm. The latter: Uppsala University.

⁵¹ Original quote: 'outsinlig uppfinningsriktighet och mycket oväsen', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29 Sept. 1960, 10.

⁵² At S:t Petri läroverk on 18 Mar. (*Svenska Dagbladet*, 19 Mar. 1961, 15) and Högre Tekniska Läroverket in Helsingborg on 24 Mar. ('10.000 i tekniskhjälp till Sverige hjälper', *Helsingborgs Dagblad*, 25 Mar. 1961).

⁵³ Information about the Sundsvall campaign was included in the brochure 'En aktuell idé' (no. 1), published by SUL in Dec. 1961, RA, SUL, FX:7. Press coverage in local news media was extensive, see for example, 'Läroverkets "Operation Dagsverke" den 15 sept. ger flyktning hjälp', *Sundsvallsposten*, 7 Sept. 1961, 3; 'Läroverket arbetar för flyktningstudent', *Sundsvallsposten*, 14 Sept. 1961, 1; 'Operation Dagsverke för flyktningstudent', *Sundsvallsposten*, 15 Sept. 1961, 1; "'Operation Dagsverke" – lyckad aktion', *Sundsvallsposten*, 16 Sept., 1961, 10.

⁵⁴ 'Afrikansk flyktningstipendiat gästar Sundsvalls läroverk', *Dagens Nyheter*, 29 Jan. 1962, 29.

⁵⁵ *Vi i plugget*, no. 1, 1962, 26–31; *Dagens Nyheter*, 14 Oct. 1961, 16.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Vi i plugget*, no. 1, 1962, 26–31.

⁵⁸ Author's interview with Staffan Thorsell, 9 May 2022.



Figure 1. Student supporting the OD campaign in Sundsvall, 15 September 1961. Archive: Sundsvall Museum. Photographer: Tommy Wiberg, Norrlandsbild. License CC-BY-NC.

name, meaning ‘day’ in Swedish), where participants also donated one day’s earnings to the Dag Hammar skjöld Foundation.⁵⁹ Later that year, *Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråd*, the National Council of Swedish Youth Organisations (SUL), announced its plans for a national Operation Day’s Work campaign, adopting the Alnarp students’ slogan.⁶⁰ In the end, the campaign made use of the mottos ‘En dag för Dag’ and ‘Operation Dagsverke’, citing the latter as the preferred *method* of fundraising.⁶¹ In December 1961, SUL distributed a call for this nationwide fundraising campaign to all its member organisations, stating that Swedish youth looked to the legacy of Hammar skjöld and his ‘super-human contributions’ as an inspiration. It urged members to donate one day’s salary to the fund.⁶²

SUL represented more than fifty youth organisations, from the youth wings of political parties to religious movements and Scout organisations. Meanwhile, SECO became a full member of SUL with a representative appointed to its board.⁶³ SECO had pushed for SUL to adopt the OD campaign

⁵⁹ ‘Alnarpskampanjen för Minnesfonden’, *Dagens Nyheter*, 23 Sept. 1961, 5.

⁶⁰ “‘En dag för Dag’ tros ge 10 miljoner’, *Expressen*, 18 Nov. 1961, 12.

⁶¹ Letter from the board of SUL, 13 Dec. 1961. RA, SUL, FX:7. See also ‘En aktuell idé’ (no. 1), published by SUL in Dec. 1961. RA, SUL, FX:7.

⁶² Letter from the board of SUL, 13 Dec. 1961. RA, SUL, FX:7.

⁶³ Verksamhetsberättelse för Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation 1961. RA, SECO, A2:1, 2.

