

“Little Soldiers” for Socialism: Childhood and Socialist Politics in the British Socialist Sunday School Movement*

JESSICA GERRARD

*Melbourne Graduate School of Education, University of Melbourne,
234 Queensberry Street, Parkville, 3010 VIC, Australia*

E-mail: Jessica.Gerrard@unimelb.edu.au

ABSTRACT: This paper examines the ways in which turn-of-the-century British socialists enacted socialism for children through the British Socialist Sunday School movement. It focuses in particular on the movement’s emergence in the 1890s and the first three decades of operation. Situated amidst a growing international field of comparable socialist children’s initiatives, socialist Sunday schools attempted to connect their local activity of children’s education to the broader politics of international socialism. In this discussion I explore the attempt to make this connection, including the endeavour to transcend party differences in the creation of a non-partisan international children’s socialist movement, the cooption of traditional Sunday school rituals, and the resolve to make socialist childhood cultures was the responsibility of both men and women. Defending their existence against criticism from conservative campaigners, the state, and sections of the left, socialist Sunday schools mobilized a complex and contested culture of socialist childhood.

INTRODUCTION

The British Socialist Sunday School movement (SSS) first appeared within the sanguine temper of turn-of-the-century socialist politics. Offering a particularly British interpretation of a growing international interest in children’s socialism, the SSS movement attempted a non-partisan approach, bringing together socialists and radicals of various political

* This paper draws on research that would not have been possible without the support of the Overseas Research Scholarship and Cambridge Commonwealth Trusts, Poynton Cambridge Australia Scholarship. I would like to thank Rosa Campbell for her assistance with some of the archival work, and Dr Phil Gardner, Prof. Diane Reay, and the anonymous reviewers for this journal for their insightful comments on earlier versions of this paper. I am also grateful to the many archivists for their helpful assistance, particularly those at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre where the majority of SSS archives are held.

persuasions. Starting in 1892 with Social Democratic Federation (SDF) member Mary Gray's first school in the Battersea Docks,¹ SSS's growth across Britain made the schools a distinct feature of local socialist community life in the early years of the twentieth century. SSSs offered educational, cultural, and political experiences to children and young people based on broad principles of socialism. Existing until the 1970s, the movement most likely constitutes the longest running independent working-class community-based children's education initiative.

This was not, however, a movement marked by great numbers. As Fred Reid noted in 1966 in what remains the most comprehensive account of SSSs, the schools' heyday in the mid-1920s was short lived.² And whilst both Reid's suggested total of 153 schools and the official record of 140 schools with 6,210 children and 1,932 adult attendees most likely undercounted an additional layer of unrecorded SSSs, even the schools' peak was modest at best.³ Initially bolstered by growing national and international interest in the enactment of socialism for children and young people into the late 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the movement suffered from wider social and political events, including the Great Depression and World War II, and changing dynamics in the socialist movement. Certainly, SSSs suffered from the increasing turn towards parliamentary politics, the growth in party-based youth sections – particularly those of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), and the fall-out from the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and Labour Party (LP) split.⁴ By the mid and latter half of the twentieth century, the SSS movement was sustained by the devoted work of a handful of organizers.

Despite their comparatively diminutive extent, SSSs represent an important site of socialist politics. Across national contexts, children and childhood were fundamental to the wider project of socialism. As Lisa Kirschenbaum states in her history of children in Soviet Russia, children “embodied both pressing practical problems and revolutionary dreams”.⁵

1. Mary Gray Papers, Socialist Party of Great Britain Archives [hereafter SPGB], SPGB/Mary Gray; “Portrait Gallery: Mary Gray”, *Young Socialist: A Magazine of Love and Justice* [hereafter YS], (April 1903), pp. 1–2.

2. Fred Reid, “Socialist Sunday Schools in Britain, 1892–1939”, *International Review of Social History*, 11 (1966), pp. 18–47.

3. National Council for British Socialist Sunday Schools [hereafter NCBSSS] 1930 Log Book, Labour History Archive and Study Centre, People's History Museum, Manchester [hereafter LHASC], LHASC/SSS/16 (the SSS archives held at the LHASC are not fully catalogued; numbers quoted throughout for the SSS collection refer to box numbers); Reid, “Socialist Sunday Schools”.

4. SSS organizer Jack Allam points to the ILP and LP split as having particularly profound ramifications; Jack Allam, “The SSS and its future”, LHASC/SSS/7.

5. Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades: Revolutionizing Childhood in Soviet Russia, 1917–1932* (New York [etc.], 2001), p. 2.

For the British SSSs, Reid's initial documentation of the movement, along with the work of such historians as Brian Simon,⁶ highlights the importance of children's and educational narratives in wider social and political histories.⁷ Explicitly countering the historical positioning of SSSs as moral and ethical addendums to the socialist movement "proper", Reid chronicles the organizational and political autonomy of the schools, and the various internal debates that featured in their history.

Surprisingly, forty-five years after Reid's account, SSSs remain in large part unrecorded in social, cultural, and even socialist and educational histories of Britain. In contrast, a collection of scholarship on their US counterparts has highlighted the schools' place in community networks of socialist political culture in America.⁸ Most recently, British SSSs have appeared as part of wider histories of women's involvement in socialist politics. For example, in Rafeek's doctoral oral history study of CPGB women, and in Hilda Kean's, Krista Cowman's, and Karen Hunt's histories of turn-of-the-century women's activism, there are revelatory references to the role of SSSs in constructing women's and girls' political identity.⁹ In these works, exploration of the ways in which socialist women used and extended the traditional domain of childhood and children's education as a means to political activism considerably deepens understanding of the political and social context of SSSs.

This paper extends upon these analyses by offering a dedicated examination of the socialist cultures of childhood developed by the SSS movement. Building upon Reid's examination of the tensions between the movement's ethical aims and religious links, I explore the interconnections between SSSs and the wider national and international socialist movements. I pick up on a number of key aspects of the SSS movement left unexplored by Reid's significant work. Firstly, I give historical context to the schools by outlining their emergence within turn-of-the-century

6. Brian Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement 1870–1920* (London, 1965).

7. Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools".

8. Kenneth Teitelbaum, *Schooling for "Good Rebels": Socialist Education for Children in the United States, 1900–1920* (Philadelphia, PA, 1993); Florence Tager, "A Radical Culture for Children of the Working Class: *The Young Socialist's Magazine, 1908–1920*", *Curriculum Inquiry*, 22 (1992), pp. 271–290, 271; W. Pritchett, *Brownsville, Brooklyn: Blacks, Jews, and the Changing Face of the Ghetto* (Chicago, IL, 2002); Kenneth Teitelbaum and William J. Reese, "American Socialist Pedagogy and Experimentation in the Progressive Era: The Socialist Sunday School", *History of Education Quarterly*, 23 (1983), pp. 429–454.

9. Neil C. Rafeek, "Against All the Odds: Women in the Communist Party in Scotland 1920–21: An Oral History", (unpublished Ph.D., University of Strathclyde, 1998); Hilda Kean, *Challenging the State? The Socialist and Feminist Educational Experience 1900–1930* (London, 1990); Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question 1884–1911* (Cambridge, 1996); Krista Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother: Women in Merseyside's Political Organisations, 1890–1920* (Liverpool, 2004); see also Kevin Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain, 1883–1902* (London, 2001).

British socialist politics. In particular, I examine the political antecedents of the SSS movement, including the increasing public and political interest in children and childhood. Secondly, I consider the SSSs' attempted creation of an international and national "children's socialist movement". In this discussion I examine their contentious relationship to the wider socialist movement in Britain and abroad, the gender politics that underlay their concern with children and childhood, and the response to the schools by the state. I also explore the contradictions and challenges that faced the SSS movement in its attempt to connect its local practice with the creation of a broad international and national children's movement, whilst not aligned specifically with women's socialist politics or with any particular socialist party or creed. Thirdly, I move to an analysis of the schools' culture and educative function. This final section considers the cultural and educational translation of socialism for children and young people in SSSs, including the schools' development of a socialist curriculum and pedagogy.

