

Student activists and international cooperation in a changing world, 1919–60

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Mentions of student activism inevitably conjure up images of 1968 – a year in which protests on university campuses across the world were often framed in internationalist terms.¹ This chapter, by contrast, draws attention to earlier varieties of student internationalism: it focuses on a period that predated both the growing appeal of New Left currents and a substantial expansion in access to higher education. Many student organizations that operated internationally before the 1960s engaged in knowledge exchange and cooperation with international institutions to further the interests of their constituency. Revolving around associational work and expert collaboration, their brand of internationalism resembled other varieties that are being explored in this volume.

Prior to the 1960s, university students were but a small subsection of their age cohort. Notwithstanding national variations, the participation rate in interwar Europe barely surpassed 2 per cent.² By the late 1950s, this share had increased – but not in a way that drastically changed the overall picture.³ In Japan, student numbers were proportionally higher than in Europe: 4 per cent in 1940 and 7.5 per cent in 1952.⁴ The United States were an outlier, with around 8 per cent of young people attending college or university by 1940 as well as substantial expansion resulting from the G. I. Bill of

¹ For studies that emphasize the internationalism of student protests in and around 1968, see Robert Gildea, James Mark and Anette Warring, eds, *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Martin Klimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds, *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1956–1977* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2008); Vania Markarian, *Uruguay, 1968: Student Activism from Global Counterculture to Molotov Cocktails*, trans. Laura Pérez Carrara (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2017); Martin Klimke, *The Other Alliance: Student Protest in West Germany and the United States in the Global Sixties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

² Fritz Ringer, 'Admission', in *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries (1800–1945)*, vol. 3 of *A History of the University in Europe*, ed. Walter Rüegg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 254–7.

³ Vincent Carpentier, 'Expansion and Differentiation in Higher Education: The Historical Trajectories of the UK, the USA and France', *Centre for Global Higher Education Working Paper Series*, no. 3 (April 2018): 16.

⁴ T. J. Pempel, 'The Politics of Enrollment Expansion in Japanese Universities', *The Journal of Asian Studies* 33, no. 1 (1973): 68.

1944.⁵ In many other parts of the world, higher education remained even more of a minority experience than it was in Europe. The dynamics of empire were one major factor that shaped patterns of exclusion as well as scholarly mobility.⁶ Limited college or university provision in regions under colonial control subsequently informed debates about colonialism and international development.⁷

As a select band of people, university students were subject to major expectations regarding their potential contributions to society. In this respect, perceptions of students as future leaders intersected with broader ideas about youth. In his study of post-1945 France, Richard Ivan Jobs has noted that ‘young people as a group became the object of countless debates and innumerable government policies as they represented the hope of a future unburdened by the devastation of the recent past.’⁸ Visions of youth as a force for the ‘rejuvenation’ of society can also be applied to the specific constituency of university students and to the international activities that they engaged in. League of Nations officials during the 1920s, communist leaders during the 1930s as well as Cold Warriors from both power blocs during the 1940s and 1950s supported student organizations or sought to influence their work. Such forms of engagement anticipated that university youth might play an important role in the future.

University students were not a cohesive group. There were significant national differences with regard to their social profile, even though the low number of working-class students was a widely shared feature across different education systems.⁹ Women’s participation in higher education tended to vary, too. Even within individual countries, the growth in the number of women students from the 1920s to the 1950s was by no means a linear process.¹⁰ Political persuasions and religious beliefs added further complexity to the make-up of the student body. With regard to the religious dimension, it is worth bearing in mind that the higher education landscape comprised not only secular institutions but also colleges and universities that were run by churches or religious communities.

International student organizations mirrored the heterogeneity of the constituency that they catered for. Some organizations claimed to represent students irrespective of their backgrounds, while others addressed particular religious, ethnic or political groups. Meanwhile, the question of women’s access to higher education underpinned the work of the International Federation of University Women.¹¹ Yet, despite the

⁵ Paul Windolf, ‘Cycles of Expansion in Higher Education 1870–1985: An International Comparison’, *Higher Education* 23 (1992): 4 and 11.

⁶ Tamson Pietsch, *Empire of Scholars: Universities, Networks and the British Academic World, 1850–1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

⁷ On issues and debates surrounding university development in West Africa, see Timothy Livsey, *Nigeria’s University Age: Reframing Decolonisation and Development* (London: Palgrave, 2017).

⁸ Richard Ivan Jobs, *Riding the New Wave: Youth and the Rejuvenation of France After the Second World War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 7.

⁹ Fritz Ringer has discussed the ‘social origins of university students’ before the Second World War in Ringer, ‘Admission’, 257–66. For developments from 1945 to 1970, see A. H. Halsey, ‘Admission’, in *Universities since 1945*, vol. 4 of *A History of the University in Europe*, ed. Walter Rüegg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 223–6.

¹⁰ See, for example, Gail Kelly and Sheila Slaughter, ‘Women and Higher Education: Trends and Perspectives’, in *Women’s Higher Education in Comparative Perspective*, ed. idem (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), 3–13. On the uneven development in Britain, France and the United States, see Carpentier, ‘Expansion and Differentiation’, 18.

¹¹ Marie-Elise Hunyadi, ‘Promouvoir l’accès des femmes aux études et aux titres universitaires: un défi transnational? L’engagement de la Fédération internationale des femmes diplômées des Universités

diversity of actors on the international scene, student internationalism constituted a concrete and distinct phenomenon, as student leaders from different backgrounds, persuasions and associations interacted with one another in manifold ways.

In tackling the work of international student organizations, this chapter examines how student leaders positioned themselves within a changing global order, either consciously or implicitly. In particular, it discusses threads that connected the interwar period to the early Cold War – a chronological approach that has also informed other recent studies on internationalism.¹² Notwithstanding its thematic approach, the chapter highlights wider trends for the period between 1919 and 1960, notably the growing role of political pronouncements and non-European actors within the work of international student organizations.

A fresh look at student organizations contributes to the literature on internationalism in three major ways. First, it illustrates how war and conflict produced new collaborative patterns, as reflected in widening spheres of action for student organizations. Second, student internationalism covered a broad ideological spectrum and thus allows us to consider ‘non-liberal variations of internationalism and transnationalism’, which have only recently begun to attract greater scholarly attention.¹³ Third, it shows that the history of European internationalism cannot be separated from extra-European internationalisms. Students from European colonies were present within imperial metropolises and engaged in international action. Moreover, student organizations often acted globally – be it because of missionary agendas or because the dynamics of decolonization forced organizations to extend their scope of action. In all of these respects, a phenomenon that at first appears to be relatively confined – namely the work of organizations that catered for small groups of young people – illustrates the spread and diversity of internationalism.

War as a spur for internationalist action

International student organizations had existed before 1914, yet the Great War and its aftermath transformed the work of such bodies. The conflict’s impact was felt clearly within the World’s Student Christian Federation (WSCF), which had been founded in Sweden in 1895 and thus was the oldest international student organization. In 1931, its secretary Suzanne de Dietrich articulated a sense of generational rupture. As she

(1919 – 1970)’ (PhD thesis, Université de Genève and Université de Paris, 2019). See also Christine von Oertzen, *Strategie Verständigung: Zur transnationalen Vernetzung von Akademikerinnen 1917–1955* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2012).

¹² See, for example, Talbot Imlay, *The Practice of Socialist Internationalism: European Socialists and International Politics, 1914–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Simon Jackson and Alanna O’Malley, eds, *The Institution of International Order: From the League of Nations to the United Nations* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018).