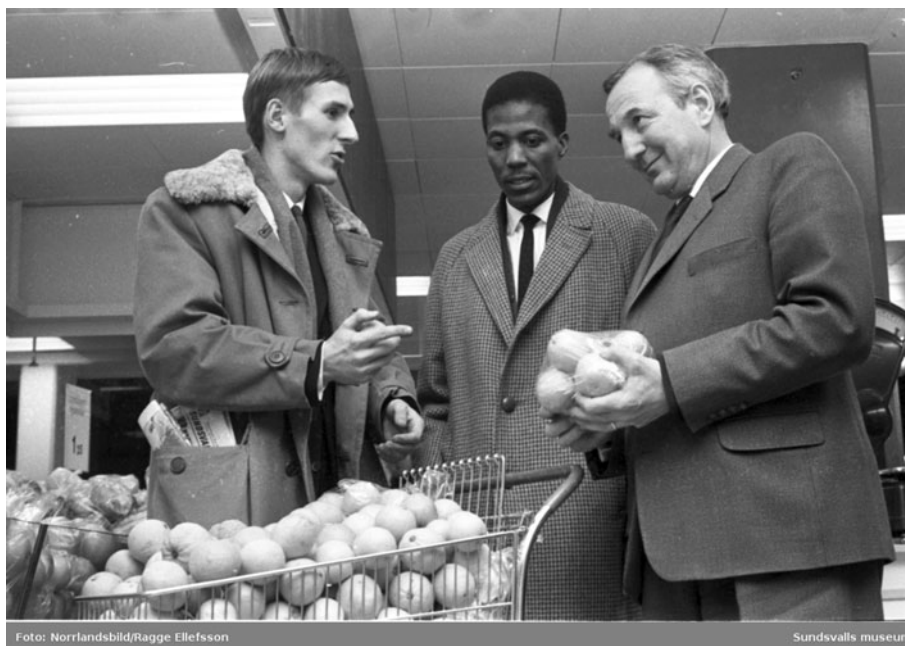


Figure 2. During his visit to Sundsvall, refugee student Zedekia Ngavirue – future Namibian Ambassador to the EU – discussed boycotting South African products with students of the *Läroverk*. Archive: Sundsvall Museum. Photographer: Ragge Ellefsson, Norrlandsbild. License CC-BY-NC.

nationally, but in the end, the support from other youth organisations proved to be limited. During the ‘En dag för Dag’ campaign in 1962, nearly 80 per cent of the total funds were raised by SECO alone.⁶⁴ In other words, the main contribution of SUL was administrative.⁶⁵

Several factors might explain why the school councils and SECO took a leading role in the OD campaign. First, internationalisation, understood as an increased interest in international affairs and more specifically global issues, had already begun to take root in the organisation.⁶⁶ In the late 1950s, SECO cooperated with *Rädda Barnen*, the Swedish Save the Children Fund, for fundraisers in schools.⁶⁷ In 1960, the magazine *SECO-aktuellt* presented articles advocating for school classes to sponsor children in the Third World or forming United Nations Clubs.⁶⁸ The following year, an article detailed the work of the United Nations Student Association of Sweden, which primarily organised university students, and its effort to establish United Nations clubs in secondary education.⁶⁹

Secondly, schools proved to be a suitable arena for this campaign format, relating to the amount of time spent by young people in school. Timo Järvikoski has argued that since young activists typically

⁶⁴ Verksamhetsberättelse för SECO 1962. RA, SECO, A1:1, 9.

⁶⁵ At least one other youth organisation outside the educational system had attempted the OD campaign format in 1961: Svenska Landsbygdens Ungdomsförbund (SLU), the Youth wing of the Swedish Centre (agrarian) party. During the autumn of 1961 and winter of 1962, its members made day’s work contributions to the considerable sum of 347, 100 SEK, in support of its new ‘international fund’. Svenska Landsbygdens Ungdomsförbund: Verksamhetsberättelse för år 1961. RA, Centerns Ungdomsförbund, B1a:2.

⁶⁶ SECO had cooperated with *Rädda Barnen* (The Save the Children Fund) as early as 1957. A similar process of internationalisation took place in the Finnish school council movement, however starting a few years later, making an impact from 1963; see Ahonen, ‘Teinien Taksvärkki’, 10.

⁶⁷ Letters UA:83, 25 Oct. 1956 and UA:141, Sept. 1957. RA, SECO, B1:1.

⁶⁸ ‘Fadderbarn ger sammanhållning’, *SECO-aktuellt* vol. 4, no. 5, Dec. 1960, 10; ‘Bilda FN-klubb’, *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 4, no. 6, 1960–1961, 6–7.

⁶⁹ *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 5, no. 2–3, Sept. 1961, 6–7.

have little access to positions of power and expertise, time is one of their primary resources.⁷⁰ In most other organisations involving youth, members gathered perhaps once a week or even less often, limiting the amount of time they could spend on a day's work campaign. Schools, on the other hand, regulated young people's lives for many hours, five or six days a week.⁷¹ Moreover, school councils could raise demands to principals and school boards to give students time off from school for campaigning, or using so-called outdoor days for this purpose. After all, schooling was the main daily activity of most children and youth, and the OD format was better suited for young people's 'work day' than their spare time.

