One of the many unfulfilled goals of the modern trade union movement has been to find ways to reach out to young people in hopes of replenishing the diminishing ranks of an institution under steady attack. In hopes of resuscitating its role in sustaining industrial democracy, labour has appealed to youth through popular music videos, theatre, board games, and the occasional network television show. Sadly, union membership continues to decline in the United States, begging the question: how do we make unions appealing to a generation inundated by negative media reports, right-wing attempts to undermine workers’ rights, and the long-cultivated attitude that unions have outlived their usefulness?

The Graphic History Collective, a group of Canadian history students and their professor Mark Leier, have concluded that the graphic novel is one way. The question is, will it succeed?

Over the past few years, the graphic novel format has grown in popularity with the success of the critically acclaimed film versions of *Persepolis* and *Waltz with Bashir*. The collective was also inspired by the appearance of several other graphic novels focused on historical issues and events.


The Graphic History Collective has thrown political caution to the wind with its sometimes stridently passionate portrayal of the workers’ international day that is celebrated in communist and socialist countries around the world, often in place of Labour Day. They, and illustrators Sam Bradd and Trevor McKilligan, have stuffed thirty-two pages with all the legendary labour events of the past—from the nineteenth century to the twenty-first.

Much of what is included has a strong association with Canada—the Nine-hour Movement, the Winnipeg General Strike, and numerous celebrated protests. But the authors also include the struggle for the eight-hour day in the U.S., the 1886 Haymarket strike in Chicago, a Toronto baseball team’s visit to Fidel Castro’s Cuba, and the late Hugo Chavez’s efforts to bring socialism to Venezuela. All occurred on May Day.

The thin volume has received accolades from several historians, including Buhle and the Canadian authors of *The Workers’ Festival*, a history of that other labour day,
and plans are afoot to produce more graphic novels. Labour educators, perhaps especially adult educators, will also be grateful for another teaching tool that should entice students to learn more about the history of workers’ struggles.

Undoubtedly some young people will be attracted to the format, one that easily lends itself to posting on various social media. They and older students will also enjoy the quick bursts of history that do not require hard slogging through hundreds of footnotes. Still, the authors are competing with commentators, both in the media and in the academic community, who may present a less flattering and less inspiring version of labour history.

The authors should not, of course, make any apologies for telling May Day’s history as they perceive it nor in offering their analysis of the meaning of events surrounding the day. Regrettably, they may have to be satisfied with a smaller audience for the book in an era of widespread discontent that is often fueled by Tea Party–style hatred of unions and anything that smacks of socialism.


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*Detroit’s Cold War: The Origins of Post-war Conservatism* is an important and well-timed book, particularly in light of the passage of so-called right-to-work legislation in Michigan and other states seen generally seen as more progressive and with a long history of union activism, including Wisconsin and Indiana. Doody’s rich historical analysis helps to situate the contemporary mistrust and criticism toward unions, collective action, and the welfare state throughout the USA, but especially in areas such as Detroit that should, in theory, be a haven for left-wing politics.

Doody rightly notes that the hostility toward any semblance of collective action began as early as the New Deal, suggesting that any belief in a so-called post-war compromise between labor, capital, and the state was far from secure. The threat of Communism, and things vaguely associated with it—such as a strong organized labor movement—were immediately targeted by a strong anti-Communist rhetoric, which has had longstanding implications and continues to hamper organized labor, liberals, and the welfare state, even well after the fall of the Soviet Union and the rise of neoliberal politics. This supposed threat continues to impede efforts of progressives today, who are often quickly labelled socialists. As Doody aptly states in the final sentence of the book, “the rhetoric of anti-Communism has outlived Communism itself” (p. 123).

While the primary thrust of Doody’s text is dedicated to examining Detroit in the