¹³ Jessica Reinisch, ‘Introduction: Agents of Internationalism’, *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 2 (2016): 197. Recently, an influential volume has sought to consider a ‘broader spectrum of intellectual thought and action’, encompassing ‘ideological transactions that took place across the boundaries of the socialist and liberal strands of internationalism’ and the use of internationalism by ‘even . . . [its] most avowed enemies’: Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, ‘Rethinking the History of Internationalism’, in *Internationalisms: A Twentieth-Century History*, eds. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 4.

suggested, the war had led to ‘a displacement of interest from the spiritual to the social’ and a ‘passionate revolt against the “institutions of the past”’, including ‘Churches, missionary societies, any type of thought which might be labelled “conservative” or “conventional”’.¹⁴ Research on the WSCF has noted that the organization did itself undergo significant changes in the 1920s, moving ‘from an overt evangelical focus to a more inclusive and interfaith perspective’.¹⁵

More generally, the war experience created new contexts for student activism. Young people who entered higher education in the years following the Armistice had observed the consequences of military conflict; in many cases, they had undertaken military service themselves.¹⁶ They were confronted with the war’s manifold legacies – from political instability and social crisis to cultural transformations. In light of their experiences and as members of a new generation, students could cast themselves as uniquely equipped for overcoming past antagonisms and shaping the new international order. Such claims resonated with contemporary notions about ‘Peace through Youth’ – the motto of a large-scale Franco-German youth gathering in 1926.¹⁷ This is not to say that such slogans can be taken at face value: wartime enmities proved just as pervasive among students as they did elsewhere.¹⁸ Nonetheless, many student organizations affirmed their commitment to reconciliation and cooperation. The WSCF’s first post-war meeting – held in St Beatenberg, Switzerland, in 1920 – featured delegates from former enemy countries.¹⁹ WSCF member Ruth Rouse later noted a ‘passionate determination to build international relationships on a new basis’, as reflected in the decision to include an ‘international objective’ in the organization’s agenda.²⁰

After the Great War, a host of new student organizations joined the WSCF on the international scene, exemplifying the internationalist momentum of the era. WSCF officials noted the emergence of other ‘student societies of an international character’ and proposed ‘to consider in a friendly spirit any openings for cooperation’.²¹ Importantly, the post-war rebirth of internationalism produced new structures that allowed activists to promote their aims. Recent research has highlighted the role of

¹⁴ Suzanne de Dietrich, ‘A Tentative History of the Federation Message’, *The Student World* 24, no. 2 (1931): 112–3.

¹⁵ Johanna M. Selles, *The World Student Christian Federation, 1895–1925: Motives, Methods, and Influential Women* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 253.

¹⁶ The war’s impact on British university life, including the role of ex-service students therein, is the focus of a research project whose initial findings are presented in Georgina Brewis, Sarah Hellowell and Daniel Laqua, ‘Rebuilding the Universities after the Great War: Ex-Service Students, Scholarships and the Reconstruction of University Life’, *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* 105, no. 364 (February 2020): 82–106.

¹⁷ Géraoid Barry, *The Disarmament of Hatred: Marc Sangnier, French Catholicism and the Legacy of the First World War, 1914–45* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2012), 128.

¹⁸ I have explored this dimension in Daniel Laqua, ‘Activism in the “Students’ League of Nations”’: International Student Politics and the Confédération Internationale des Étudiants, 1919–1939’, *The English Historical Review* 132, no. 556 (June 2017): 605–37, esp. 613–14.

¹⁹ Yale University Divinity School, World Student Christian Federation Archives (RG 46 Series IX), A912 - General Committee Reports (hereafter MS WSCF): *Who’s Who: Meeting of the World’s Student Christian Federation, St. Beatenberg, July 30 – August 7, 1920*, 6–7.

²⁰ Ruth Rouse, *The World’s Student Christian Federation: A History of the First Thirty Years* (London: SCM, 1948), 264–5.

²¹ MS WSCF: *Minutes of the Meeting of the General Committee of the World’s Student Christian Federation, High Leigh, England, August 7 to August 20, 1924*, 24.

the League of Nations as a focal point for many efforts.²² Among students, a range of local and national groups promoted awareness of the League and its work. From 1924, they were organized transnationally through the International University Federation for the League of Nations. Meanwhile, another body – the International Confederation of Students (*Confédération Internationale des Étudiants*) – bundled the efforts of national unions of students and worked with League officials, for instance launching an International Student Identity Card in 1926–7.²³

War-induced humanitarian emergencies stimulated new internationalist endeavours. There are various connections between recent scholarly interest in internationalism on the one side and humanitarianism on the other, including the attempt to problematize both phenomena rather than viewing them as inherently progressive or benign.²⁴ Humanitarian ventures can be approached through the conceptual lens of internationalism because they used patterns of international cooperation that were common to many internationalist ventures. If one bears this aspect in mind, it underlines the extent to which the interwar period was an internationalist era. The literature on humanitarianism treats the Great War as a transformative moment that produced an expanded, diversified and increasingly organized humanitarian landscape.²⁵ Recently, Tomás Irish has shown how aid efforts aimed at universities could combine a humanitarian impetus with ideas about the ‘moral reconstruction’ of a devastated continent.²⁶

The creation of European Student Relief in 1920 was one manifestation of this wider development. Georgina Brewis has appraised the former as ‘a substantial contribution to the broader postwar aid movement’, while Benjamin Hartley suggests that it ‘may be considered the first international ecumenical relief agency’.²⁷ The aid effort had been initiated by WSCF members after encountering poverty and devastation in Central Europe. Ruth Rouse, a key figure in these endeavours, stated that as WSCF Travelling Secretary, she had witnessed much misery, but none on the scale she observed in

²² Andrew Arsan, Su-Lin Lewis and Anne-Isabelle Richard, ‘The Roots of Global Civil Society and the Interwar Moment’, *Journal of Global History* 7, no. 2 (July 2012): 157–65; Daniel Gorman, *The Emergence of International Society in the 1920s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (London: Hurst, 2014), 77–122. See also the plethora of examples in Daniel Gorman, *International Cooperation in the Early Twentieth Century* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

²³ Laqua, ‘Activism in the “Students League of Nations”’, 625–6, 628 and 637.

²⁴ See, for example, Emily Baughan’s comment that ‘humanitarian histories were . . . part of a pushback against more celebratory narratives of internationalism and integration’, in Matthew Hilton, Emily Baughan, Eleanor Davey, Bronwen Everill, Kevin O’Sullivan and Tehila Sasson, ‘History and Humanitarianism: A Conversation’, *Past & Present* 241, no. 1 (2018): e11.

²⁵ Bruno Cabanes, *The Great War and the Origins of Humanitarianism, 1918–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Peter Gatrell, ‘General Editor’s Introduction’ to the ‘Discussion: Humanitarianism’, in *1914–1918 online: International Encyclopaedia of the First World War*, https://encyclopedia.1914-1918-online.net/article/discussion_humanitarianism (last accessed 22 July 2019).

²⁶ Tomás Irish, ‘The “Moral Basis” of Reconstruction? Humanitarianism, Intellectual Relief and the League of Nations, 1918–1925’, *Modern Intellectual History* 17, no. 3 (2020), 769–800

²⁷ Georgina Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering: Britain and Beyond, 1880–1980* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2014), 54; Benjamin Hartley, ‘Saving Students: European Student Relief in the Aftermath of World War I’, *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 42, no. 4 (2018): 296.