THE MAKING OF A "SOCIALIST CHILDREN'S MOVEMENT"

Nestled within the wider socialist political culture, SSSs were part of a broad radical milieu that understood the transformation of the relations of production as intimately connected to the transformation of civil life. Concerned to instil a commitment to socialism that could be sustained into the next generation, many socialists were dedicated to creating locales of socialist activity and culture. Unsurprisingly then, just as the radicals of the previous generation had placed their hope in children as holding the potential for an alternative future, turn-of-the-century socialists turned their attention to children and childhood.¹⁰

Indeed, children were already a part of public political life. They were heavily incorporated into popular church culture following widespread Sunday school attendance across the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹¹ In addition, by the end of the nineteenth century, philanthropists, governments, and social reformers all had a growing interest in children and childhood. Debates over, and legislation surrounding, child labour, universal education, child welfare, and family morality interpolated children and childhood – and in particular working-class childhood – into

10. Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 39; Mantou, *Socialism and Education in Britain*; H. Silver, *The Concept of Popular Education* (London, 1965).

11. Although there is debate over the level of working-class control of Sunday schools, they were undoubtedly a significant and widespread part of working-class life. See T.W. Laqueur, *Religion and Respectability: Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture 1780–1850* (New Haven, CT [etc.], 1976); Malcolm Dick, "The Myth of the Working-Class Sunday School", *History of Education*, 9 (1980), pp. 27–41.



Figure 1. Crystal Palace SSS, 1909, outside the *Clarion* office. *People's History Museum. Used with permission.*

the political sphere.¹² As the century drew to a close, “childhood” was both an increasingly publicly governed stage of life, and a powerful ideological trope on which to hang a variety of political intents.¹³

In articulating their position on childhood, socialists rallied against both competitive conservative capitalist and paternalist liberal approaches. Perhaps most compelling for socialists was the case for a childhood free of work. Writing about SSS enthusiast Robert Weare of Liverpool, W.W. Young describes the socialist position as one fiercely committed to an experience of childhood out of the workplace:

The insistent cry of the children of the slums was a fit subject for politics, but just as the Liberal capitalists of the early part of the nineteenth century had opposed the release of the little factory slaves, so are the powerful Liberals of to-day opposed to freeing the little slaves of the degrading results of our sordid competitive system.¹⁴

12. E. Hopkins, *Childhood Transformed: Working-Class Children in Nineteenth-Century England* (Manchester, 1994); Anna Davin, *Growing Up Poor: Home, School and Street in London 1870–1914* (London, 1966), p. 4; H. Hendrick, *Children, Childhood and English Society, 1880–1990* (Cambridge, 1997).

13. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*; Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain*.

14. W.W. Young, *Robert Weare of Bristol, Liverpool & Wallasey 1858–1920: An Appreciation, and Four of His Essays* (Manchester, 1921), p. 42.

Influenced by the morality of Christian socialism and what Stephen Yeo has described as “the religion of socialism”,¹⁵ for many British socialists working-class children were a bodily site in which to exercise their commitment to socialism. As men and women contemplated and acted on their diverse visions of social change, childhood was, Carolyn Steedman writes, “an extension of self” that tied the past, the present, and possible futures.¹⁶ Children also provided a political outlet for those men and women committed to socialism, but who were challenged by a perceived deficit in working-class culture. As put by the *Clarion* editor Robert Blatchford in 1893, “to be candid I don’t so much care about the stupid, selfish, ignorant British workman. But for the sake of the little children [...] I keep the field.”¹⁷ Additionally, childhood politics afforded space for women to develop and engage their own political convictions. As has been examined elsewhere, the gendered character of children’s activism both supported women’s role as socialist mothers, and provided opportunities for women to assert their political prowess and aptitude in more public campaigns.¹⁸

It was therefore within this existing concern with children and childhood that the SSS movement emerged: indeed, SSSs were not the only socialist children’s venture. Both the secularist and ethical movements, involving such prominent radicals as Annie Besant and F.J. Gould, opened their own schools and began publishing alternative literature for children.¹⁹ It is worth noting in particular the influence of F.J. Gould on the growing interest in children’s socialist cultures, including his active development of international networks through the Moral Instruction League.²⁰ Gould’s socialist-leaning secular moral fables were eventually published

15. Stephen Yeo, “A New Life: The Religion of Socialism in Britain, 1883–1896”, *History Workshop Journal*, 4 (1977), pp. 5–56.

16. Carolyn Steedman, “La theorie qui n’en est pae uni, or, Why Clio Doesn’t Care”, *History and Theory*, 31:4 (1992), pp. 33–50.

17. Manton, *Socialism and Education in Britain*, p. 16.

18. See Hunt, *Equivoocal Feminists*; Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother*; Kean, *Challenging the State*; Jessica Gerrard, “Gender, Community and Education: Cultures of Resistance in Socialist Sunday Schools and Black Supplementary Schools”, *Gender and Education*, 23 (2011), pp. 711–727.

19. E. Royle, *Radicals, Secularists and Republicans: Popular Freethought in Britain, 1866–1915* (Manchester, 1980), pp. 320–328; see also G. Spiller, *The Ethical Movement in Great Britain: A Documentary History* (London, 1934), p. 14; K. Manton, “‘Filling Bellies and Brains’: The Educational and Political Thought of Frederick James Gould”, *History of Education*, 30 (2001), pp. 273–290; Robert Berard, “Frederick James Gould and the Transformation of Moral Education”, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 35 (1987), pp. 233–247; see also F.J. Gould, “Children’s Ethical Classes”, *International Journal of Ethics*, 11 (1901), pp. 214–226.

20. S. Wright, “‘There is Something Universal in Our Movement which Appears Not Only to One Country but to All’: International Communication and Moral Education, 1892–1914”, *History of Education*, 37 (2008), pp. 807–824.

with SSSs in mind, and were republished extensively in the SSSs' monthly magazine.²¹

At the same time, the migrant working-class Jewish communities of London continued their own tradition of independent education, including the London Jewish Free School and youth groups, many of which were imbued with anarchist, socialist, and free-thinking politics.²² Starting from 1894 in the pages of *Labour Leader*, Keir Hardie and then Archie McArthur in 1897 (having the pen names "Daddy Time" and "Uncle Archie" respectively), were busy recruiting child "Labour Crusaders" in the column "Chats With the Crusaders".²³ Meanwhile, Blatchford used *The Clarion* to advertise "Cinderella Clubs". Aiming to bring relief and an introduction to socialism to slum children through musical performance with tea and cakes, these clubs gathered a significant collection of committed socialists who organized weekly meetings on Sunday afternoons.²⁴ The Labour Church (LC), heavily involved in Cinderella Clubs, but eager to extend their own work to children's education, also created their own Sunday schools and published a "Cinderella Supplement" in their main organ, the *Labour Prophet*.²⁵

And yet, there was something about the idea of a SSS that resonated, and which resulted in SSSs constituting a movement (of sorts) in their own right. SSSs outlived both their predecessors and their contemporaries. In time they successfully incorporated many of those already involved in children's activism, and recruited a significant (though by no means extensive) additional layer of socialists to their cause.²⁶ The spread of the schools was assisted by their enthusiastic uptake by socialists across Britain, such as Caroline Martyn in the north and Alex Gossip in London. Central to this growth was Archie McArthur's effort to establish the

21. For example, *Children's Book of Moral Lessons; Pages for Young Socialists* (1913); *Brave Soldiers Victors of Peace* (1915); and *300 Stories to Tell* (1924).

22. M. Thomas, "No-One Telling Us What To Do': Anarchist Schools in Britain, 1890–1916", *Historical Research*, 77 (2004), pp. 405–436; J. Shotton, *No Master High or Low: Libertarian Education and Schooling 1890–1990* (Bristol, 1993). The Jewish Museum, London [hereafter JML] holds photographs of young people's camps and Sunday schools connected to the Jewish-led working-class organization, Workers' Circle, JML 1241.10; 33.12; 1241.11.

23. J. Gorman, *Images of Labour* (London, 1985), p. 67; Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools".

24. See M. Bevir, "The Labour Church Movement, 1891–1902", *Journal of British Studies*, 38 (1999), pp. 217–245; Simon, *Education and the Labour Movement*, p. 51. Importantly, while Cinderella Clubs may have primarily seen their task as providing ease from poverty (see Manton, *Socialism and Education*, p. 88), they rejected the idea that their work was simply band-aid charity, understanding it as a way to introduce children to socialist ideas; for example, Cinderella report in *The Clarion*, 19 January 1901.

25. C. Sumpter, "Joining the 'Crusade against the Giants': Keir Hardie's Fairy Tales and the Socialist Child Reader", *Literature and History*, 15:2 (2006), pp. 34–49; Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools".

26. Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools".

monthly national SSS magazine: *Young Socialist: A Magazine of Love and Justice* (YS). First published in 1901 as a simple typescript broadsheet, the YS quickly became a resource for cross-school communication and school activities, and included pictures, poems, stories, lessons in history and science, and campaign and school reports.²⁷

Reflecting the diverse character of SSSs, the movement's institutional structures retained high levels of localism. Throughout the early 1900s, SSSs created regional unions in order to coordinate across schools and share resources.²⁸ Following on from this, when the National Council for British Socialist Sunday Schools (NCBSSS) was established in 1909, the unions were retained within its organizational structure, and the NCBSSS remit was restricted to two primary purposes: assistance in opening SSSs, and the provision of teaching and learning resources.²⁹

INTERNATIONALISM, GENDER AND CHILDHOOD: MAINTAINING AND DEFENDING THE SSS MOVEMENT

In establishing an interconnected network of SSSs, organizers – and with this the NCBSSS – were explicit about the need for a widely inclusive movement. SSSs were strictly non-partisan and ambivalent towards members' religious and political affiliations (or lack thereof). The movement aimed to transcend party-political differences, and encouraged all socialists to join together for the sake of a united children's movement.

To be sure, the initial expansion of the SSS movement was linked to the ease in which association to the movement could be made. Schools were the political expression of diverse socialist affinities: independent socialists, the LC, SDF, Independent Labour Party (ILP), and later the British Socialist Party (BSP) all had SSS branches, and many branches brought together socialists from a range of political perspectives. For example, ex-SSS participant Mrs Scarlett recollected that together “Mr Pye of the Ethical Society and Mr J. Shepparth of the BSP were mainly responsible for the opening” of her local SSS.³⁰ Embracing this diversity, the SSS movement endeavoured to create a broad collective identity that could reflect a general commitment to children's socialism. In part, this venture arose out of a concern to counter to the ever popular militaristic and

27. For discussion of the significance of the US *Young Socialist* magazine, see Tager, “A Radical Culture for Children of the Working Class”. For the British socialist children's literature, see Anna Vaninskaya, “It Was a Silly System”: Writers and Schools 1870–1939”, *Modern Language Review*, 105 (2010), pp. 952–975.

28. For example, as early as 1906 a table of SSS attendances revealed a total of 1,939 children and 804 participating adults, and a number of regional unions, including London, Glasgow and District, Yorkshire, and Lancashire and Cheshire; YS (February 1906), p. 19.

29. NCBSSS Conference Minute Book, 1st Conference 1909 Constitution, LHASC/SSS/16.

30. Correspondence to NCBSSS Secretary, 7 September 1954, LHASC/SSS/7.

conservative scouts.³¹ Beyond this, the import of a movement reflected a dedication to engaging with international networks of socialism, and to the principles of internationalism more generally. As put by F.J. Gould and quoted in the *YS* editorial in April 1911, “Europe, Asia, Africa, America, Australia? Are not all the millions of workers one race, one bond, one proletariat, one kinship?”³²

As early as 1902 Archie McArthur heralded the importance of an international “socialist children’s movement”.³³ Here, McArthur published letters of exchange with French comrades, who relayed their own efforts in securing 900 subscribers for their “socialist review for children”. Following on from this, regular reports and letters in the *YS* under the heading “International Notes” indicate that organizers were in contact with SSSs across national contexts, from Zurich to California and Melbourne, Australia.³⁴ For instance, in July 1909, the “International Notes” includes a review of a US book, “Socialist Readings for Children”, and reports on socialist children’s initiatives in Denmark, the US, Hungary, Germany, and Austria.³⁵ Nevertheless, it appears that the British movement was either unaware or dismissive of international precedents, such as the New York German-socialist SSS established in the 1880s.³⁶

With the exception of SSSs in the US, however, there is limited scholarship surrounding these international namesakes, which receive just passing mentions in wider histories of socialist politics.³⁷ Of course, scholarly attention has turned to the many youth movements that featured in late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century socialist politics, from early youth organizations, to party-based national youth sections, and the Young Communist International (YCI). Recent examinations of

31. Norman Young, “Why Not a ‘Young Socialist Corps?’”, *YS* (May 1912), p. 91.

32. “Editorial”, *YS* (April 1911), p. 915.

33. “The Children’s International”, *YS* (April 1902), pp. 1–4.

34. For example, *YS* (March 1912) includes a letter from a SSS in Melbourne, Australia, p. 40; *YS* (February 1911) includes information about the Zurich SSS, and an article by Lizzie Glasier on Dr Robert Danneburg, the Hon. Secretary of the International Young People’s Organization and editor of the Socialist Youth of Austria’s magazine, *Jugendliche Arbeiter*, p. 875. *YS* (October 1902) includes correspondence from the United States regarding the establishment of SSSs in California, p. 2.

35. *YS* (July 1909), pp. 495–497.

36. Christiane Harzig, “The Role of German Women in the German-American Working-Class Movement in Late Nineteenth-Century New York”, *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 8:2 (1989), pp. 87–107.

37. See, for Australia, P.J. O’Farrell, “The History of the New South Wales Labour Movement 1880–1910: A Religious Interpretation”, *Journal of Religious History*, 2 (1962), pp. 133–151; for New Zealand, R. Openshaw, “The Highest Expression of Devotion: New Zealand Primary Schools and Patriotic Zeal During the Early 1920s”, *History of Education*, 9 (1980), pp. 333–344; and for Canada, Linda Kealey, “Canadian Socialism and the Woman Question, 1900–1914”, *Labour/Le Travail*, 13 (1984), pp. 77–100.

children's experiences in Soviet Russia has provided critical insight into the politics of childhood, as well as the gender dynamics of intergenerational relations in socialist politics.³⁸ These histories point to the importance of children, young people, and to youth-based politics in the development of turn-of-the-century socialism across national contexts.³⁹ This included, for example, similar initiatives to the SSSs, such as the *Kinderfreunde*, founded in 1908 in the Weimar Republic to assist parents in providing socialist educational and cultural experiences for their children,⁴⁰ and of course the schooling initiatives and educational reforms of Soviet Russia.⁴¹

For the SSS movement itself, the international character of a children's socialist movement was paramount. In the immediate months following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution, for instance, many in the SSS movement revelled in the possibilities for international socialism. In June 1917, Fleming, leader of the SSS youth section, the Young Socialist Citizen Corps, devoted his monthly *YS* column to the topic "Hurray for Russia". Echoing similar sentiment, the Yorkshire SSS Union voted unanimously to express its "whole-hearted admiration for the courage and devotion which have won a victory not only for Russia, but for the whole of mankind".⁴² And, as Reid chronicles, although the NCBSSS opposition to World War I caused internal division, it did bolster the underlying commitment to the politics of an international working class, with the schools asserting that their only flag was the red flag, and that their own war was the war against capitalism.⁴³

Nonetheless, while the movement may have been outward-looking, not everyone was sympathetic to the revolutionary and explicitly Marxist politics that were often reflected back. As early as 1901, McArthur's

38. For example, Kirschenbaum, *Small Comrades*; Katy Turton, "Children of the Revolution: Parents, Children, and the Revolutionary Struggle in Late Imperial Russia", *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth*, 5 (2012), pp. 52–86.

39. Thomas Ekman Jorgenson, "The Purest Flame of the Revolution: Working Class Youth and Left Wing Radicalism and Germany and Italy During the Great War", *Labor History*, 50 (2009), pp. 19–38; Julia Mickenberg, "The New Generation and the New Russia: Modern Childhood as a Collective Fantasy", *American Quarterly*, 62 (2010), pp. 103–134.

40. Anson Rabinbach, "Politics and Pedagogy: The Austrian Social Democratic Youth Movement 1931–32", *Journal of Contemporary History*, 13 (1978), pp. 337–356, 340; James Wickham, "Working-Class Movement and Working-Class Life: Frankfurt am Main During the Weimar Republic", *Social History*, 8 (1983), pp. 315–343, 342; James M. Olsen, "Radical Social Democracy and School Reform in Wilhelmian Germany", *History of Education Quarterly*, 17 (1977), pp. 3–16.

41. See Yordanka Valkanova, "The Passion for Educating the 'New Man': Debates about Preschooling in Soviet Russia, 1917–1925", *History of Education Quarterly*, 49 (2009), pp. 211–221; Lisa A. Kirschenbaum, "Learning to be Soviet: Stalinist Schools and Celebrations in the 1930s, Review", *History of Education Quarterly*, 42 (2002), pp. 403–413.

