

How Trump Backlash Is Funding a Refugee Camp School in Lebanon

The financial challenges are daunting – but Donald Trump has unwittingly spurred a wave of donations that will help educate thousands of children.

BY **DAVID KENNER**

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BAR ELIAS, Lebanon — The dirt paths in the encampments turn into rivers of mud when it rains. Cold leaks through the canvas tents in the winter; some refugees have frozen to death during particularly vicious storms. But now it's spring, and the fields outside the town of Bar Elias are green with budding wheat and potatoes. Inside the blue-and-white tents dotting these fields, however, the struggles to build a life remain as daunting as ever.

There are no well-ordered, state-run refugee camps in Lebanon; everything is haphazard. The tent encampments are built on private land, placing the refugees at the mercy of landlords, and scattered at random across the eastern Bekaa Valley, making it difficult for humanitarian organizations to coordinate support. Many of the 1.5 million Syrian refugees in the country live in conditions like this. It is as if an entire nation deposited itself in an area where one would expect to find nothing but agricultural land or the odd farmer tending his sheep.

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A cluster of buildings, the largest of which is perhaps the size of a small barn, sits on the edge of the tent camp surrounded by a chain-link fence. This is the Kayany Foundation's Telyani School, where children 6 to 13 attend classes in subjects such as English, Arabic, and math. The outer walls are adorned with cardboard cutouts of pink, red, and blue flowers. "Welcome Spring" reads a rainbow-colored sign. Children line up excitedly each morning outside the classrooms, a cheery contrast with the drab life outside the school.

Here, I am rarely introduced as a reporter or the Middle East editor of Foreign Policy. Rather, I am *ibn Carol*: the son of Carol. My mother is the head of the American nonprofit that raises money for the Kayany schools.

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So while I make no pretense of objectivity when discussing Kayany, I can provide you with a few facts about the schools. I can tell you there are seven of them, including two all-girls schools, enrolling more than 3,400 students. I can tell you that a large portion of teachers are Syrian refugees, and that the schools serve 77,000 free meals per month.

I can tell you that many of the children who attend these schools would probably receive no education at all if it weren't for Kayany, and that every time I have visited, clusters of children linger outside the chain-link fence around the schools, hoping to be allowed in.

Kayany operates on a mix of partnerships with larger organizations and private donations. For example, it received financial support from the Malala Fund to open the all-girls schools, and has partnered with organizations like the Jesuit Refugee Service to operate them. After salaries are paid, textbooks are bought, and meals are prepared, it costs Kayany \$1.7 million per year to fund its operations. The organization relies heavily on private donations — and until recently, raising that money was no easy feat. (It's not just Kayany. The U.N. humanitarian response plan, which is meant to provide support for Syrians who haven't left the country, suffers from a funding gap of \$2.9 billion in 2017 alone.)

But in January, the efforts of American nonprofits to raise money in support of Syrian refugees received a boost from the unlikeliest of sources: Donald Trump. The newly inaugurated U.S. president had just issued the first travel ban, which would have suspended the entry of Syrian refugees indefinitely, sparking a wave of “rage donations” by Americans incensed by the executive order. Jennifer Patterson, the deputy executive director at USA for UNHCR, which raises money for the U.N. Refugee Agency and other partners, said that the weekend after the travel ban, her organization experienced a 370 percent surge in traffic on its website and the second-largest fundraising weekend in its history.

Kayany, too, has since seen a wave of donations. Money poured in from organizations of Arab-American college students; art dealers in New York were suddenly eager to help organize charity auctions in support of the schools. “People were just aghast. It just hit a raw nerve,” said Jumana Elzayn, a Syrian-American living in California who has donated to Kayany. “This is not what our country is about.”

But in the Syrian refugee camps of Lebanon, there is still not enough — not enough schools, not enough psychosocial support, not enough money. Some students start drifting away from school before they reach their teenage years, because their parents need them to work. Amina Al Zein, the administrator of the Telyani school and a refugee herself, said there are roughly 100 children in the school’s first grade, but only 13 in the sixth grade. The rest, she says, have gone to work.

Eleven-year-old Aya worked in the potato fields last summer, rising at 4 a.m. to begin her shift and then heading to school at noon. She’s a slight, precocious girl who regularly drowns out her classmates in her determination to be heard. Her favorite classes are Arabic and English, she says, because she “wants to understand everything.”

Only the most menial employment is available, and preteens work in factories or the fields for as little as \$10 a week. Her mother eventually stopped her from working because Aya was experiencing backaches. She might return this summer; her father is dead, and her family needs the money.

But it will be only during the summer, Aya insists, not when Kayany opens its doors. She juts out her chin and smiles proudly. “I don’t let anything stand in the way of coming to school.”

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Don't Call It Brexit Radio

Union JACK Radio was supposed to celebrate the quirks of British culture, from tea and scones to Mr. Bean. Then came Brexit. Then came the angry tweets.

BY **ALICIA P.Q. WITTMAYER**

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@APQW

OXFORD, England — Union JACK Radio broadcasts out of a low-slung, graffiti-covered structure that its staff affectionately refers to on the air as “the dumpy little building.” Located on a nondescript Oxford street, the building is technically two stories but looks shorter; the ceilings are low, the carpeting worn. When I visited recently for a tour, one of the first things I learned was that there are bomb shelters underneath dating back to World War II — the days of Churchill, Spitfires, and Britain’s finest hour.