Austria: 'Vienna was a wreck slowly but inevitably sinking.'²⁸ Her account demonstrated how religious beliefs and humanitarian concern could fuse with hopes for the post-war order. As she put it, 'The key to the salvation of the nations lay so obviously in the universities, the nurseries of future leadership.'²⁹

European Student Relief attained a significant scale. By 1926, it reported to have 'raised over £480,000 and distributed them amongst their needy fellow students in Europe.'³⁰ Early on, it moved beyond Central Europe, for instance organizing aid for Russian students. As the immediate post-war situation gave way to new concerns, activists extensively debated the way forward for student-centred relief efforts.³¹ In 1925, they renamed their organization 'International Student Service', and one year later adopted an institutional arrangement that provided greater independence from the WSCF. International Student Service continued to lead a range of aid efforts, for instance supporting refugee students in the 1930s. Norman Bentwich – a British academic who had worked for the High Commissioner of Refugees Coming from Germany in 1933–5 – later noted that it had been 'the agency chosen by common consent to deal with the refugee students from the Continent of Europe', and acknowledged its role in offering guidance, college placements and scholarships.³²

In Ruth Rouse's view, involvement in relief efforts did not only benefit the recipients of aid: to those who participated in relief ventures, it offered 'a vast international education' and 'an experience of the richness of international fellowship.'³³ Early reports stressed this personal dimension. In 1920–1, submissions from WSCF branches in China, India and Japan suggested 'that nothing has helped their students so much during the past year to understand the Federation as the real sacrifices some of them have made for the E.S.R. [European Student Relief]'.³⁴ In China, students provided 'gifts for the relief of Vienna students' alongside help for famine sufferers at home. The Indian section proclaimed that the 'ready and generous response of students in money and sympathy has gone a long way to further their interest in the federation', while the report from Japan predicted that 'this spirit of doing for other students will increase their sympathy and friendliness towards all foreigners'.

If involvement in humanitarian ventures was an education in internationalism, its impact could also be observed in the trajectory of student leaders. The career of Mary McGeachy (1901–91) provides an illustrative example. As an undergraduate in Toronto,

²⁸ Ruth Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe: The Student Chapter in Post-War Reconstruction* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1925), 16.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁰ Swarthmore College Peace Collection, Subject File 'Youth/Students: Organizations A-N' (hereafter MS Swarthmore): leaflet 'International Student Service of the World's Student Christian Federation' (November 1926), 2.

³¹ See, for example, *Minutes of the Meeting of the General Committee . . .*, *High Leigh*, 6–8. See also M. S. Swarthmore, *Fifth Annual Conference of International Student Service of the World's Student Christian Federation. Karlovci – Yugoslavia. July 24th– August 2nd 1926* (Geneva: WSCF, 1926), 19–24.

³² Norman Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars: The Story of Displaced Scholars and Scientists 1933–1952* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1953), 24.

³³ Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe*, 53.

³⁴ WSCF, *Christ and the Student World: A Review of the World's Student Christian Federation, 1920–21* (London: Student Christian Federation, 1922), 27.

McGeachy joined the Student Christian Movement, which WSCF and European Student Relief formed part of. McGeachy later acknowledged that her university experience was formative in ‘inspiring her to be a social activist.’³⁵ After graduating, she maintained close ties to student organizations, and in 1927 she attended a conference of International Student Service in Switzerland. Shortly afterwards, she was named editor for the organization’s paper, *Vox Studentium*.³⁶ Later on, McGeachy worked for the British government and the League of Nations. In 1944, she became a leading official in the newly created United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration – a body that also worked with World Student Relief, which had emerged from International Student Service.³⁷ If, as Mary Kinnear has put it, international cooperation was ‘the organizing theme of her life’, then student internationalism is key to understanding McGeachy’s subsequent commitments.³⁸

The Second World War both perpetuated and transformed the international structures and efforts that had characterized the interwar years. In the humanitarian realm, it led International Student Service to join forces not only with its long-standing institutional partner, the WSCF, but also with the Catholic student organization Pax Romana in setting up a War Emergency Relief Committee.³⁹ Furthermore, in 1947, the Student Commission of the World Federation of United Nations Associations established a post-war successor to the University Federation for the League of Nations. Finally, if a language of reconciliation featured prominently in some strands of interwar internationalism, the same goes for the post-1945 years. For instance, at its first post-war meeting, the WSCF ‘rejoiced in the renewal of official contact with the Movement in Germany and the presence . . . of its representatives’ while also applauding the ‘renewed activity of Protestant student groups in Austria and . . . contacts made by Federation staff’. Even at this early stage, officials expressed a desire to support students from such countries ‘to enter more deeply into the life of the Federation.’⁴⁰ These examples suggest that, in the face of war, genocide and destruction, some activists sought to strengthen their efforts for dialogue and cooperation. From a different angle, Richard Ivan Jobs has highlighted the emphasis on Franco-German youth links, with travel initiatives in the 1940s and 1950s being cast as ‘journeys of reconciliation.’⁴¹

³⁵ Mary Kinnear, *Woman of the World: Mary McGeachy and International Cooperation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 30.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁷ This relationship also included the secondment of World Student Relief personnel to UNRRA missions: World Student Relief, *Out of the Ruins: Fifth Report on Student Relief Activities April 1945 – March 1946* (Geneva: WSCF, 1946), 27–8.

³⁸ Kinnear, *Woman of the World*, 7.

³⁹ Bentwich, *The Rescue and Achievement of Refugee Scholars*, 24. See also the reference to Pax Romana’s participation in this venture ‘on terms of equality with other student representatives’ in ‘Pax Romana Summary’ (1947), in *American Students Organize: Founding the National Student Association after World War II. An Anthology and Sourcebook*, ed. Eugene Schwarz (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2006), 747.

⁴⁰ MS WSCF: *Minutes of the Meeting of the General Committee of the World’s Student Christian Federation, Chateau de Bossey, Céligny, Switzerland, August 9th to 20th 1945* (Geneva: Geneva, 1946), 24 and 28.

⁴¹ Richard Ivan Jobs, *Backpack Ambassadors: How Youth Travel Integrated Europe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017), 59–96.

Challenges to ‘apolitical’ conceptions of student internationalism

Like many humanitarian ventures, European Student Relief and International Student Service adopted a discourse of neutrality and impartiality. When International Student Service received its new legal status in 1926, its ‘guiding principles and policy’ pledged that it would operate ‘on an impartial service basis’ and ‘irrespective of creed, race or nationality’.⁴² Yet it was not only in the realm of humanitarianism that various student organizations claimed to be ‘apolitical’. During the 1920s and 1930s, the International Confederation of Students insisted on refraining from political pronouncements. Its agenda, which focused on service provision, echoed the ways in which national unions of students, including those in France and the UK, interpreted their remit.⁴³ Such rhetoric evidently requires critical interrogation. For instance, the complex relationship between humanitarianism and politics is widely acknowledged.⁴⁴ And if claims about the apolitical nature of student internationalism were always tenuous at best, they rang particularly hollow in times of ideological polarization.

The political dimensions of student internationalism became evident in the 1930s, when communists gained ground within university circles in several countries.⁴⁵ In line with its Popular Front strategy, the Communist International and its youth wing increasingly sought to ‘to forge links with the main body of “progressive” youth’.⁴⁶ University students offer a striking perspective on the phenomenon of communist internationalism, because student activism was less overtly shaped by social milieus or identities and, as such, the boundaries between the non-communist and communist worlds remained porous.⁴⁷ In December 1934, the creation of the World Student Association (*Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants*, RME) highlighted the growing

⁴² MS WSCF: *Minutes of the Meeting of the General Committee of the World’s Student Christian Federation: Nybox Strand, Denmark, August 11th to 24th, 1926*, 12.

⁴³ On France, see Alain Monchablon and Robi Morder, ‘Apolitisme, autonomie et indépendance dans le mouvement étudiant’, in *Cent ans de mouvements étudiants*, ed. Jean-Philippe Legois, Alain Monchablon and Robi Morder (Paris: Éditions Syllepses, 2007), 195–204. With regard to 1960s Britain, a growing challenge to ‘apolitical’ conceptions of student union work is discussed in Caroline Hoeflerle, *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 67–9.