42. Yorkshire SSS Union Minute Book 1912–1959, 19 May 1917, LHASC/SSS/2.

43. Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools", p. 38.

suggestion that the British SSSs instigate an International Socialist Children's League did not go unchallenged. For some SSS organizers, a fundamental disunity between the SSS ethical interpretation of socialism and the "largely secular" socialists on the continent was grounds for a retreat from collaboration.⁴⁴ Undoubtedly, such differences were characteristic of the SSS movement's diversity. At the same time, they also represented deep fractures and divisions in the political orientation of the movement, fractures that would eventually defeat the hope of a united non-partisan and popularly supported children's socialist movement.

The radical Glaswegian sections of the SSS movement led by Tom Anderson, for example, eventually split to form the Proletarian Sunday School (PSS) movement.⁴⁵ Writing in the first PSS pamphlet, Anderson makes clear his frustration with "the dreamers" of the SSS movement whose utopian sentiments obfuscated the reality of working-class life and struggle.⁴⁶ In the 1920s similar criticisms were echoed by the CPGB, which lobbied repeatedly for the NCBSSS to become subsumed under its own children's sections. Eventually, a motion put to the NCBSSS 1922 Annual Conference by the CPGB for it to affiliate to the YCI was defeated 5 to 36.⁴⁷ In response, the CPGB concluded that the SSS favoured abstract morality over class politics:

[In SSSs] [...] no attempt was made to teach the children the true facts of the class struggle, by organising them and training them through practical day to day work in the fight. [...] Rather [they were given] [...] dreamy suggestions about "love and human justice" to hope for impossible Utopian fairylands, which could be gained by merely wishing hard enough for them.⁴⁸

The distance that the SSS movement placed between itself and the international communist youth movements certainly appears to reinforce

44. YS (October 1901), p. 2.

45. Reid, and following his lead, historian Thomas Linehan place the split between SSSs and PSSs as occurring in 1911; Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools"; Thomas Linehan, *Communism in Britain 1920–1939: From the Cradle to the Grave* (Manchester, 2007). In fact, throughout the 1910s pamphlets produced by Tom Anderson and others in Glasgow continue to bear the name "Socialist Sunday School" until 1918 when a series of pamphlets entitled "Proletarian School Series" commences, consisting of republished pamphlets and new material. The Marx Memorial Library [hereafter MML] holds a number of pamphlets in these series. Paul and Paul also place the PSS movement's inception as 1918; E. Paul and C. Paul, *Proletcult: Proletarian Culture* (London, 1921).

46. MML (uncatalogued), Tom Anderson, "Socialist Sunday Schools: A Review and How to Open and Conduct a Proletarian School", September 1918. Anderson makes similar remarks in his article "The Socialist Sunday School Movement", *The Revolution*, 10:1 (April 1918), pp. 154–158, LHASC/CP/CENT/YOUTH/02/14. See also *idem*, *Proletarian Song Book, School Edition: The Slaves Bade and Salute* (Glasgow, 1933); British Library [hereafter BL].

47. LHASC/SSS/16.

48. Young Communist League [hereafter YCL], "A Short History of the Children's Youth Movement", LHASC/CP/CENT/YOUTH/2/14.

the idea that SSSs were largely fixated on the moral and ethical character of socialism. An emphasis on the initial connections of SSSs to the ethical movement and the LC, and with prominent socialists who explicitly espoused the “religion of socialism” (such as Katherine and Bruce Glasier),⁴⁹ has provided ample opportunity to present SSSs as emblematic of the “emotional” or “religious” sections of the turn-of-the-century socialist movement.⁵⁰ Historians such as Henry Pelling, for example, have represented SSSs as an ethical addendum to the turn-of-the-century ILP and SDF, and more particularly as an echoed imprint of the LC.⁵¹ More recently, Linehan suggests that the SSS “idealist take on socialism” assumed that “the socialist commonwealth could be attainable through the cultivation of proper ethical behaviour in the child”.⁵²

And yet, the schools were by no means politically placid or passive. Indeed, the very act of teaching, organizing, and learning within SSSs was itself a political one – and one that had to be fought for. As early as 1907, SSSs were forced to defend their right to exist when the London County Council (LCC) voted to evict the schools from council property.⁵³ Reportedly, some 10,000 students, teachers, and supporters demonstrated in Trafalgar Square and were addressed by renowned SSS proponents Margaret MacMillan, Mrs Despard, Mrs Bridges Adams, Jim O’Grady MP, and Alex Gossip.⁵⁴ Despite their remonstrance, the eviction went ahead and was again reaffirmed in 1920 following a challenge to LCC policy by SSS advocate A.A. Watts.⁵⁵ The eviction had far-reaching repercussions for London SSSs. South Islington SSS, for example, was saved only by the efforts of Comrade Finnimore, who “kept the school going single-handed rather than let it die”.⁵⁶

SSSs were again challenged in the early 1920s, after an over decade-long campaign by conservative religious MPs and community members culminated in the tabling of the Seditious and Blasphemous Teaching to Children Bill. Throughout the 1910s concern over the sacrilegious use of Christian imagery and the “evil resulting from [SSS] instruction” led to a range of conservative interventions, including such counter-institutions as

49. Yeo, “A New Life”.

50. For example, David Fisher, *Band of Little Comrades: The Story of Socialist Sunday Schools in Edinburgh 1905–1945* (Edinburgh, 2001); Vincent Geoghegan, “Socialism and Christianity in Edwardian Britain: A Utopian Perspective”, *Utopian Studies*, 10:2 (1999), pp. 40–69.

51. Henry Pelling, *The Origins of the Labour Party 1880–1900* (Oxford, 1965), pp. 136–138.

52. Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, p. 31.

53. *The Times*, 29 July 1907, p. 18.

54. See Alex Gossip’s entry by Helen Corr and John Saville in W. Knox (ed.), *Scottish Labour Leaders 1918–39: A Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh, 1984).

55. *The Times*, 30 July 1920, p. 25.

56. “Portrait Gallery”, *YS* (November 1911), p. 1057; see also LHASC/SSS/5 for documentation of the difficulty following the eviction of Fulham SSS.

the “Children’s Faith Crusade” and the “Children’s Social Sunday Union”.⁵⁷ In response to the Seditious Teaching Bill socialist activists mobilized again, with Labour MPs, the Trades Council, ILP, CPGB, YCL, NCBSSS, and Cooperative Guild all united in their protest, rallying in London to defend their right to provide an education independent of state schooling.⁵⁸ The Bill was “talked out”, but it did succeed in stoking the debate surrounding socialist and communist children’s activities.⁵⁹

Indeed, despite the unity wrought by the combined response to the Bill, it also served to bolster divisions. Some supporters of the SSS movement harnessed the opportunity to argue for the superiority of their version of socialist children’s education. For instance, during the bill’s hearing, SSS advocate Labour MP Ben Turner reflected with annoyance the deliberate conflation by conservative MPs of SSSs with communist Sunday schools “which had precepts which no sane man could fully support”.⁶⁰ Such distinctions also appear not to have been lost on the conservative responses to children’s and youth socialism. Home Secretary and Liberal Party member Edward Shortt concluded in 1922, “nothing has been brought to my notice on which a prosecution for ‘blasphemy’ [in SSSs] could properly be taken”.⁶¹

In chronicling these political interrelations it is easy to understand how SSSs have become synonymous with a kind of British “ethical socialism”. However, in defining SSSs as primarily a moral affair, the schools are positioned within the comparatively private and gendered realm of children’s cultural activities, whilst the more serious business of political engagement is designated to the public “proper”, carried out by trade unions and political organizations. The social and political significance of childhood cultures is lost in such historical accounts. Politically, children and childhood were powerful symbols in the project of socialism. Proudly performing and marching at the front of May Day celebrations, children offered an important opportunity to extend the political salience of socialism

57. Anti-SSS pamphlets appear as early as 1911 with Mrs St Clare Norris’s *Watchman Awake! Save the Children* (London, 1911). Publicity for the “Social Sunday School Union” can be found through advertisements for “at homes” with Major H.C.C. Gibbings with the topic “Socialist Sunday Schools”; for example, *The Times*, 7 February 1912, p. 11.

58. Leaflet advertising mass demonstration against the “Muzzling Order for Children”, LHASC/CP/CENT/YOUTH/04/09. Kean points out that the bill served to heighten surveillance of socialist and communist groups, with the CP reporting having their publications seized from abroad by Scotland Yard; Kean, *Challenging the State*, p. 70, n. 14.

59. LHASC/SSS/7. Later in 1940 it appears that newly introduced legislation “bearing on publication of seditious matter during the war” led the NCBSSS to destroy the June issue because of “controversial references to the war”; editorial correspondence, LHASC/SSS/9 YS.