OD was not the first organised fundraiser in Swedish schools, or even the first supported by SECO.⁷² However, this new format differed from previous campaigns as it did not merely collect money. Instead, it was described as a 'superior fundraiser' because students did not have to contribute financially, instead offering a resource that was more evenly distributed between young and old: time. The time they put into this work could be 'transformed into much larger amounts' than what would result from traditional fundraisers.⁷³ It should be noted, however, that the possibility of using school hours for campaigns of this sort was by no means undisputable. An organised school council movement, and benevolent attitude among school principals and public officials, were important factors, as well as some curricular flexibility, provided by the use of 'outdoor days' for these purposes.

SECO actively encouraged its roughly 225 member schools to participate in the campaign but did not set a specific date.⁷⁴ After all, participation depended on the schedules of each school or district. As a consequence, however, it was not possible to coordinate a nationwide campaign day, which could potentially have drawn larger media attention.

The Stockholm district, *Stockholms Elevorganisation* (SEO), took the lead. Led by Jan Rencke and Staffan Thorsell, with backing from the principal of *Gubbängens läroverk*, the young organisers presented a request to the district's board of principals for a joint campaign day in all upper secondary schools, which was granted.⁷⁵ The OD campaign in Stockholm on 9 March 1962 received greater media attention than any other OD campaign since the initial fundraiser at Lund University two years earlier. In this case, the youthfulness of the organisers worked to their advantage: they received help from several private companies and public institutions, including a telephone exchange and free public transportation.⁷⁶ The campaign also generated far greater earnings. In total, 15,100 students raised 212,162 SEK, far exceeding the 100,000 SEK that the organisers had initially hoped for.⁷⁷ The campaign was an up-scaled version of the Gubbängen OD in October, with youth spreading out across the city. A total of roughly 300 volunteers had prepared the event for 5–7 weeks, which included work for celebrities (including, for example, one participant sorting greeting cards for Prince Bertil and two others cleaning the windows of the Prime Minister's home).⁷⁸

The permit application to the local police department reveals a long list of planned activities in public spaces, including shoe-polishers, young portrait artists, street theatre and music. Others were to collect money from 'voluntary bridge tolls'. The police accepted most requests, with minor comments. For example, no children under the age of twelve were allowed to handle collection boxes. The police also stressed that the fundraiser must not infringe on schoolchildren's homework.⁷⁹

⁷⁰ Timo Järviokski, 'Young People as Actors in the Environmental Movement', *Young*, 3, 3 (1995), 80–93.

⁷¹ The five-day week was introduced nationally in 1968, but some schools had given students Saturdays off since the 1950s.

⁷² The 1961 annual report of SECO mentions two other fundraisers. Verksamhetsberättelse för Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation 1961. RA, SECO, A2:1, 2.

⁷³ Verksamhetsberättelse för SECO 1962. RA, SECO, A1:1, 9.

⁷⁴ In 1961, 69 per cent of member schools were public high schools or gymnasiums. Source: Verksamhetsberättelse för Sveriges Elevers Centralorganisation 1961, RA, SECO, A2:1, 3.

⁷⁵ Author's interviews with Staffan Thorsell, 9 May 2022, and Jan Rencke, 11 May 2022.

⁷⁶ Author's interviews with Staffan Thorsell, 9 May 2022, and Mats Gullers, 10 May 2022.

⁷⁷ Brev till Bankdirektör Ragnar Iverstedt, Dag Hammarskjölds minnesfond från Folke Bäck, kampanjsekreterare Sveriges Ungdomsorganisationers Landsråd, 14 Feb. 1962. RA, SUL, FX:7.

⁷⁸ *Expressen*, 24 Feb. 1962.

⁷⁹ Poliskammarens resolution N:r 84, TD 2 1962, RA, SECO, B1:2.