Had it launched at any other time, Union JACK might not have attracted quite so much attention. The concept behind the station is straightforward. As the name implies, it plays only British music, by British artists. Its target audience is people 45 to 59 years old. This demographic is reflected both in the choice of the listener-selected playlist (you're more likely to hear Pink Floyd than grime) and in the smattering of British-inflected dad jokes listeners are treated to between songs (the station eschews DJs in favor of pre-recorded promo material). On a recent morning, the playlist included music by New Order, Queen, Radiohead, some very good punk by a band called The Members, and recorded voiceovers making quips about some of the things typically viewed as essentials of Britishness: "popping out for a curry," MINI Coopers, excessive politeness. According to its promotional materials, the station aims to celebrate "the quirky British way of life ... from Mary Berry's soggy bottom to a proper cup of tea." (Sample catchline: "More British than Stephen Fry riding a swan.")

But Union JACK began broadcasting in September 2016, less than three months after the country voted to leave the European Union, following a bitter campaign that both divided the United Kingdom and exposed anew some of the sources of its deepest collective anxieties, including imperial nostalgia and English nationalism. These wounds have not healed in the months since. And so, Union JACK has spent the first few months of its young life pushing back — always cheerful, always impeccably polite — against those who've dubbed the station "radio Brexit." *NME*, an influential British music magazine, covered the first hour of Union JACK's debut in an article that began, "If you liked Brexit but thought it lacked a decent soundtrack, you are in luck." Another publication went with the headline "Brexit Britain Radio Station Bans Foreigner[s]."

Today, that stream of press coverage has mostly died off, but the station still fields the occasional angry tweet. In response, the social media team, which consists solely of a sunny 20-something named Phil, tweets back friendly responses that insist on the station's staunch neutrality on all things Brexit.

"We're letting people shake their fists at us, and we're just sort of waving back," program manager Giles Gear, an energetic 23-year-old with an unlikely enthusiasm for radio, told me.

"No bias/Brexit undertones here. We're more Mr. Bean than Mr. Farage," the station's Twitter account recently chirped in response to a tweet calling the station another sign that "Britain has lost its mind."

"Nah, no bias here," it said in another. "All about celebrating the music, comedy and quirks from this weird and wonderful island. Smashing!"

My visit to Union JACK came in early April. It was just a few days after an episode that, for many, signaled a new low in whatever post-Brexit madness had taken hold: the unexpected flare-up between Britain and Spain over the fate of Gibraltar. Earlier that month, former Conservative Party leader Michael Howard had suggested that Britain would willingly go to war over the rocky peninsula. This was followed, later the same day, by a report in the right-leaning *Daily Telegraph* clarifying that while Britain's navy was "far weaker" than it was during the Falklands War, it could "still cripple" Spain.

But Union JACK was not born out of this Britain, insisted CEO Ian Walker, 49, while sitting on a plush couch covered with Union Jack pillows. Rather, it was a concept conceived in the wake of the much-celebrated London 2012 Olympic Games.

Those Games were marked by an opening ceremony almost universally received as deeply strange but oddly stirring. London was hosting the Summer Olympics four years after Beijing, which had seen the occasion as a coming out party on the world stage for a newly rich China. In its opening ceremony, Beijing had opted for the spectacular: performances on a gigantic, elaborate, \$100 million, 15,000-performer scale. Now that it was Britain's turn, the world waited anxiously to see how a country — not a rising power, but one long in decline — would follow.

The United Kingdom opted not for grandiosity, but for quirk. The queen parachuted out of a helicopter (or at least appeared to, with the aid of a royal stunt double) accompanied by James Bond. Paul McCartney made an appearance, as did Mary Poppins and the National Health Service, in a celebration of British cultural icons. Britain, the *New York Times* wrote, was presenting itself to the world as "a nation secure in its own post-empire identity" if "sometimes slightly insane."

Walker, who is Australian but has lived in the U.K. since 2002, said he saw in the spirit of these Games an opportunity. "When the Olympics came to London there was such a groundswell of national pride," he said. "It was really transformational." Britain, he said, was a country longing for a chance to celebrate and embrace its idiosyncrasies. What if a radio station could tap into that same enthusiasm?

Five years later, Union JACK is still selling a version of this Britain: a weird and wacky island with certain cultural touchstones that everyone, Brexiteers and Remoaners alike, can love and share: tea, queuing, *The Great British Bake Off*. But it's not yet clear that in post-Brexit Britain, where patriotism that once seemed simple has suddenly become politically fraught, such symbols can be universally embraced the way they were five years ago.

Or maybe it is that simple, and maybe they can. Jordan Bassett, who reviewed Union JACK for *NME*, for instance, started out his hour of listening with his tone set firmly to snide. The first 30 seconds on the air, which included a man talking about “pork pies and pasties” (a Cornish pastry) and the TV sitcom *Fawlty Towers*, were like “a moodboard from the mind of Nigel Farage,” he wrote.

A few minutes later, however, the station moved onto the music — and it proved hard to resist. By minute 10, following Erasure's “A Little Respect”: “I've removed my shirt, and I'm dancing at my desk.” Minute 36: He was swooning over Pulp's “Common People.” By minute 49, it was all over. British music, after all, is very good. “The accumulative effect of Erasure, Oasis, Pulp and The Smiths is reason to believe that maybe Union Jack is the best radio station ever invented,” he wrote. Tallyho.

*This article originally appeared in the May/June 2017 issue of **FP** magazine.*

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