⁴⁴ Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, ‘Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present’, in *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008), 1–48. Maria Framke has used the term ‘political humanitarianism’ for ‘a form of humanitarianism in which political motivations are particularly overt’: Maria Framke, ‘“We Must Send a Gift Worthy of India and the Congress!” War and Political Humanitarianism in Late Colonial South’, *Modern Asian Studies* 51, no. 6 (2017): 1970.

⁴⁵ Jacques Varin, ‘Les étudiants communistes, des origines à la veille de Mai 1968’, *Matériaux pour l’histoire de notre temps* 74 (2004): 37–49; Susan Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth: Communists and Catholics in Interwar France* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 161 and 163; Robert Cohen, *When the Old Left Was Young: Student Radicals and America’s First Mass Student Movement, 1929–1941* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993); Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering*, 90–1.

⁴⁶ Kevin Morgan, *Against Fascism and War: Ruptures and Continuities in British Communist Politics, 1935–41* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), 39.

⁴⁷ The recent interest in the history of communist internationalism is exemplified by Kasper Braskén, *The International Workers’ Relief, Communism, and Transnational Solidarity: Willi Münzenberg in Weimar Germany* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015); Brigitte Studer, *The Transnational World of the*

communist engagement with student internationalism. Its original name included the by-line 'against War and Fascism' and thus resonated with the terminology of the Amsterdam-Pleyel movement and communist-dominated ventures such as the Women's World Committee against War and Fascism.⁴⁸

Its overtly political character prevented the RME from developing formal relations with the League of Nations. In November 1936, its request to join the League's liaison committee for student representatives was declined because it seemed clear that the RME operated 'largely on the terrain of active politics'. The committee reiterated that, in representing student organizations with diverse constituencies, it had 'to abstain from all active politics' and could 'not depart from its traditional neutrality'.⁴⁹ Nonetheless, the RME cannot be treated in separation from other strands of student internationalism. For example, its members played a prominent part at the World Youth Congresses of 1936 and 1938, held, respectively, in Geneva and at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York. The first of these events – with over 700 participants – originated in an initiative of the University Federation for the League of Nations. As such, it revealed how a communist body could even target initiatives that had originally been associated with liberal internationalism. Joël Kotek has highlighted the growing role of communist activists in international student ventures and noted the 'extraordinary network woven by the League of Young Communists' in the 1930s.⁵⁰

Student internationalism was subject to conflicting impulses in its stance on military conflict – a tension that was implicit in the phrase 'against war and fascism': while pacifism enjoyed growing currency among some young people,⁵¹ particular conflicts triggered militant solidarity. Both the Spanish Civil War and Japanese aggression in China resulted in the mobilization of young people.⁵² In such instances, student solidarity created fresh alliances. For example, a meeting held at Bedford College, London, in 1936 featured not only Chinese students and members of International Student Service but also speakers from communist groups.⁵³ In 1938, an RME-led delegation travelled to Asia, 'to discuss how the world students can give practical aid to China'.⁵⁴

Cominternians (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2015); Patryk Babiracki and Austin Jersild, eds, *Socialist Internationalism in the Cold War: Exploring the Second World* (Charm: Palgrave, 2016).

⁴⁸ Jasmine Calver, 'The *Comité mondial des femmes contre la guerre et le fascisme*: Anti-Fascist, Feminist, and Communist Activism in the 1930s' (PhD thesis, Northumbria University, 2019).

⁴⁹ 'Neuvième reunion des Délégués internationaux d'étudiants', *La Coopération intellectuelle*, no. 71 (December 1936), 12.

⁵⁰ Joël Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, trans. Ralph Blumenau (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 1996): 16.

⁵¹ Jean-François Sirinelli, *Génération intellectuelle: Khâgneux et Normaliens dans l'entre-deux-guerres* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), 134–6 notes the prominent role of pacifist views at the École Normale Supérieure in 1930s Paris. See also Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering*, 111–16.

⁵² For the British case, see Brewis, *A Social History of Student Volunteering*, 122–32. Tom Buchanan has discussed the wider resonance of these causes among the British left in *Britain and the Spanish Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *East Wind: China and the British Left, 1925–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 48–80.

⁵³ 'Internationale Solidarität: Internationale Studentenkonferenz für die Unterstützung des Kampfes der chinesischen Studenten', *Internationale Rundschau*, no. 14 (26 March 1936): 571–2.

⁵⁴ 'Round-Table Confab for I.S.D.', *China Forum*, 18 June 1938. See also 'Une délégation internationale d'étudiants est partie pour la Chine', *Revue Mensuelle*, no. 2 (15 May to 15 June 1938).

Communist investment in the wider project of student internationalism meant that the emerging Cold War tensions of the late 1940s also played out within student organizations. After the Second World War, the newly established International Union of Students (IUS) resumed earlier efforts to federate national unions of students. Maintaining a secretariat in Prague from 1946 onwards, the organization soon came under Soviet domination. In 1948, a Soviet memorandum acknowledged the division 'into two camps, one of which, led by the Soviets, was trying to politicize the Union, while the other insisted on a purely cultural outlook'.⁵⁵

Despite growing misgivings, national unions from non-communist countries attended the early IUS meetings. International politics, however, caused major ruptures, as evidenced by the contrasting responses to the Stockholm Appeal of 1950. The latter had been launched by the communist-dominated World Peace Council and 'split the peace movement along cold war frontiers'.⁵⁶ The appeal reflected communists' adoption of the language of 'peace' and sustained portrayals of the Soviet Union as a peace-loving country.⁵⁷ Conflict surrounding the Stockholm Appeal and related issues characterized the IUS's Prague congress in 1950. British student leader Stanley Jenkins criticized that the self-proclaimed 'Defenders of Peace' were 'not against war in any part of the world, provided that it is a war fought for communist aims'.⁵⁸ Meanwhile, an American delegate argued that 'banning the atom bomb would not guarantee peace'.⁵⁹ Although such statements met with jeers from the majority of the congress audience, the position of non-communist delegates meant that the congress ultimately acknowledged 'that certain groups of students expressed their struggle against the use of nuclear arms through other texts than the Stockholm Appeal'.⁶⁰ The subsequent history of student internationalism highlights the impossibility of maintaining unified structures. Nonetheless, the existence of a communist strand connects the student internationalism of the interwar years to the Cold War period.

Beyond internationalisms on the left

When student internationalism took on overtly political features, it did not necessarily have to tilt towards the left. Recent work on the history of internationalism has insisted on its diversity, far beyond the varieties that bore liberal, socialist or communist inflections. In this respect, it is worth noting internationalism's close relationship

⁵⁵ Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90.

⁵⁶ Günter Wernicke, 'The Communist Led World Peace Council and the Western Peace Movements: The Fetters of Bipolarity and Some Attempts to Break Them in the Fifties and Early Sixties', *Peace and Change* 23, no. 3 (1998): 269.

⁵⁷ However, Günter Wernicke has argued that we should not treat specific kinds of 'peace commitment' as any less 'genuine' just because of their connection to 'a political world view': *ibid.*, 267.

⁵⁸ *Report from Prague: An Account of the Second World Congress of the International Union of Students (August 1950)* (London: Student Labour Federation, 1950), 11.

⁵⁹ 'Students Hear Warning', *New York Times*, 20 August 1950.

⁶⁰ Didier Fischer, 'L'Unef et l'Union internationale des étudiants (1945-1965)', *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, no. 86 (2007): 89.

with ideas of nationhood. As Glenda Sluga has argued, we should not regard internationalism as nationalism's 'other' but rather comprehend the two phenomena as intrinsically connected.⁶¹ Nationalism featured prominently within some strands of internationalism – and internationalism provided a potential staging ground for national agendas.