60. Ben Turner, *About Myself 1868–1930* (London, 1930), pp. 238–239.

61. “Socialist and Revolutionary Schools”, memorandum by the Home Secretary, 25 April 1922, National Archives [hereafter NA], NA/CAB/24/136.

beyond the factory gates.⁶² Culturally and politically, children were emblematic of the youthful and hopeful future of socialism.⁶³

Importantly, this focus on childhood did not make the SSS movement an auxiliary of women's socialism. Unlike the SSS movement in the US, which more explicitly connected its practice to women by directly appealing "to socialist mothers",⁶⁴ British SSSs did not present themselves as the realm of women's work.⁶⁵ Undoubtedly, the extension and adaptation of traditional women's work found in SSSs provided women with a relatively straightforward entry into socialist political life. As Cowman, Hunt, Kean, and others have demonstrated, turn-of-the-century British socialism was by no means devoid of traditional notions of women and men's work.⁶⁶

Correspondingly, traditional gendered depictions of women appear to flourish throughout SSS literature. In George Whitehead's outline of the movement, for example, he describes woman as the "weaker vessel", suggesting that "her influence should be mainly spiritual or emotional, in which department she excels", and that "her mission" should be to "supply the idealistic factor necessary to progress and accomplishment".⁶⁷ Complementing Whitehead's assertion, "lady comrades" took on catering responsibilities for social events, and participated in a large amount of hidden work, appearing in *YS* features of male organizers as (nameless) "supportive" wives and "helpmates".⁶⁸ And yet, alongside these normative representations, the *YS* also gave key women leaders as much of a celebrated reception as men, and sometimes husbands were even relegated to (namelessly) appearing in their supportive role:

Mrs Gossip joined the Central Committee in its first year [...] supported and encouraged by her noble-minded and greatly serving husband, and surrounded by her devoted family. [...] What would the children's movement be without her and a small group of women comrades of like mind, I can hardly think.⁶⁹

In addition, the *YS* regularly included contributions from and about socialist women, and credited the work of local women school organizers for their work in SSSs and wider social campaigns.⁷⁰ For example, in writing

62. See *The Times*, 2 May 1902, 2 May 1906, 3 May 1909, 2 May 1910, 2 May 1912, 2 May 1925; *The Daily Graphic*, 2 May 1924.

63. "To the Children of the Socialist Sunday Schools – May Day Message", *YS* (May 1909), p. 458; "What London Saw on May Day", *YS* (June 1910), p. 721.

64. *YS* (July 1903), p. 1; Teitelbaum, *Schooling for "Good Rebels"*.

65. See also Gerrard, "Gender, Community and Education".

66. Cowman, *Mrs Brown is a Man and a Brother*, p. 61; see also Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists*.

67. George Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*, issued by the Hyde Socialist Sunday School, n.d., LHASC/SSS/4, p. 25.

68. See, for example, *YS*, portrait of Peter Myles (Chairman of the Glasgow Union), June 1904, p. 42.

69. *YS* (February 1903), Mrs A. Gossip, p. 1.

70. For example, Zelda Kahan wrote a feature on Russian socialist Sophie Perovskaya in September 1909 (pp. 540–541) and Zinaida Konopliannikova in December of the same year

an obituary for the recent passing of SSS teacher Mary Morrison in 1909 “D.L.” makes reference to her work inside and outside the SSS movement:

Mary joined the Central School on the opening day and has since served it in many ways, being Librarian, Treasurer and Delegate to the Union (Glasgow and District), for a long period. [...] She took an active part in the movement for the emancipation of women. [...] Mary has done her part towards the building of the New City. By us of the Central School and all who knew her she will be ever remembered as a good comrade and a faithful worker for the commonweal.⁷¹

Of course, the gender politics of the SSS movement was not without contradiction and complexity. “Greatly serving wives” and women with “sweet” and “generous” dispositions are featured alongside active campaigners – for socialist and feminist causes – in their workplaces and in the broader public domain.⁷² Women were encapsulated within, and actively developed, discourses of femininity and motherhood alongside explicit reference to their class position as workers and their commitment to socialism. For some, attaching SSSs to an extension of women’s work carried some appeal: Lizzie Glasier, for example, suggested that the SSS might become an auxiliary of the socialist women’s movement.⁷³ However, the failure of Glasier’s proposal to gain any currency within the British SSS movement signals that the task of creating socialist children’s educational cultures was one that inspired both men and women alike.

While the SSS movement attracted large numbers of women, men too were inspired by the task of creating childhood socialist cultures. Many male teachers connected their own childhood experiences of work and poverty with their desire to protect a period of childhood through their SSS work. For example, Robert Weare, who worked and was primary carer for a younger sibling by the age of nine, gave his “life and soul” to SSS teaching in his later years.⁷⁴ Keir Hardie, one of the most prominent champions of SSSs, was sent to the mines twelve hours a day by the age of twelve, and Comrade Fimmore, devoted superintendant of South Islington SSS, trained on a ship from an early age after being orphaned at seven years old.⁷⁵

(pp. 604–605); Marion Phillips, D.Sc.(Econ.), discusses the minimum wage for women in “Minimum Wage”, *YS* (January 1912), p. 12; Kalek (Alex Gossip) writes about the unfair conditions of a girl in her factory workplace and at home in “A Story of Factory Life”, *YS* (April 1909), pp. 442–423.

71. *YS* (January 1909), p. 386.

72. For example, Mrs J. Bruce Glasier, *YS* (December 1904), p. 89; Mrs Lumb, *YS* (March 1906), p. 25.

73. *YS* (October 1911), p. 1042.

74. Young, *Robert Weare*.

75. Emrys Hughes, “Keir Hardie”, in *Keir Hardie: Pioneer Socialist: Commemorative Booklet for Centenary Celebrations* (Glasgow, 1956); *YS* (November 1911), p. 1057.

For these and many other teachers, commitment to the SSS movement marked an extension of political activism into the realm of childhood. They envisaged a children's socialist movement that could transcend party differences through the enactment of a broad socialist culture of childhood. Take, for example, these popular SSS songs:

Oh, we are little soldiers in the world's great fight,
 We can't do much to overthrow the foes of right;
 But we remember those who've laboured hard and long,
 And we mean to fight for justice as we march along.⁷⁶

We are children, but some day,
 We'll be big and strong and say,
 None shall slave, and none shall slay,
 All shall work together,
 We will up and march away, march away.⁷⁷

Central, then, to SSS work was the protected, and distinct, period of childhood. In contrast to many of the contemporaneous youth movements, which included young workers in political action, the SSS movement developed a conception of childhood that attempted to bridge socialist activism with a protected sphere of childhood, and it is this endeavour that this paper now examines.

CHILDREN'S SOCIALISM

In developing their socialist children's education, SSS organizers borrowed heavily from popular church cultures. Like many British turn-of-the-century socialists, SSS teachers displayed a clear penchant for religion-imbued rituals, and incorporated many of these into SSS practice.⁷⁸ Thus, their attempt to offer an alternative to church Sunday schools reflected back to working-class parents and children familiar cultural traditions. Each week students and teachers recited the ten socialist commandments (see Figure 2), sang socialist hymns, witnessed socialist "naming ceremonies" (which replaced baptisms), and in the *YS* read about celebrated "socialist saints".⁷⁹

76. J.R. Hogg, "As We March Along", in "Huddersfield Socialist Sunday School 14th Anniversary Services" pamphlet, 24 April 1910, LHASC/SSS/5.

77. John Bruce Glasier, "Here We Gather in a Ring", in "Great Horton Socialist Sunday School Song Sheet", LHASC/SSS/5.

78. See Raphael Samuel's discussion of turn-of-the-century socialism and the Labour Party in *Island Stories: Unravelling Britain: Theatres of Memory* (London, 1998), II, pp. 308–313.

79. NCBSSS, "Notes on Procedure in Socialist Sunday Schools", LHASC/SSS/13. A series specifically entitled "Socialist Saints" appears by 1909 in *YS*, but even before this many issues featured "great" men and women (past and present). Naming ceremonies were particularly well attended and often attracted famous guest socialists and comrades from neighbouring schools, e.g. *YS* (January 1910), p. 626.