After the success in Stockholm, additional OD fundraisers were held in other cities. In Gothenburg, 5,000 school students participated in a coordinated event on 11 May. In total, SECO raised 350,000 SEK for the ‘En dag för Dag’ campaign, establishing Operation Day’s Work as a successful fundraising event.⁸⁰

In August 1962, members of SECO gathered at the organisation’s congress or ‘student parliament’ in Gothenburg. One of the decisions concerned the future of Operation Day’s Work. While the campaign had been a success, SUL had not proven to be an ideal partner. Instead, the members of SECO decided upon going forward with a new, independent OD campaign, raising money to build schools in Algeria. From now on and for several decades, the campaign format would be one of the major activities of the organisation. It was not completely independent, however, as SECO decided to cooperate with the Swedish Save the Children Fund (*Rädda Barnen*) to support their educational projects in Algeria. Thus, SECO would raise money using the OD campaign format, but would not handle the complex process of implementing an aid programme in Algeria.⁸¹

While advocating democracy and international solidarity, it should be noted that the Swedish school council movement was hardly a vanguard of egalitarianism in every sense. The elite nature of SECO leadership during the early 1960s, consisting predominantly of young men, white shirt and tie, from renowned schools in the Stockholm district, who would in many cases go on to become influential public figures, calls into question whether youthfulness necessarily equals agency ‘from below’. In terms of age, the school councils enrolled young people with common interests, but notions of gender and class were apparently at play too. All high school students could clearly not mobilise equal resources when addressing global issues. On the other hand, local school councils across the country were free to join the campaign, and a large number evidently chose to do so.

‘Practical Internationalism’ and Global Knowledge

With the campaign for Algerian schools, SECO adopted the slogan ‘*Ungdom hjälper ungdom*’ (‘Youth helping youth’).⁸² More specifically, students in Swedish schools were to raise money for building schools in a war-torn, newly independent African country. The symbolic connection between donors and receivers did not only allude to age, but also to their common interests as school students. As an educational campaign, OD became a *knowledge* problem. On the face of it, raising money for charitable purposes required little more than imagination and collection boxes, but in the long-term perspective, children would only be willing to contribute if they understood the nature of the problems that the campaign addressed, and the same could be said about the adults who donated money to the campaign.

This problem was not new. A report on the international activities among Youth NGOs in Sweden from 1959 had concluded that fundraisers should be conducted with caution. To avoid feelings of superiority, fundraisers were advised to always include efforts to promote awareness through education.⁸³ When the first national fundraiser for Swedish foreign aid was held in 1955, the organisers had complained about a lack of knowledge among the general public regarding global challenges. Information and ‘propaganda’ became a key area for the Central Committee for Swedish Technical Assistance to Less Developed Areas, seeking to instil the Swedish population with a global conscience. Two main strategies were employed for this purpose; firstly, conveying knowledge about the global issues at stake, facts about starvation, poverty and population growth presented in maps and charts; and secondly, providing narratives and images of starving children and other victims of global

⁸⁰ Verksamhetsberättelse för SECO 1962, RA, SECO, A1:1, 9.

⁸¹ Protocol from SECO-elevriksdagen, 16–18 Aug. 1962, RA, SECO, A1:1. Verksamhetsberättelse för SECO 1962, RA: SECO, A1:1, 9–10.

⁸² ‘Ungdom hjälper ungdom’, *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 6, no. 4, Oct. 1962, 10.

⁸³ Internationell verksamhet inom de svenska ungdomsorganisationerna och samarbetet mellan dessa och Svenska Unescorådet. Betänkande från Svenska Unescorådets Ungdomskommitté, 1 Oct. 1959, RA, SUL, FII:6, 27–8.

inequality that spoke to the conscience of the general public.⁸⁴ The images of starving children reflected how emotional messages were increasingly incorporated into humanitarian campaigns during these years, when television brought ‘the spectatorship of suffering’ to the living room of many Western households.⁸⁵ Images of starving children in Africa manifested unequal power relations discursively, ‘the most striking symbol of the power of the First World over the Third’, as Arturo Escobar suggests.⁸⁶ However, in terms of intentionality, these images were arguably not powerful because they sought to prolong suffering but because they instilled a will to help.