European Student Relief was a case in point. As a vehicle for humanitarian aid, it may appear as an expression of cosmopolitan convictions. Yet the memoirs of Willem Vissert t'Hooft – subsequently a key figure in the ecumenical movement – point to the presence of strong national passions within the organization. In 1922, a motion to define 'world peace and fraternity' as key objectives for the organization triggered a 'long and testy debate.'⁶² As Vissert t'Hooft noted, 'the severity of the rejection stemmed from the suspicion that European Student Relief might be a bait to harness European students for a specific American peace ideology.' Some delegates even construed the proposal 'as an attack on their national sentiment'. While a compromise formula subsequently spoke of 'international understanding' and 'international responsibility', the episode showed how national anxieties even reared their head in a humanitarian organization dominated by Christian activists.

The 1923 congress of European Student Relief further highlighted this aspect. At this event, the German delegation denounced the occupation of the Ruhr while Hungarian participants defended their government's anti-Semitic *numerus clausus*.⁶³ Moreover, Jewish students were forced to form a separate delegation as they had been excluded from several national delegations. Ruth Rouse argued that European Student Relief ultimately improved 'international and interracial relationships' in Hungary, helping Hungarian student leaders to see beyond the irredentist designs vis-à-vis Czechoslovakia and Romania and to question their anti-Semitism.⁶⁴ The overarching picture, however, remains ambivalent. In 1929, International Student Service acknowledged the discrimination that Jewish students experienced in different Central and Eastern European countries. Yet, rather than campaigning through public pronouncements, the organization chose to address the issue by organizing a conference featuring 'students of every shade of opinion, from Anti-Semite to Zionist.'⁶⁵

The case of German student politics further illustrates internationalism's ambivalences. Throughout the Weimar years, the *Deutsche Studentenschaft* defined itself in pan-German terms, with a mission that extended beyond the borders of the German state. Early on in the 1920s, the association embraced *völkisch* policies; by 1931, it was dominated by National Socialist students.⁶⁶ Despite never joining the

⁶¹ Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁶² Willem A. Visser't Hooft, *Die Welt war meine Gemeinde: Autobiographie* (Munich: R. Piper & Co, 1972), 21.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 23.

⁶⁴ Rouse, *Rebuilding Europe*, 124.

⁶⁵ M. S. Swarthmore, *Annual Report on International Student Service 1929–1930* (Geneva: ISS, 1930),

⁶⁶ I have discussed the *Deutsche Studentenschaft's* conflicts with the International Confederation of Students in Laqua, 'Activism in the "Students' League of Nations"', 613–15. See also the observations in Lieve Gevers and Louis Vos, 'Student Movements', in *Universities in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries*, ed. Rüegg, 345–57.

International Confederation of Students, the *Studentenschaft* attended its congresses, provoking heated debates on several occasions. Even in the 1930s, it continued to participate in the International University Games. As late as 1937, the International Confederation discussed ways of bringing the *Studentenschaft* on board by creating the new membership category of ‘Sporting Collaborators’.⁶⁷ Similarly, although German students withdrew from International Student Service in 1934, a ‘German Circle for International Cooperation in Student Service’ maintained links with it. International Student Service cooperated with the German Circle in hosting two Anglo-German conferences, held in Oxford (1937) and Dresden (1938), discussing issues such as ‘the colonial question, the possibility of an economic settlement, disarmament, and the general conditions for the construction of a lasting European peace’.⁶⁸ These interactions are striking because, in the same period, International Student Service was busy organizing aid efforts for Jewish victims of Nazism. Such examples highlight the involvement of fascists within the internationalist field, despite their hostility to notions of dialogue and diversity.⁶⁹

From a different ideological angle, Catholic student internationalism further demonstrates the highly variegated nature of internationalism. As expressions of lay action, Catholic student organizations covered a broad spectrum of social and political persuasions; even at the national level, political tensions existed among Catholic student groups.⁷⁰ Only recently has the interwar history of Catholic internationalism received detailed attention.⁷¹ Catholic students began to organize themselves internationally after the First World War through the foundation of Pax Romana in 1921. The latter formed part of the wider associational landscape of interwar internationalism, maintaining relations with the League of Nations as well as other student organizations.

After the Second World War, Pax Romana was put on a new organizational footing, comprised of two major strands: the International Movement of Catholic Students and the International Movement of Catholic Intellectuals – the latter being informed by views that an ‘international association of Catholic academics’ might play ‘an important role in the ideological struggle against communism’.⁷² Anti-communism was indeed an important factor for Pax Romana. Accordingly, when Catholic students from America participated in the 1946 IUS congress, they were ‘jarringly out of sync with the spirit

⁶⁷ ‘Les relations entre la C.I.E. et la Deutsche Studentenschaft’, *Bulletin officiel d’Information de la Confédération Internationale des Étudiants* 10, no. 1 (January–February 1937): 6–7.

⁶⁸ Swarthmore College Peace Collection, CDGB ‘Switzerland – Collective Box’: *International Student Service: Annual Report 1936–1937* (Geneva: ISS, 1937)

⁶⁹ Herren, ‘Fascist Internationalism’, in *Internationalisms*, eds. Sluga and Clavin, 191–212; Benjamin Martin, *The Nazi-Fascist New Order for European Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

⁷⁰ David Colon, ‘Face aux églises, un siècle d’organisations des étudiants chrétiens’, in *Cent ans de mouvements étudiants*, ed. Legois et al., 219–25.

⁷¹ Giuliana Chamedes, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade: The Vatican’s Battle to Remake Christian Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2019); Cormac Shine, ‘Papal Diplomacy by Proxy? Catholic Internationalism at the League of Nations’ International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation, 1922–1939’, *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 69, no. 4 (2018): 785–805.

⁷² Bernhard Salzmann, *Europa als Thema katholischer Eliten: Das katholische Europa-Netzwerk der Schweiz von 1945 bis Mitte der 1950er Jahre* (Fribourg: Academic Press Fribourg, 2006), 78.

of the conference.⁷³ With regard to post-war Quebec, Nicole Neatby has described Pax Romana members as ‘traditionalists among student leaders’, stating that ‘international cooperation between Catholic university students’ was meant ‘to check pernicious communist influences.’⁷⁴ Anti-communism could produce alliances with authoritarian regimes: in June 1946, Pax Romana held its first post-war congress in Francoist Spain. Giuliana Chamedes has suggested that on the one hand the event was ‘a lavish display of old-style papal internationalism’, taking place in Salamanca as a renowned seat of Catholic learning. On the other hand, the conference was also a forum ‘to celebrate Spain as a bastion of anticommunist resistance.’⁷⁵ Shortly afterwards, Joaquín Ruiz Giménez – the Spanish organizer of the conference who had served as Pax Romana president since 1940 – travelled to Britain and North America, ‘to speak with Catholic leaders and lobby on behalf of the regime.’⁷⁶

This is not to say that Catholic student internationalism was exclusively anti-communist, conservative or right-wing. In 1946, the International Young Catholic Students (*Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique Internationale*, JECI) emerged as another international actor alongside Pax Romana.⁷⁷ This organization had its roots in social Catholicism which, while seeking to counter communist agitation, engaged with questions of social justice.⁷⁸ Some of its members embraced leftist ideas. Gérard de Bernis – president of the National Union of French Students in 1950 – had originally been a member of *Jeunesse Étudiante Catholique* and promoted ongoing contacts with the IUS upon his election in 1950.⁷⁹ He subsequently joined the French Communist Party and became a well-known Marxist economist. Moreover, by the early 1960s, ‘JECI was in tune with progressive currents in the Catholic church’, as Gerd-Rainer Horn has noted.⁸⁰ Such examples not only demonstrate the broad political spectrum covered by Catholic organizations but signify a wider feature of internationalism: the presence of a plurality of worldviews.

Cold War internationals

Sandrine Kott has argued that ‘the Cold War solidified the position and operation of the two rival universalisms and their internationalism’ while also facilitating ‘the circulation of knowledge.’⁸¹ The history of student internationalism illustrates both aspects. Cold War rivalry certainly manifested itself within the world of student

⁷³ Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 35.