1. Love your schoolfellows, who will be your fellow-workmen in life.
2. Love learning which is the food of the mind; be as grateful to your teacher as to your parents.
3. Make every day holy by good and useful deeds and kindly actions.
4. Honour the good, be courteous to all, bow down to none.
5. Do not hate or speak evil of anyone. Do not be revengeful, but stand up for your rights and resist oppression.
6. Do not be cowardly. Be a friend to the weak, and love justice.
7. Remember that the good things of the earth are produced by labour. Whoever enjoys them without working for them is stealing the bread of the workers.
8. Observe and think in order to discover the truth. Do not believe what is contrary to reason, and never deceive yourself or others.
9. Do not think that those who love their own country must hate and despise other nations, or wish that, which is a remnant of barbarism.
10. Work for the day when all men and women will be free citizens of one fatherland, and live together as brothers and sisters in peace and righteousness.

Figure 2. Ten Socialist Precepts.⁸⁰

1. Opening Aspiration.
2. Song.
3. Roll Call. (The meaning of the “Builders’ Roll” should occasionally be explained in the school.)
4. The minutes of the previous Sunday’s gathering are read and endorsed. The purpose of this is to train the observation and memory of the young people in view of later Trade Union, Cooperative, and Socialist duties.
5. Song.
6. Precepts or text (repeated separately from memory by the scholars and explained by teacher).
7. Recitations or other contributions by the members.
8. Song.
9. Lesson – address (maximum 20 minutes), children to be invited to answer questions as the lesson proceeds).

Figure 3. SSS Agenda.⁸¹

80. Socialist Fellowship, *Socialist Sunday Schools: Aims, Objects and Organisations* (London, n.d.).

81. NCBSSS, *Socialist Sunday Schools: A Manual* (Gateshead, 1924).

To add to this, SSS weekly meetings were conducted in a church-style format, with recitations and lessons peppered by singing (see Figure 3). At the very least it appears that, whilst aspects of the religiosity of the schools' practice caused discontent amongst the secular ranks of the SSS organizers, this style of educational practice did not. As Reid has outlined, SSSs continued to use these religious-inspired practices, even as the language to describe them was successfully reformed in the first decade of the twentieth-century, with the NCBSSS agreeing to change "hymns" to "songs", and "commandments" to "precepts".⁸²

And yet, this borrowing of church culture did not signal an alignment with religion more widely. Despite some members' ongoing commitment to (a socialist) Christianity, SSSs were clear in their intent to provide a socialist alternative to church Sunday schools and to the militaristic and religious scout movement.⁸³ This was, as Archie McArthur put it, a "new socialism":

[...] all that is noblest and fairest in human life. [...] It will give its due place to the head with all its knowledge of social conditions and how to better them, but it will make much for the heart and the conscience, of love and duty. It will not be purely economic nor purely ethical, but both in one.⁸⁴

Thus, for teachers and organizers, the SSS project was part of fostering working-class counter-cultures capable of supporting wider struggles for change. Moving beyond religious traditions, the SSS movement rejected the sublime after-life, opting instead "to materialise it here and now in the actual deeds of justice and love in the service of humanity".⁸⁵

This included, for example, explicitly incorporating aspects of trade-union culture and socialist politics into the schools' agenda. Teachers used minute-keeping to teach students trade-union skills, and referred to the school roll as the "Builders' Roll" to inspire the notion that each and every student and teacher was "one of many builders" in the project of socialism. In addition, the *YS* regularly reported on a range of socialist campaigns and the activities of SSS teachers (men and women), including the struggle for the minimum wage, the opposition to conscription, and the support of miners.⁸⁶ The *YS*'s series of short features on SSS teachers and students, the "Portrait Gallery", also reveals a strong affiliation of

82. See Reid, "Socialist Sunday Schools". Internal debates over the use of the term commandment appear as early as 1913 in National Conference minutes, LHASC/SSS/16. In 1910 Alfred Russell's motion that hymns be altered if they contain "God" was defeated; NCBSSS Conference Minutes, LHASC, SSS, 16.

83. Dora Walford, "Socialist Sunday Schools: Their Aims, Value and Future", pamphlet reprinted from *The Worker*, Huddersfield, 29 February 1908, LHASC/SSS/13.

84. *YS* (April 1902), p. 3.

85. Walford, "Socialist Sunday Schools", LHASC/SSS/13.

86. *YS* (February 1912), p. 12; *YS* (March 1916), pp. 34–35; *YS* (February 1916), p. 30.

SSSs to wider political activism. The political affiliations of men and women were named and they were personally described as “active” and “ardent trade unionists”, proud of their worker’s identity and “not afraid of work”, nor lacking in “zeal” for the movement.⁸⁷ Children were congratulated for their ability to speak to audiences on socialist ideas, and – along with their adult comrades – for their unselfish attitude to interpersonal relationships.⁸⁸

Unsurprisingly, for other socialists, adaptation and incorporation of religious culture proved challenging. For instance, after attending a SSS naming ceremony, prominent communist Harry McShane wrote:

When I first saw it I was quite shocked, as I hadn’t quite rid myself of Catholicism. Four little girls put flowers on the baby for purity, and then a red rose was put on for revolution. Arthur Pinkney, who had a marvellous speaking voice, spoke of the future of the child and the future of all humanity. The singing was the most impressive part of the ceremony, as rich as any religious function I had ever attended; it really stumped me.⁸⁹

And yet, it was this transformation of, in Raymond Williams’s terms, the “residual” religious culture into “emergent” socialist culture,⁹⁰ that proved so popular and influential: autobiographies of ex-students make particular reference to SSS songs, with many able to recite verbatim poems and songs from their childhood SSS days.⁹¹

Importantly, however, SSS practice extended well beyond a kind of “utopian” dreaming of a socialist future. Whilst not intending to replace state schools, SSS were clear in their intent to offer a corrective to capitalist education, as explained by SSS organizer Fred Coates:

Whether we like it or not our children are compelled to attend public elementary schools. While there they are given “religious” lessons which are often opposed to Socialism; they are given history lessons that present distorted or imperfect views of society; in the whole school curriculum there is a bias – intentional or unintentional – in favour of the existing social institutions. In view of these influences are we, because of a theoretical belief in the right of a child to remain unbiased, to allow the child to be biased in every other direction than a Socialist direction. Surely not. In practice, then, we shall and must

87. For example, Maitland James Neil, *YS* (June 1905), p. 41; Annie Hoyle, *YS* (June 1912), p. 105; Allan Ireland, *YS* (November 1910), p. 812; Robert Burns, *YS* (May 1911), p. 937; Mary Gray, *YS* (April 1903), pp. 1–2; James Barron, *YS* (June 1910), p. 717.

88. For example, Peter Welsh, *YS* (March 1904), p. 17; William Wilson, *YS* (May 1903), p. 1; Alfred Russell, *YS* (August 1903), p. 102; Earnest Bates, *YS* (July 1903), p. 1.

89. Harry McShane, *Harry McShane: No Mean Fighter* (London, 1978), p. 31.

90. Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory”, *New Left Review*, 82 (1973), pp. 3–16.

91. For example, Jennie Lee, *My Life with Nye* (London, 1980); Mary Docherty, *A Miner’s Lass: Memories by Mary Docherty* (Preston, 1992); see also Fisher, *Band of Little Comrades*.

continue to discuss our socialism with and in the presence of our children, and respond to the enquiries, but we shall also recognize that the Socialist Sunday School is just an organized extension of the influence for Socialism which must exist in all Socialist homes, and is the means (or will be the means when its importance is realized) by which our children shall be educated and trained for active work in the Socialist movement.⁹²

Consequently, the SSS movement contested the narrow mainstream education and curriculum for working-class children by introducing science, history, politics, and philosophy and defending the capability of all children to understand and engage with such knowledge.⁹³ Introducing their students to a holistic collection of subjects, such as Darwin's Theory of Evolution, nature studies, international politics, needlecraft, poetry, drama, and singing, SSSs hoped to give children "training as enlightened, useful citizens" for the cause of socialism.⁹⁴

To support teachers in this endeavour, the NCBSSS provided curriculum and suggested readings through its "Education Bureau", starting in 1914 with the "Socialist Interpretation of History".⁹⁵ In addition, the NCBSSS published various editions of hymn, then song books, organized annual "National Sunday" lessons in which all SSSs taught the same socialist maxim, and in 1924 published a Teachers' Manual.⁹⁶ Short stories, poems, and suggestions for teaching topics were also provided in the *YS*. From Margaret McMillan's "Arithmetic" in which she describes the socialist tenet of cooperation through the mathematical concepts of division and sharing,⁹⁷ to Katherine Glasier's selected extracts of Thomas More's *Utopia*,⁹⁸ and F.J. Gould's story *Science and the Boy* that urged children to remember the "human note" obscured by the neutral pursuit of scientific knowledge,⁹⁹ teachers had ample material in which to inspire their lessons.

