

Anthony Carew, American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970

Denis Clark

Volume 85, printemps 2020

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1070925ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0024>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Clark, D. (2020). Compte rendu de [Anthony Carew, American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970]. *Labour / Le Travail*, 85, 320–322. <https://doi.org/10.1353/llt.2020.0024>

imperative for abolition, in contrast to mainstreamed feminists. The legacy of this labour continues to find expression in ongoing intellectual and activist work toward abolition and critiques of carceral institutions. Thuma participates in that important labour by attending to and reconstructing their subaltern understandings, strategies, and affects. If we are open to it, Thuma's account may, like the letters and newsletters she studied, (re-)produce the coalitional space across temporal as well as spatial dimensions, potentially including more of us than before in that affective body of resistance.

Thuma conceptualizes coalitional space as a counterpublic sphere, contrasted to a public sphere dominated by law-and-order or tough-on-crime hegemony and ever-expanding carceral institutions. Thuma also places this counterpublic sphere on the periphery of mainstreamed feminist movements, the latter of whom recede from view in her account, although she frames the coalitional space as a site in which boundaries of feminism are contested. Possible perturbations to the coalitional space seem to be resolved, albeit tenuously, through negotiation and consensus. This move appears deliberate to me. Thuma states in the introduction that she is focussing on spaces heretofore ignored as contributing to abolitionist and anti-carceral moves against state violence. It is understandable then that the distinctiveness of the counterpublic would be attended to over any other considerations. But going forward, in the coalitional space Thuma reopened, I think it could be helpful to interrogate the continuities, as well as disjunctions, between counterpublic and public spheres, to trouble the boundary between them and to see how it is possible for both to affect, and entangle with, each other. Such a move might require conceptualizing coalitional space as more than discursive, by accepting that it

is constituted by matter other than text and that mediating structures can work in multiple directions.

JOSHUA DAVID MICHAEL SHAW
York University

Anthony Carew, *American Labour's Cold War Abroad: From Deep Freeze to Détente, 1945–1970* (Edmonton: Athabasca University Press 2018)

IN *AMERICAN LABOUR'S Cold War Abroad*, Anthony Carew reconstructs "the admittedly obscure world of international trade union politics, with its complex institutional structure." (6) Carew, an Honorary Visiting Reader in International Labour Studies at the University of Manchester, has been researching and publishing on this subject for decades, and the book reflects his considerable expertise. *American Labour's Cold War Abroad* principally focuses on the AFL-CIO (American Federation of Labour-Congress of Industrial Organizations) and, in particular, on the activities of five men: Irving Brown, Jay Lovestone, George Meany, and Walter and Victor Reuther. The depth of analysis on these major figures in U.S. labour history, spread over 25 years, is the strength of this book. Yet further exploration of broader contextual and historiographical questions would do more to engage non-specialists.

These five men became powerful figures in international trade union circles because, as Carew documents extensively, they controlled and handed out a steady supply of money. Lovestone controlled the AFL's Free Trade Union Committee, Brown was Lovestone's protégé and the primary contact with dozens of overseas unions, and Meany was the longtime AFL/AFL-CIO president. All three were committed anti-communists who advocated the principle of "free"

trade unionism. In other words, they opposed engagement with unions in communist countries, which did not operate in a free society and were closely connected to the state. Walter Reuther, the president of the United Auto Workers (UAW), and his brother Victor, were lesser figures internationally but orchestrated several overseas operations.

U.S. labour largesse began with Brown, who dispersed funds to non-communist trade unions in France and Italy so that they could gain the upper hand over their communist competitors. From the late 1950s, Brown turned his attentions to trade unions across decolonizing Africa and in Japan, India, and South Vietnam, though with mixed results. Victor Reuther, meanwhile, joined a project to build trade union capacity and promote democracy in Latin America, while both Reuthers supported the Johnson administration's policy of "building bridges" to the Eastern Bloc.

Carew's research shows that many AFL-CIO activities abroad depended in part on U.S. government funds, including clandestine sources. This builds on his revelatory article, "The American Labor Movement in Fizzland: The Free Trade Union Committee and the CIA," which showed that the CIA had helped to fund some of Brown and Lovestone's activities in the 1940s and 1950s (*Labor History* 39, no. 1 (1998): 25–42). *American Labour's Cold War Abroad* shows that while CIA funds dried up by about 1958, the U.S. Agency for International Development continued to contribute to U.S. labour's overseas operations in the 1960s.