⁷⁴ Nicole Neatby, ‘Student Leaders at the University of Montreal from 1950 to 1958: Beyond the “Carabin Persona”’, *Journal of Canadian Studies* 29, no. 3 (1994): 26–44.

⁷⁵ Chamades, *A Twentieth-Century Crusade*, 267–8.

⁷⁶ Stanley Payne, *The Franco Regime, 1936–1975* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 356.

⁷⁷ Louis Vos, ‘Student Movements and Political Activism’, in *Universities since 1945*, ed. Rüegg, 278–88.

⁷⁸ The related case of the *Jeunesse Ouvrière Catholique* is discussed in Whitney, *Mobilizing Youth*.

⁷⁹ Fischer, ‘L’Unef et l’Union internationale des étudiants’, 89.

⁸⁰ Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of Vatican II: Western European Progressive Catholicism in the Long Sixties* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 209.

⁸¹ Sandrine Kott, ‘Cold War Internationalism’, in *Internationalisms*, eds. Sluga and Clavin, 351.

organizations. In 1950, student leaders from non-communist countries launched the International Student Conference (ISC) to counter the Soviet domination of the IUS. To Philip Altbach, the history of these two bodies 'is, in microcosm, a history of the Cold War', while Louis Vos has described them as 'pawns on the chessboard' of a global ideological conflict.⁸²

The ISC's credibility suffered a terminal blow in 1967 when *Ramparts*, a counter-cultural magazine, revealed that the organization and its American member, the National Student Association, had largely depended on covert CIA funding.⁸³ Karen Paget has stressed the impact of American involvement from the very start of the organization.⁸⁴ Joël Kotek has argued that American funds were provided in secret partly because the climate of McCarthyism made it impossible to offer direct support to organizations that 'generally defended liberal and progressive causes'.⁸⁵ At the same time, he notes that the ISC, too, had an interest in obscuring the true source of its resources: as its leaders criticized the Soviet Union's role within the IUS, the organization's 'credibility would have been totally destroyed if it had admitted receiving 90 per cent of its funds from the State Department, let alone from the CIA'.⁸⁶ This interpretation echoes the arguments of some of the protagonists. For instance, Norman Uphoff, an elected official of the National Student Association, presented the situation in the following terms:

Apart from the fact that open funding would have defeated its purpose – no student international would have operated with acknowledged funding from official sources in East or West – it was probably not possible. If the U.S. Congress balked at the political 'waywardness' of foreign governments receiving American aid, how much more difficult would it have been to appropriate money for an organization that would condemn U.S. allies such as Paraguay, Portugal, Spain and South Korea, and even the U.S. itself, as when it invaded the Dominican Republic.⁸⁷

Such claims require further probing. In its early years, the ISC remained politically cautious, casting itself as less politicized than its Cold War rival. In other words, CIA funding was provided in secret even at a time when the organization was reluctant to make political pronouncements. That said, from the mid-1950s, the ISC indeed adopted a more overtly political stance which, as Uphoff's remarks indicate, extended

⁸² Phillip Altbach, 'Introduction', in *The Student Internationals*, ed. idem and Norman Uphoff (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1973), 4

⁸³ 'Ramparts Says C.I.A. Received Student Report' and 'Foundations Linked to C.I.A. Are Found to Subsidize 4 Other Youth Organizations', *New York Times*, 16 February 1967.

⁸⁴ Karen Paget, 'From Stockholm to Leiden: The CIA's Role in the Formation of the International Student Conference', in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe, 1945–1960*, ed. Hans Krabbendam and Giles Scott-Smith (Abingdon: Frank Cass, 2003), 134–67. See also Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 65–49 on CIA involvement in student internationalism in the run-up to the ISC's creation.

⁸⁵ Joël Kotek, 'Youth Organizations as a Battlefield in the Cold War', in *The Cultural Cold War in Western Europe*, ed. Krabbendam and Scott-Smith, 182.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁸⁷ Norman Uphoff, 'The Viability of Student Internationals: Reflections on Their Structure, Financing and Relevance', in *The Student Internationals*, ed. Altbach and Uphoff, 142. On Uphoff, see Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 293–4.

to a critique of particular issues in the West. Karen Paget, whose work generally emphasizes the CIA's involvement in the ISC, suggests that by the 1960s American control over the organization seemed to be less certain and that the organization's annual gatherings 'were becoming a headache' for American officials.⁸⁸ The ISC's willingness to adopt politically inconvenient positions can be interpreted in two different ways. One is that in a Cold War context, the ISC sought to appeal to progressive youths. Some of the literature on the cultural Cold War suggests that the support for critical voices could reinforce notions of pluralism and thus offer a contrast to the Soviet bloc and its suppression of freedom of expression.⁸⁹ An alternative interpretation of the ISC's engagement with politics would go beyond the prism of Cold War politics and highlight students' agency.⁹⁰

In 1957, an article in the ISC's magazine elaborated on the shift in the organization's position. Its author acknowledged that its initial stance was based on the premise 'that a national Union of Students is, by definition, an organisation of students of varying political orientation and ideology' and that 'its officers are not chosen to represent a political point of view, but to carry out practical services of benefit to all students who make up the organisation.'⁹¹ Moreover, members of the ISC had argued that '[i]f the United Nations could not resolve the great issues of world politics by discussion and debate . . . the students could hardly be expected to do so'. The author suggested that a rethink had been triggered by events in Hungary, South Africa and Algeria. Indeed, students were protagonists in the Hungarian Uprising, the struggle against apartheid and the quest for Algerian independence. In other words, external events had made it clear 'that no sharp distinction could be drawn between student problems and political questions which concerned the student community'.⁹²

By this point, the ISC had resolved its approach to political questions by establishing a Research and Information Commission, which was conceived as an 'independent fact-finding commission' that would document instances in which students faced political repression.⁹³ Alongside tackling human rights violations in the Eastern bloc, its reports addressed injustices in countries allied to the West, for instance the US-backed dictatorships of Venezuela, Paraguay and Cuba. Likewise, the ISC's magazine also dedicated space to human rights issues, for instance highlighting the repressive policies of the Batista regime in Cuba and the situation of African Americans in the segregated South.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Ibid., 256 and 197.

⁸⁹ See, for example, Frances Conor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta, 1999). However, it has been noted that left-wing activists could also use such funding for their own purposes: Hugh Wilford, *The CIA, the British Left and the Cold War: Calling the Tune?* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

⁹⁰ In this context, it is worth bearing in mind the argument that 'we must not rely solely on the projections of adult policy makers': Mischa Honeck and Gabriel Rosenberg, 'Transnational Generations: Organizing Youth in the Cold War', *Diplomatic History* 38, no. 2 (2014): 237

⁹¹ Paul E. Sigmund, 'Research and Information Commission', *The Student* 1, no. 7 (June 1957): 14.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ *RIC Yearbook 1955-1956: Reports on Higher Education in South Africa, Venezuela, Paraguay and East Germany* (Leiden: ISC, 1956), 2.

⁹⁴ 'Student Tragedy in Cuba', *The Student* 2, no. 1 (August 1957): 14; 'Racial Integration in United States Education', *The Student* 2, no. 4 (January 1958): 12-14.