Of course, these attempts to create a socialist education did not escape the gender norms that haunted the movement's broader function and representation. Most obviously, much SSS curriculum implicitly and explicitly supported gendered divisions of labour by drawing heavily on socialist articulations of the family as a symbol of a natural state

92. Fred Coates, "The Teaching of Socialism to Children", *YS* (December 1911), pp. 1067–1077.

93. Whitehead, *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*; Young Socialist Education Bureaux, "Course of Study: Socialist Interpretation of History", LHASC/SSS/13; NCBSSS, *Socialist Sunday Schools: A Manual*.

94. NCBSSS, *Teaching Children 3–10 Years in the SSS* (n.d), LHASC/SSS/13; C.M. Smillie (ed.), *NCBSSS: Notes for Teachers* (London, 1925), BL.

95. NCBSSS, *Socialist Sunday Schools: A Manual*; Jim Simmons, "Brief Notes on the History of the Socialist Sunday School Movement", LHASC/SSS/7.

96. *Ibid.*

97. *YS* (July 1904), pp. 61–62.

98. *YS* (September 1911), p. 1026.

99. *YS* (October 1910), pp. 800–801.

of cooperative politics. For instance, Jim Simmons suggested, “Simple lessons on the fundamentals of Socialism can be given from home life. [...] Mutual aid inside the family, the cooperation of sharing work FROM EACH ACCORDING TO ABILITY, Tommy runs errands, chops stick etc., Mary helps cleaning.”¹⁰⁰

SSSs did not escape criticism for their dedicated focus on a protected sphere of childhood. Into the 1920s, the CPGB Children’s Sections took a very different direction. Unlike the neighbourhood approach adopted by the SSS movement, the CPGB based its Children’s Sections at schools in order to encourage children to “fight harder for better schools, free school meals, [and] against bosses teaching”.¹⁰¹ In the face of this alternative conception of socialist childhood, the SSS movement maintained unwavering commitment to creating distinct childhood cultures, interconnected but set apart from adult politics. In their practice of socialist children’s education, the SSS movement regarded independent and individual growth and freedom as paramount. Dora Walford explained:

As they grow from childhood to youth, and early manhood and womanhood, we then can present the case for our creed of love and justice, putting them in possession of facts relating to both sides of the case, giving them entire freedom of debate, welcoming objections and seeing flaws in our point of view.¹⁰²

Thus, when it came to developing socialist pedagogies, many in the SSS movement borrowed from the emergent discipline of progressive pedagogy. Educational thinkers such as Froebel, and his connection of childhood with a scientific period of growth, provided much inspiration for SSS teachers.¹⁰³ In particular, the notion of children’s natural capacities as propounded, for example, by prominent educator Margaret McMillan, assisted SSS teachers to challenge the presumption of working-class incapability.¹⁰⁴

Taking up a children-centred approach through a socialist lens, the NCBSSS urged teachers to “remember that each child is a unique personality to be developed carefully and not moulded to a preselected pattern”.¹⁰⁵ It was also quick to develop pedagogies and curricula to meet

100. “Some Suggestions for Lessons in Socialist Sunday Schools” (author’s emphasis), LHASC/SSS/13.

101. *Young Comrade*, 2:18 (May 1927), p. 1; e.g. *The School Strike* (a play for the YCL) emphasizes students as powerful enactors of social change within the school setting; the *Young Pioneer* features cartoons about school overcrowding, LHASC/CP/CENT/YOTH/2/14; see also Linehan, *Communism in Britain*, p. 28.

102. Walford, “Socialist Sunday Schools”, LHASC/SSS/13.

103. See, for example, Whitehead’s discussion of pedagogy and curriculum in which he reviews Spencer, Froebel, and Marx in *Education in Socialist Sunday Schools*; Greenwood, *All Children are Mine*; see also Margaret McMillan’s article on Mazzini, *YS* (June 1909), pp. 484–485.

104. Steedman, *Childhood, Culture and Class*.

105. NCBSSS, “Notes for Teachers”, n.d., LHASC/SSS/13.

the needs of particular periods of children's growth, providing teachers with a syllabus of age-appropriate lessons and literature.¹⁰⁶ Schools were encouraged to separate children into different age groups for lessons so that material could be appropriately related to their prior knowledge. Huddersfield SSS, for example, had separate classes for under-fives, five to ten-year-olds, ten to twelve-year-olds, twelve to fourteen-year-olds, fourteen to sixteen-year-olds as well as an adult class.¹⁰⁷ Across schools, sunbeam groups were established to cater for the youngest children, who were introduced to the "idea of comradeship" and "community" through play.¹⁰⁸ Sunbeam teachers were encouraged to "forget oneself and revel in the child's delight", and reminded that "freedom to enjoy and express must be allowed".¹⁰⁹ More generally, the NCBSSS recommended an open-ended and active approach to SSS teaching and learning.¹¹⁰

Of course, the extent to which this was implemented across local schools is less clear. Traditional didactic pedagogical approaches would have undoubtedly remained in many schools. In Canning Town SSS, for instance, a visitor witnessed with delight eighty children reciting in unison the ten socialist precepts.¹¹¹ And yet, other accounts signal a clear adoption of child-centred approaches, as described by Eileen Beattie, Belfast SSS student and Secretary:

Already we have had a most successful social run by ourselves – the scholars; 60 sat down to tea and 60 most thoroughly enjoyed themselves. [...] What pleases us most, I think, is the trust the teachers put in us, we really and actually carry on the schools ourselves with the exception of the teaching and even there we are encouraged to express exactly what we think. This is not what we have been used to.¹¹²

Supporting these age-specific enterprises, general SSS practice also confirmed the importance of childhood through a range of rituals that celebrated each and every child scholar. Recognizing children's birthdays, noting their absences, observing achievements, creating opportunities for performance, and the tradition of welcoming babies through "naming ceremonies" were all seen as encouraging socialist principles through the recognition of childhood. Writing anonymously in a teachers' notebook, one SSS teacher describes how even sibling babies of the child scholars are "never forgotten", and are noted in the roll call and have their birthdays remembered.¹¹³

106. NCBSSS, *Socialist Sunday Schools: A Manual*, pp. 53–59.

107. Huddersfield SSS minute book, 1 February 1906, LHASC/SSS/2.

108. NCBSSS Education Bureau, "Hints to Sunbeam Teachers", n.d., p. 1, LHASC/SSS/13.

109. *Ibid.*

110. "Preparing a Lesson", n.d., LHASC/SSS/13.

111. *YS* (December 1902), p. 4.

112. *YS* (March 1916), p. 48.

113. Anonymous teacher's notebook, 'MS', LHASC/SSS/2.

This commitment to socialist cultures of childhood in part rested upon the SSS organizers' conviction that socialism was the logical response to a critical analysis of the existing social institutions. As the Tyneside and District SSS Union states: "We aim [to] gently and naturally build up the idea to the scholars, to prepare them for the understanding and reception of the Socialist ideal in later life." SSS teachers did not shy, therefore, from declaring their socialist allegiances and aspirations. But for SSS teachers, it was essential that the schools were separated from the sectarian disputes in the adult movement. Teachers did not want to create "little [...] party members, but people who would have a [socialist] principle, and would live up to that principle".¹¹⁴

The SSS adaptation of child-centred pedagogy was therefore based on the confidence that SSSs provided a necessary and justified remedy to capitalist schooling and ideology. The NCBSSS, or instance, proudly asserted that creed and belief "falls outside the scope of the work in our schools", and that SSS curriculum only included knowledge that could be "tested" and "accredited".¹¹⁵ It was, therefore, a pedagogy and curriculum based on a certainty of socialism and of its truths: in the words of Keir Hardie, "All healthy children and young people are by instinct Socialists."¹¹⁶

CONCLUSION

From its humble inception in 1892 the British SSS movement sought to translate the politics of socialism for children. Responding, and actively contributing, to a growing international network of socialist children's initiatives, SSSs endeavoured to counter the religious conservatism of state and Sunday schools by providing children with a socialist education. Establishing their own magazine in 1901 and national organizational structure in 1909, the schools cultivated children's socialism through alternative literature, curriculum, pedagogy, songs, and play.