During the first year of the SECO campaign for schools in Algeria, several initiatives were taken to integrate information about global issues in the campaign. Fundraising activities were supplemented with efforts to communicate knowledge about complex geopolitical problems. With assistance from the national campaign of the Swedish Save the Children Fund, the OD campaigns spread information to students in schools, and those who participated could potentially spread information to adult citizens. In November 1962, the Save the Children Fund organised an autumn campaign called ‘The Algerian child, your invisible guest’. In an effort to domesticise the issue of poverty and global inequality, the campaign-makers sought ‘in various ways to bring the “invisible guest” to every Swedish home – in short, we should not forget the Algerian child when we sit at our lavish tables’.⁸⁷ The emotive message of the hungry child was complemented with facts and information. For example, the organisation prepared a speech outline for school assemblies⁸⁸ that described ‘general considerations of development challenges’, including overpopulation and malnutrition, advocating students to support the SECO campaign for Algerian children.⁸⁹ In May 1963, SECO launched an international campaign week to give further attention to global issues in Swedish schools. It included a special four-page newspaper supplement, printed with support from the newspaper *Expressen* in 200,000 copies, to be distributed in schools. Campaign executive Mats Gullers, former chairman of SECO, and Mikael Södergren, chairman of the international campaign week, stated:

It is important that we donate money, but students must also learn why suffering in developing countries is so immense. We need to provide information about other peoples’ ways of life, problems and struggles! . . . During the international week, we hope that schoolchildren will go more in-depth with these problems. It is important to create understanding for questions of population growth, world resource problems etc.⁹⁰

The outline of this publication clarified the connection of the OD campaign to global issues. On the first page, an article provided information about the need for schools in Algeria. Pages two and three featured a world map showing the average intake of calories in different parts of the world. Graphs showing population growth, life expectancy and population density added to the information provided.⁹¹ In preparation for the international campaign week, SECO also encouraged member schools

⁸⁴ Berg, Lundberg, and Tydén, *Svindlande uppgift*, 60–71. See also Diurlin, ‘Att vidmakthålla och stärka’; May-Britt Öhman, ‘Sverige hjälper’: Att fostra svenska folket till medvetenhet om sin egen storhet och andras litenhet’, *Tidskrift för Genusvetenskap*, 29, 1 (2008), 58–77.

⁸⁵ Luc Boltanski, *Distant Suffering: Morality, Media and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 103–4; Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: SAGE, 2006); Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Ironic Spectator: Solidarity in the Age of Post-humanitarianism* (Cambridge: Polity, 2013).

⁸⁶ Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

⁸⁷ ‘Kort information om Rädda Barnens höstkampanj’, Letter from Rädda Barnens Riksförbund, 1 Nov. 1962, RA, SECO, B1:2.

⁸⁸ Morning assemblies were part of Swedish primary and secondary education until the 1960s, but the form and content was debated by this time, with SECO being a strong voice for a non-confessional approach. In 1958, morning prayers were renamed school assemblies, but psalms and prayers remained part of the programme in some schools.

⁸⁹ ‘Morgonsamlingsföredrag i skolorna’, Rädda barnens riksförbund, centralstyrelsens kansli, RA, SECO, B1:2.

⁹⁰ *Ungdom hjälper ungdom*, RA, SECO, B1:2.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

to arrange exhibits, film screenings, study circles or debates with international themes. They further advised local student councils to form United Nations clubs in order to institutionalise the circulation of global knowledge in schools.⁹² During these years, the United Nations Association of Sweden reported increased activities relating to the UN and global issues among schools.⁹³

The spread of information about global issues remained a challenge for OD organisers, however. Despite being one of the primary objectives of the campaign, claims that fundraisers turned into spectacles failing to address the gravity of the problems would resurface in the coming years. It is reasonable to assume that many students were driven by other motives than humanitarianism or solidarity, for example having a day off from regular teaching, or being part of the excitement of the campaign. By 1970, a SECO evaluation even suggested folding the campaign permanently, citing the difficulties of promoting information and the indifference among third-party organisations to contribute as two of the reasons.⁹⁴ This proposal never materialised, but the discussion itself shows that youth-led activism for global issues needed to balance between organising activities that encouraged young people to enrol for other reasons than pure idealism while maintaining an ambition to also provide information about critical global challenges.