This is not to say that there was a clear consensus on such matters. At a time when the Research and Information Commission was already up and running, the ISC's magazine still debated the question, 'Should National Unions Be "Political"?'⁹⁵ The impossibility to ignore the political dimensions of students' experiences was brought to the fore two pages later in the same magazine issue, as the publication featured a series of photos from student protests.⁹⁶

While not denying the role of Cold War dynamics, the nuances in the ISC's position illustrate why we must not treat student internationalism of the 1940s and 1950s in purely dichotomous terms. In themselves, national unions of students in Western Europe had no homogenous stance vis-à-vis Cold War tensions, as communists and radical socialists were involved in such bodies. For this reason, national engagement with the IUS was by no means consistent. In the UK, the National Union of Students had been a driving force behind creating the ISC as a rival to the IUS. At the same time, the presence of a significant cohort of communist student activists meant that disaffiliation from the IUS proved contentious. As a compromise, the National Union of Students withdrew its full membership and instead became an 'autonomous associate member' in 1950.⁹⁷ In 1961, the organization reiterated its desire 'to consolidate and extend friendly student relations between Britain and the U.S.S.R.'⁹⁸ A similar degree of ambivalence applies to the French case. The National Union of French Students withdrew from the IUS in 1948, but renewed its relations on 'technical' questions in 1953.⁹⁹ Didier Fischer has suggested that there were parallels between Charles De Gaulle's foreign policy and French involvement in international student politics, namely the ambition to carve a distinct route amid the rivalry of great power blocs.¹⁰⁰ From a different angle, Jodi Burkett has observed a desire among British student leaders to act as mediators between activists from the two power blocs.¹⁰¹

The globalization of student internationalism

Internationalism could serve power-political agendas, and, as some of the examples in this chapter have illustrated, they could be appropriated by actors with exclusionary agendas. Internationalist practice – both within student organizations and elsewhere – was often construed within existing imperial hierarchies.¹⁰² Johanna Selles has noted

⁹⁵ 'Should National Unions Be "Political"? A "Student" Forum on Vital Student Questions', *The Student* 2, no. 2 (October 1957): 8–9.

⁹⁶ 'Political Protests: Student Demonstrations in Different Countries', *The Student* 2, no. 7 (October 1957): 11–12.

⁹⁷ Kotek, *Students and the Cold War*, 177–81.

⁹⁸ Jodi Burkett, 'The National Union of Students and Transnational Solidarity, 1958–1968', *European Review of History* 21, no. 4 (2014): 546.

⁹⁹ Fischer, 'L'Unef et l'Union internationale des étudiants', 88 and 92.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 93.

¹⁰¹ Burkett, 'The National Union of Students and Transnational Solidarity', 546.

¹⁰² See, for example, Miguel Bandeira Jerónimo and José Pedro Monteiro, 'Pasts to Be Unveiled: The Interconnections between the International and the Imperial', in *Internationalism, Imperialism and the Formation of the Contemporary World*, ed. idem (Cham: Palgrave, 2018), 1–29. See also

that '[t]he goals of the WSCF were packaged in North American and British methods of organization and leadership'.¹⁰³ As Georgina Brewis has suggested, 'ideas of empire as a place for charitable aid and voluntary service fed into the British self-image as benevolent rulers'.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, universities themselves had manifold connections to the politics and practice of empire. However, student internationalism could also be deployed to challenge exclusion or external domination.

The WSCF offers some examples in this respect. Johanna Selles has argued that it 'gradually developed an appreciation of the diversity of its federated member groups and became less focused on conversion to Western Christianity'.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, in 1931, Suzanne de Dietrich suggested that '[t]he "prestige" of the West is gone for ever; tribute may be paid to Western science but no longer to Western civilization'.¹⁰⁶ Evidently, WSCF's work had been driven by missionary impulses and as such was entwined with imperial expansion. Yet the relationship between missionary activity and empire was never clear-cut, as the agendas of religious groups and secular authorities sometimes clashed with one another.¹⁰⁷ Some WSCF leaders argued that anti-colonial voices had to be taken seriously because any attempt to silence them would undermine both the international and the spiritual ambitions of their organization. By the 1930s, the WSCF discussed anti-colonial campaigns in its publications and at its conferences, for instance acknowledging Indonesia's 'thirst for national independence' in the context of the WSCF's Eastern Conference in Java (1933).¹⁰⁸

The WSCF's engagement with anti-colonial matters needs to be seen in the context of the rise of anti-colonial student activism during the 1920s and 1930s. Recent work has shown how imperial metropolises such as Paris, London and Amsterdam became centres for anti-colonial movements in which university students from within the French, British and Dutch empires played a major role.¹⁰⁹ While such activism often unfolded at local or national levels, it interacted with internationalist ideas. For instance, African students in interwar Britain were involved in Pan-Africanism, which formed an international movement in its own right.¹¹⁰ In this context, Hakim Adi has

Bandeira Jerónimo's chapter 'A League of Empires: Imperial Political Imagination and Interwar Internationalisms' in *ibid.*, 87–126.

¹⁰³ Selles, *The World's Student Christian Federation*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Brewis, *A Century of Student Volunteering*, 35.

¹⁰⁵ Selles, *The World Student Christian Federation*, 110.

¹⁰⁶ Dietrich, 'A Tentative History of the Federation Message', 113.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Porter, *Religion versus Empire: British Protestant Missionaries and Overseas Expansion, 1700–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004); Michael G. Thompson, *For God and Globe: Christian Internationalism in the United States between the Great War and the Cold War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2015), 27–46.

¹⁰⁸ W. A. Visser't Hooft, 'National "Awakening" and the Thirst for National Independence', reprinted in *Memoirs and Diaries: The World Student Christian Federation (1895–1990)*, ed. Elisabeth Adler (Geneva: WSCF, 1994)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Goebel, *Anti-Imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Marc Matera, *Black London: The Imperial Metropolis and Decolonization in the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014); Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia: Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917–1931* (Copenhagen: NIAS, 2019).

¹¹⁰ Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain: 1900–1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998). For a critique of the term 'black internationalism', see Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism: A History* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 4–5.

also highlighted the links between Pan-African activists and the world of communist internationalism.¹¹¹

By the 1930s, communist internationalism, student activism and anti-imperialism intersected in several ways. The communist-backed RME repeatedly denounced colonial rule and imperial domination. As part of the RME mission to China in 1938, the organization's secretary James Klugmann visited several Indian cities, holding meetings with student leaders but also with Jawaharlal Nehru.¹¹² Furthermore, the RME's 1939 congress in Paris featured presentations of Indian and Vietnamese speakers who discussed independence movements and proclaimed their debt to the French Revolution. Meanwhile, a student association from Burma reported on the 'Burmese National Movement and the Struggle for Democracy'.¹¹³

Such ties went beyond sporadic congresses as communist engagement with anti-imperial and anti-colonial student activism continued in the post-war years. In challenging Western countries, the IUS provided a forum for anti-colonial voices. By 1948, the IUS and another communist-dominated body, the World Federation of Democratic Youth, supported an event that tackled national liberation movements in South-East Asia. As Philip Altbach noted, '[t]he conference took a strong anti-colonialist line and on several occasions criticized the IUS for its reliance on the moderate policies of its non-Communist Western members'.¹¹⁴ Two years later, the IUS congress in Prague included a large contingent of non-Western delegates, who were celebrated for their participation.¹¹⁵

In some ways, Cold War dynamics effected a broadening of internationalist action: in its competition with the IUS, the newly founded ISC targeted students from decolonizing nations or recently independent states. In 1956, Western members of the ISC travelled to the Asian–African Students Conference in Bandung – a meeting that, in Karen Paget's words, 'decisively shifted the Cold War student battleground'.¹¹⁶ The event evidently followed on from the previous year's Asian–African Conference, whose pivotal role in Third World politics is widely acknowledged; one newspaper account described the student event as the 'junior edition of the celebrated conference of last year'.¹¹⁷ Paget suggests that the ISC involvement did not necessarily denote sympathy for anti-colonial struggles but was owed to fears that student movements

¹¹¹ Hakim Adi, *Pan-Africanism and Communism: The Communist International, Africa and the Diaspora, 1919–1939* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2013).

¹¹² Geoff Andrews, *The Shadow Man: At the Heart of the Cambridge Spy Circle* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2015), 92.