In part, the movement can be seen to coopt religious culture in the enactment of the ideals and ethics of socialism for children. Indeed, SSSs could be interpreted as emblematic of the particularly British "religion of socialism" turn-of-the-century culture. Much of the SSS experience reiterated church-based cultures through the lens of socialism, including, for example, the ten socialist commandments/precepts. At the same time, however, SSS teachers and organizers of the schools, from diverse political

114. Yorkshire SSS Union Minute Book, Arthur Booth's lecture to the Yorkshire SSS Union's Annual Conference, 24 January 1931, LHASC/SSS/2.

115. NCBSSS, *Socialist Sunday Schools*, pp. 13–15.

116. Keir Hardie, "How to Use One's Talents", *YS* (January 1910), p. 618. Similar assumptions are also found in US SSSs; P. Mishler, *Raising Reds: The Young Pioneers, Radical Summer Camps, and Communist Political Culture in the United States* (New York, 1999), p. 28.

persuasions, were dedicated to building national and international children's socialist movements that could connect children's socialism to the larger project of working-class struggle. Unsurprisingly, it was this connection that proved challenging for the SSS movement.

Extending socialist politics to children, SSSs intertwined moral and economic dimensions of turn-of-the-century socialism in their educational practice. Certainly, their reiteration of religious rituals and routines through a socialist lens explicitly politicized the culture of childhood. As the SSS movement attempted to find its place as a supporter of socialist campaigns and a promoter of a socialist ethic, those around it – including many women – utilized the schools as a site of political action. At the same time, the schools were brought into political confrontation through the intervention of conservative campaigners. In 1907 the LCC evicted SSSs from all council premises, and in the 1920s the coordinated conservative challenge culminated in the parliamentary hearing of the Seditious Teaching Bill. SSS teachers and organizers were repeatedly forced to defend children's socialist culture, and concurrently, the ability and right of working-class children to be taught a broad curriculum, including scientific and historical knowledge and complex political ideas.

Inspired by national and international networks of socialism, the movement aimed to foster an inclusive non-partisan children's socialist movement that could transcend party sectarian differences. Correspondence and contact with international SSSs and a curricula focus on internationalism demonstrates an underpinning concern to develop international children's socialist cultures. Nonetheless, their broad non-partisan socialism struggled to gain currency in the increasingly party-based political field into the twentieth century, at home and abroad. Criticism from the CPGB and the split of the PSS movement indicate that, particularly in the years following the Russian revolution, many found their inclusive approach too politically ambiguous. For SSS teachers, devotion to this approach reflected their political commitment both to non-partisanship and to the creation of a protected sphere of childhood. Like many others, they hung their hopes for a socialist future on the next generation, and interpreted the ideals of progressive pedagogy through a socialist lens in order to defend an independent socialist children's sphere. SSS teachers wanted to develop an alternative education in which children could be introduced to the broad philosophies and practices of socialism, without being channelled into a particular socialist party.

With their focus on childhood and education, it is unsurprising that dominant conceptions of women's identity and work can be found in SSS literature and accounts of practice. Undoubtedly, SSSs provided an unproblematic space for socialist women to practise their political convictions. However, the influence of SSSs on students' and teachers' lives, and the flexibility it gave women to develop and practise their politics,

indicate that women used SSSs to extend their involvement in public life. Indeed, the movement never represented itself as an extension of women's work, and celebrated the local work of SSS teachers, male and female. Extending socialism into the realm of childhood, SSSs inspired both men and women, and provided links into broader socialist activity for all teachers and students. Thus, despite seeming to operate on the margins of the broader socialist movement, through their educational initiatives and their support of radical activism more broadly, SSSs were interconnected with a range of socialist political activity: they were, in fact, constitutive of a broader socialist challenge to social, political, and economic power.

As my discussion in this paper has shown, SSSs were far more than a collection of socialists relying upon utopian moral fables by which to inspire a love of socialism in children. Incorporating a diverse range of men and women socialists, engaging in international networks of alternative children's initiatives, and actively defending their practices against conservative intervention, SSS alternative childhood cultures were by no means set apart from the wider political cultures of the turn-of-the-century socialist milieu. Rather, the history of the SSS movement demonstrates the import of childhood cultures as contested and interconnected sites of political activity, embedded within the wider field of turn-of-the-century socialist politics.

TRANSLATED ABSTRACTS FRENCH – GERMAN – SPANISH

Jessica Gerrard. *“Des petits soldats” pour le socialisme : l'enfance et la politique socialiste dans le mouvement de l'École du dimanche socialiste au Royaume-Uni.*

Cet article examine comment les socialistes du Royaume-Uni au tournant du siècle orchestrèrent le socialisme pour les enfants par l'intermédiaire du mouvement britannique de l'École du dimanche socialiste. L'accent est particulièrement mis sur la naissance de ce mouvement dans les années 1890 et sur les trois premières décennies de ses travaux. Inscrites dans un champ international croissant d'initiatives socialistes comparables pour les enfants, les Écoles du dimanche socialistes tentèrent de relier leur activité locale en matière d'éducation des enfants à la politique élargie du socialisme international. Dans ce texte, j'examine la tentative d'établir ce lien, y compris l'effort pour transcender les différences partisans par la création d'un mouvement socialiste international pour les enfants en marge des partis, l'assimilation de rituels traditionnels des écoles du dimanche et la constatation que les cultures socialistes de l'enfance étaient la responsabilité tant des hommes que des femmes. Défendant leur existence contre la critique de campagnes conservatrices, de l'État et de certaines sections de la gauche, les Écoles du dimanche socialistes mobilisèrent une culture complexe et contestée de l'enfance socialiste.

Traduction: *Christine Krätke-Plard*

Jessica Gerrard. *“Kleine Soldaten” des Sozialismus: Kindheit und sozialistische Politik in der sozialistischen Sonntagsschulbewegung Großbritanniens.*

Dieser Beitrag untersucht, wie die britischen Sozialisten der Jahrhundertwende durch die britische sozialistische Sonntagsschulbewegung den Sozialismus für Kinder inszenierten. Das Augenmerk liegt insbesondere auf der Entstehung der Bewegung in den 1890er Jahren und auf den ersten drei Jahrzehnten ihres Wirkens. Eingebettet in ein expandierendes internationales Feld vergleichbarer sozialistischer Initiativen für Kinder, versuchten die sozialistischen Sonntagsschulen, ihre lokale Tätigkeit im Bereich des Kinderunterrichts mit der umfassenderen Politik des internationalen Sozialismus zu verbinden. Der Beitrag untersucht und diskutiert den Versuch, diese Verbindung herzustellen. Dabei wird auf die Bemühungen eingegangen, parteipolitische Differenzen durch die Schaffung einer überparteilichen und internationalen sozialistischen Kinderbewegung zu überwinden, sowie auf die Vereinnahmung traditioneller Sonntagsschulrituale und die Bemühungen, exemplarisch zu zeigen, dass die Pflege sozialistischer Kinderkultur in der Verantwortung von Männern und Frauen gleichermaßen liege. Indem sie sich gegen die Kritik konservativer Kampagnen, des Staates sowie einiger Teile der Linken behaupteten, mobilisierten die sozialistischen Sonntagsschulen eine komplexe und umstrittene sozialistische Kindheitskultur.

Übersetzung: Max Henninger

Jessica Gerrard. *“Pequeños soldados” por el socialismo: infancia y políticas socialistas en el Movimiento Socialista Británico de las Escuelas Dominicales.*

Este artículo examina las formas en que los socialistas británicos de la época de entresiglos difundían el socialismo entre los niños a través del Movimiento Socialista Británico de las Escuelas Dominicales. Se centra de forma particular en su emergencia durante la década de 1890 y en las tres primeras décadas de su funcionamiento. Situadas dentro de un ámbito internacional creciente de iniciativas socialistas para la infancia, las Escuelas Dominicales Socialistas intentaron conectar su actividad educativa infantil a nivel local con la más amplia política del socialismo internacional. En el texto se exploran los intentos de establecer esa conexión, incluyendo el esfuerzo por trascender las diferencias partidistas en la creación de un movimiento socialista infantil al margen de los partidismos, la asimilación de los rituales tradicionales de las Escuelas Dominicales y la constatación de que las culturas socialistas dirigidas a los niños eran tanto responsabilidad de hombres como de mujeres. Defendiendo su existencia frente a las críticas de las campañas conservadoras, del estado y de sectores de la izquierda, las Escuelas Dominicales Socialistas movilizaron una cultura socialista dirigida a los niños compleja y combativa.

Traducción: Vicent Sanz Rozalén