The campaign for Algerian schools ended in 1964, totalling 1.2 million SEK.⁹⁵ Six schools in Algeria were built, giving thousands of children access to education.⁹⁶ Also in 1964, SECO decided to promote a new nationwide OD campaign. It commenced in October 1965, raising money for schools in Peru.⁹⁷ On 15 October, more than 100,000 school students from across the country raised 1.5 million SEK in a single day, bringing a new record to the OD campaign format. The success of the 1965 OD campaign inspired other Nordic countries to take up the fundraising concept.⁹⁸

Meanwhile, SECO experienced internal turmoil in the mid-1960s, when debates about the ‘politicisation’ of the organisation began, with some school councils leaving the organisation.⁹⁹ Despite internal struggles, the OD campaign format remained popular in Sweden and also spread to Finland, Norway and Denmark. Thanks to the network provided by the Nordic council for school student organisations, *Nordiskt elevforum*, a joint OD campaign was organised in four countries on 13 October 1967.¹⁰⁰

Concluding Discussion

In this article, I have traced the emergence of the Operation Day’s Work campaign from university fundraiser to recurring campaign in Swedish secondary education. After its start among university students of Lund University in 1960, the campaign format was picked up by students in secondary schools and employed to demonstrate resourcefulness and global consciousness. The campaign was also internationalised in two different ways. First, the objectives of the charity changed, from efforts to finance stipends for university students in Sweden to building schools in Africa and South America. Secondly, the campaign itself spread to new countries, primarily by cooperation among school council organisations in the Nordic region.

The rapid spread of the Operation Day’s Work campaign can be attributed to several factors. First, it tapped into a larger process of ‘global awakening’ of the postwar era. For Sweden as a non-aligned

⁹² *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 7, no. 2, May 1963, 6–7.

⁹³ See for example the annual reports of the Swedish United Nations Association (*Svenska FN-förbundet*), 1961–1963. RA, Svenska FN-förbundet, B2:1.

⁹⁴ Söderberg and Östberg, *Skolan och elevrörelsen*, 58.

⁹⁵ ‘Sikta på två miljoner!’, *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 9, no.1–2, 1965, 8. ‘Ännu mera SECO-pengar till u-landsprojekt’, *SECO-aktuellt*, no. 3, 1964, 9.

⁹⁶ These schools were inaugurated in Feb. 1966. See: Årsberättelse över verksamheten i Algeriet 1966, RA, RB, vol. F1b:18. See also Söderberg and Östberg, *Skolan och elevrörelsen*, 49–50.

⁹⁷ *SECO-aktuellt*, vol. 9, no. 4, 1965, 12–3.

⁹⁸ Ahonen, ‘Teinien Taksvärkki’, 24.

⁹⁹ *SECO-aktuellt*, no. 2, 1964, 8–11, 15–7.

¹⁰⁰ Söderberg and Östberg, *Skolan och elevrörelsen*, 51–9.

small state, the United Nations became an important arena for foreign policy, and foreign aid played an important role in promoting Sweden on the international stage. In the early 1960s, government-funded foreign aid was very limited, but support for international development grew rapidly.¹⁰¹

During these years, SECO was influential in advocating educational policy change. Using its membership network and communication channels with school councils across the country, it was comparatively easy, or at least feasible, for the organisation to arrange coordinated campaign events. The affiliations with similar school democracy organisations in other Nordic countries also facilitated the international spread of the campaign.

Support among children and youth was another, perhaps underestimated, factor behind the success of the OD campaign. After all, the campaigns would hardly have reached their goals if young people had been disinterested. In more practical terms, I have argued that the campaign format utilised one of the main resources for young activists – time – in ways that could be effectively converted into economic resources. One of the downsides, however, was the difficulty of conveying knowledge about global issues of development in the carnivalesque setting of the OD fundraisers, and discussions within the organisation reveal that this issue was considered problematic, accentuating the need to balance entertainment with earnestness and a sense of humanitarian duty.

The emergence of the OD campaign during the early 1960s highlights that international solidarity and global consciousness was not merely implemented ‘from above’, through efforts of international organisations or global elites. Although SECO during these years arguably reflected the middle-class dominance of Swedish upper secondary schools, the campaign provides a case in which these issues were pushed by youth-led campaigns. The results in terms of fundraising and media impact imply that this format of activism was met with enthusiasm among the general public, tapping into broader debates about public financing of foreign aid and Swedish foreign relations. It further reveals that campaigns of international solidarity provided an arena which young people could enter as political actors with broad public support. Further research is needed, however, to evaluate the role of children and youth in the establishment of post-war foreign aid and development assistance policies.

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¹⁰¹ Berg, Lundberg and Tydén, *Svindlande uppgift*, 80, 300–9, 322.