¹¹³ International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, Rassemblement Mondial des Étudiants Collection, folder 15: documents 'The Influence of the French Revolution on the National Movement of Indonesia: Report by the Perhimpunan Indonesia', 'The French Revolution and the Indian National Movement: A Report by N. Chakravarty and C. Devanesan, Federation of Indian Students' Societies in Europe' and 'The Burmese National Movement and the Development of Democracy in Burma. Resume of the Report by the All-Burma Student Union' (all 1939).

¹¹⁴ Altbach, 'Introduction', 27.

¹¹⁵ See, for example, *Report from Prague*, 6.

¹¹⁶ Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 156.

¹¹⁷ 'Bandung Juniors', *Manchester Guardian*, 7 June 1956. On the significance of the Asian–African Conference, see Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2008); Christopher J. Lee, ed., *Making a World after Empire: The Bandung Moment and Its Political Afterlives* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2010); Jürgen Dinkel, *The Non-*

in Asia and Africa might take a communist turn. As she argues, American members of the National Student Associations were partly seeking to 'sabotage its aims'.¹¹⁸ Yet in itself, the need for ISC members to engage with this initiative indicates how the joint factors of Cold War and decolonization reshaped student internationalism.

Such shifting perspectives manifested themselves in the ISC's publications. For example, one of the Indian delegates stayed in Indonesia beyond the Bandung conference and subsequently reported on student life in Indonesia, praising the 'unique . . . role of the students of Indonesia in their people's struggle for independence'.¹¹⁹ This is but one example of the commitment to represent a more diverse constituency. The ISC's magazine covered issues such as 'Colonialism and the University in Africa' as well as discussing the first Pan-African students' conference.¹²⁰ In the magazine's debate forum on national student unions and politics, Dafalla El Hag Yousif, former president of the Sudan University Students' Union, argued that politics could not be ignored by students who experienced colonialism's 'adverse effects on culture, politics and economy'.¹²¹ A related point about politics as a response to external factors was advanced by Willie Abraham, a Ghanaian contributor. Abraham argued that in the late 1940s, when leaders of Ghana's independence movement were imprisoned, students had been active campaigners, whereas '[a]fter that the battle against political imperialism was more or less won', students had become more apathetic.¹²²

As previously mentioned, student leaders cited the events in Algeria as a key factor for the politicization of the ISC. The Algerian question posed particular challenges for the National Union of French Students, whose stance on colonial matters underwent significant changes in the course of the 1950s. In 1953, its delegates had left the ISC conference at Istanbul in protest because a Senegalese organization had been admitted at a time when the French colonies in West Africa had not yet acquired independent statehood. Back then, the French leaders criticized the ISC for 'having engaged a bit too much on the political terrain and notably on that of anti-colonialism, while trying to impose its views upon the national unions'.¹²³ By the end of the 1950s, its position had changed. Alain Mounchablou has suggested that the Algerian War turned the colonial question into 'a major theme and element of radicalization' for French student leaders.¹²⁴ In 1958, the ascent of a more radical faction within the ranks of the National Union of French Students meant that the body took a prominent role in

Aligned Movement: Genesis, Organization and Politics (1927–1992), trans. Alex Skinner (Leiden: Brill, 2019), 42–83.

¹¹⁸ Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 144 and 153–4.

¹¹⁹ Chandra Bhal Tripathi, 'The Student Movement in Indonesia', *The Student* 1, no. 6 (October 1957): 8.

¹²⁰ Isaac Omolo and Crawford Young, 'Colonialism and the University in Africa', *The Student* 2, no. 10 (1958): 1–5; Lovemore Mutambanengwe, 'The First Pan-African Students Conference', *The Student* 2, no. 10 (1958): 6–7.

¹²¹ 'Should National Unions Be "Political"?', 8

¹²² W. E. Abrahamson [Willie Abraham], 'Ghana Students and Politics', *The Student* 1, no. 6 (March 1957): 12.

¹²³ Fischer, 'L'Unef et l'Union internationale des étudiants', 90.

¹²⁴ Alain Monchablou, 'L'apogée d'un mouvement syndical (1944–1962)', in *Cent ans de mouvements d'étudiants*, ed. Legois et al., 79.

French campaigns against the ongoing war in Algeria.¹²⁵ By 1960, the National Union of French Students maintained direct relations with Algerian students and organized a major demonstration against the war's continuation.¹²⁶

The evolution of Franco–Algerian student ties can be seen within a wider international context. In 1955, Algerian students had founded the *Union Générale des Étudiants Musulmans Algériens* (UGEMA) and soon engaged with international networks, including the student conference at Bandung. In its quest for support from Africa, Asia and the Middle East, the ISC endorsed its actions – a stance that already became evident at an ISC council meeting in Ceylon in 1956.¹²⁷ Moreover, in 1958, the ISC held a special session in London on student problems in Algeria. In this context, it defined UGEMA as ‘a National Union of Students with a wide range of syndicalist activity on behalf of its members.’¹²⁸ The portrayal of UGEMA as a student, rather than political, organization was vital, as it enabled the ISC to treat the suppression of UGEMA as ‘student matter’ and issue pronouncements that denounced the actions of the French authorities. The case shows how a cause such as Algerian independence – often seen within the context of the ‘long Sixties’ – can also be integrated into an earlier history of European student internationalism and its engagement with politics.¹²⁹

Conclusion

Student activism is often viewed through the lens of political and social protest. At the international level, such forms did indeed exist well before the 1960s, as illustrated by the role of communist students and the involvement of university students in anti-colonial campaigns. This chapter has noted, however, that another prominent strand of student internationalism before 1960 cast itself as ‘apolitical’, emphasizing cooperation, aid and expertise. Such ventures were aimed at supporting students through practical efforts and by working with other actors within the international order, including the League of Nations and the UN. The boundaries between protest and ‘apolitical’ work were blurrier than student leaders were willing to admit: student organizations engaged with political questions at several levels, even when they did not acknowledge it. This point is worth noting as it also allows us to connect the work of the more limited ‘student internationals’ of the earlier period to the more radical forms of student activism of the 1960s.

As this chapter has highlighted, the First World War was not necessarily a rupture. Instead, it changed the contexts in which older organizations – notably the WSCF

¹²⁵ Louis Vos has even described it as ‘the main centre for the entire resistance movement against the war in Algeria’: Vos, ‘Student Movements and Political Activism’, 291.

¹²⁶ Monchablon, ‘L’apogée d’un mouvement syndical’, 80

¹²⁷ Paget, *Patriotic Betrayal*, 162–3.

¹²⁸ Research and Information Commission of the ISC, *Report on Higher Education and Culture in Algeria* (Leiden: RIC, 1959), 5.

¹²⁹ For a consideration of transnational activism on Algeria and other ‘Third World’ issues in a 1960s context, see Robert Gildea, James Mark and Niek Pas, ‘European Radicals and the “Third World”’, *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 4 (2011): 449–71.

– operated, and it triggered the creation of new bodies. Moreover, the presence of substantial communist and anti-colonial strands within the world of student internationalism clearly preceded the era of Cold War and decolonization. This observation connects with a wider point – namely that research on internationalism is well suited to questioning existing periodizations.

Moreover, student internationalism highlights the fluidity of internationalism, as young people moved in and out of positions and stances. While some individuals stayed within organizations well beyond their student days – serving as student officials – the general feature of student organizations was that, because of their connection to a particular stage in the educational cycle, they were subject to frequent renewal. In this respect, generational shifts were even more prominent than within other international organizations. It is therefore all the more striking that in terms of concerns and rhetoric, a range of common threads can be observed. The transient nature of university life also offers intriguing paths for further research. In particular, it raises the question whether individuals who had acquired a taste of internationalism continued or terminated their internationalist commitments after they had graduated from university – and from the student organizations they had been involved in.