Despite this reliance on state funding, the book's main figures considered themselves essentially independent agents who acted on their personal ideological convictions. Carew, based on his extensive examination of private papers, portrays Brown in particular as operating very much on his own initiative, to

the point that some of his funds lacked accountability. Yet the activities of American labour representatives also occurred, for the most part, in places where the U.S. government aimed to contain the spread of Soviet-backed communism, real or imagined. Government policy is important context, but it receives little attention in the book. A fuller discussion would have made for a more convincing assessment.

Brown, Lovestone, Meany, and the Reuthers worked for broadly the same aims, but as Carew demonstrates clearly, they were hardly a united front in their overseas activities. Ideological differences were important – the Reuthers were ideologically to the left of Meany and Lovestone – but personal rivalry characterized the relationship between the AFL men and the Reuthers by the 1960s. This culminated in the late 1960s when Walter Reuther took the UAW out of the AFL-CIO and tried to take a separate place in the International Conference of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In response, Meany disaffiliated his organization with the ICFTU entirely.

The Americans, as Carew describes with clarity, had contentious relationships with many of their international partners. While in regular communication with Lovestone, Brown sabotaged the formation of the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) in 1945, in which communist unions had a considerable presence. Brown helped to engineer a split in the WFTU and inspired the formation of the competing ICFTU in 1949, in which the AFL was immediately a major player. Yet Lovestone and Meany contrived to end the tenure of the first two general secretaries of the ICFTU, while the third, Harm Buiters, helped to inspire the AFL-CIO's disaffiliation from ICFTU in 1969. It also did not help that Brown, Lovestone, and Meany had well-deserved reputations for being brash and blunt.

Carew's study of U.S. labour abroad joins the vibrant and growing historiography on both transnationalism and internationalism. His emphasis on Irving Brown showcases a particularly interesting transnational figure who worked extensively on the front lines of the global Cold War. The book also suggests the limited nature of U.S. labour's commitment to internationalism.

Yet *American Labour's Cold War Abroad* also suffers from drawbacks common to many transnational histories. It is, at its core, the story of a few powerful men and therefore privileges their perspectives, though Carew does provide a relatively balanced view. Moreover, the book could use the inclusion of context in many respects. This would frame the narrative more effectively and point to the significance of Carew's conclusions. Even though "Cold War" is in the title, insufficient reference is made to either U.S. foreign or domestic context or major works about them. Did McCarthyism affect how U.S. labour activists could act overseas? Where do Irving Brown's activities fit in new understandings of the global Cold War? Furthermore, much of the European view of the Americans is through the Americans' eyes, while the views of Africans, Latin Americans, and Asians are rarely stated.

It is impossible to include all of the necessary context, and these absences point to the possibilities for future research. Yet, it is not clear what those possibilities might be, because the book lacks a coherent statement on how it contributes to the field. This is particularly notable in relation to the historiography on the transnational turn and global Cold War generally and to recent specialist works like Quenby Olmsted Hughes' *In the Interest of Democracy* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2011), which extends up to the mid-1950s, and several of the essays in *American Labor's Global Ambassadors*,

the volume edited by Robert Anthony Waters Jr. and Geert van Goethem (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Addressing at least some of the broader historiographical and contextual questions would have helped to situate non-specialists. The bibliography lists archival collections in six countries, dozens of interviews, and a substantial number of secondary works. The book introduces more than one hundred national and international labour organizations, although the many acronyms make reading difficult at times. The detailed material presented in *American Labour's Cold War Abroad* will therefore be of greatest interest to scholars of U.S. labour organizations abroad in the early Cold War.

DENIS CLARK

University of Calgary

Jorge J. Santos, Jr. *Graphic Memories of the Civil Rights Movement: Reframing History in Comics* (Austin: University of Texas Press 2019)

GRAPHIC MEMOIRS and novels offer scholars and students access to many usable, often controversial, and always captivating pasts. As a teacher of history, I relish opportunities to consider assigning recent publications in the graphic history genre for my students because of their readability and accessibility, as well as the ways they address the contingent nuances of historical interpretation. In particular, I have taught from Jonathan Hennessey's *The United States Constitution* (2008) and Chester Brown's *Louis Riel* (2003) and plan to assign recently published works like David F. Walker's *The Life of Frederick Douglass* (2019) and the Graphic History Collective's excellent *1919: A Graphic History of the Winnipeg General Strike* (2019) among others. Each of these works addresses a range of key documents, figures, and events in