

**Gálvez, P. i López, A. (2021). 8 hores. El Noi del Sucre i la vaga de La Canadenca. Pagès Editors**

ANDRÉS PLA GÁLVEZ

Professor of History and Geography

andresplagalvez@gmail.com

Comics present in a synthetic and attractive way information that in many cases can be of indisputable quality. In terms of comics aimed at teaching and learning history we can find numerous titles of unquestionable didactic utility. To cite a few examples, there is the raw narration of the Holocaust in *Maus*, by Art Spiegelman, the Islamist revolution of Iran seen from a gender perspective in *Persepolis*, by Marjane Satrapi, and the magnificent representation of feudalism and the Middle Ages in *Les Tours de Bois-Maury*, by Hermann. The comic that concerns us today narrates rigorously and in an attractive way some of the events that are key to understanding the recent history of Catalonia and Spain.

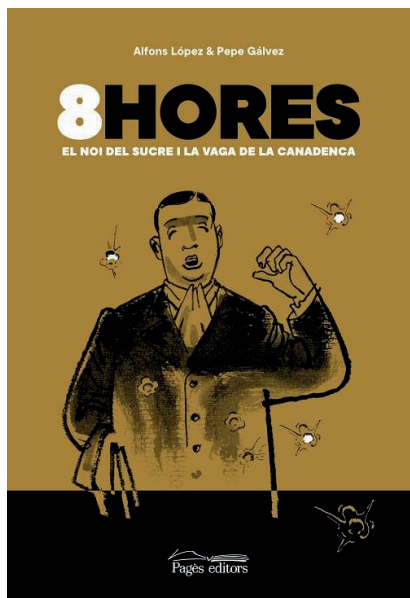


Figure 1. Cover of comic: 8 hores...



COM A RESPOSTA, EL DIA 17 ES PROCLAMA LA VAGA GENERAL A LLEIDA I ES REALITZA UN GRAN MITING A LA CAPITAL DE LA PROVINCIA ON INTERVINGUE SALVADOR SEGÚR.

"VOSTRA LLUITA ÉS LA NOSTRA, LA DE TOTA LA CLASSE OBRERA, TENIU EL SUPORT DE LA CONFEDERACIÓ EN PIE PER GUANYAR AQUESTA VAGA."



Figure 2. Interior page from the còmic.

In *8 hores. El Noi del Sucre i la vaga de La Canadenca*, Alfons López (graphics) and Pepe Gálvez (script) offer us a complete lesson, not only in history, but also in how to tell it. It situates us in Catalonia in the first quarter of the 20th century, at time of political upheaval and great social change. As the title indicates, the protagonists of the story are Salvador Seguí, (*El Noi del Sucre - the Sugar Boy*), the Canadenca strike (*la vaga de La Canadenca*) and the whole of Catalan society at the time, which would end up being involved in these events. Thus, it is a work suitable for social studies in the fourth year of compulsory secondary education insofar as it is, *a priori*, more attractive to students.

One of the authors of this comic, Alfons López (1950), is a journalist and illustrator with a long career in the field of graphic humour and Spanish comics. He has collaborated in publications issued by TBO, the Bruguera publishing house and *Cimoc* magazine, among others. He also helped create the magazine *Botifarra!* (1975-1987), which combined journalistic analysis with a comic format. The other author is Pepe Gálvez (1950), an economist by training and also a screenwriter and trade unionist. For more than thirty years he has been involved in the dissemination of comics, writing several books on the subject and helping to curate various exhibitions related to the medium (Gálvez and López, 2021).

The structure of this work is designed so that readers can situate themselves in and understand the historical context it narrates. The comic starts with the murder of Seguí and from there goes back to tell the story from the beginning. We can identify three parts. The first narrates Seguí's childhood, the second, which makes up the bulk of the work, describes how the Canadenca strike unfolded, and the third, by way of conclusion, presents the consequences of this strike and how it did not end with the following political and social upheaval. Although the striking workers did achieve, in theory, an 8-hour workday, in practice business abuses did not cease and the measure did not become effective immediately nor was it enforced everywhere. Consequently, the reasons that motivated the working class struggle for rights remained in place.

The didactic spirit of the comic is evident in the pages dedicated to explaining the historical context that the authors intersperse between

the different parts of the story. Although the book has not been designed for use in the classroom, thanks to these parts, its value as a teaching resource is clear. Thus, in the course of its pages, the book describes, briefly and concisely, global events such as the First World War and the Russian Revolution, major local events such as the founding of the CNT, the Congrés de Sants and the creation of the Commonwealth of Catalonia, and the biographies of the historical figures who appear in the story. It also includes a small chronology of events in the life of Salvador Seguí (useful for relating his life to the wider historical, political, social and cultural context as a whole) and bibliographic references for further reading on the subject. Finally, Pepe Gálvez offers us an epilogue that connects the events narrated in the comic with the present and thus demonstrates how a knowledge of history helps us to understand the present. When all is said and done, this is one of the main reasons for teaching and learning the social sciences.

This comic will be a good resource for work in high school classrooms. First, teenage readers will find it accessible. The narrative discourse is clear and very easy to follow. There is no need to read between the lines, it explains itself clearly and it is evident that the authors are at great pains to ensure that the work can be understood by anyone who reads it. In other words, one does not need to have an intimate knowledge of the early 20th century trade union movement to follow the plot, on the contrary, it is an ideal resource for students who are approaching this period for the first time. It is also highly positive that it is written in Catalan. It is not common to find comics written in our language, it is even increasingly difficult to find translations of titles beyond the great children's classics, so as teachers, therefore, we are grateful to have materials in Catalan at our disposal. The commitment to promoting comics in Catalan demonstrated by the Pagès publishing house through its Dobletinta collection is as brave as it is necessary.

As for the graphic part, this is where the work perhaps loses some of its appeal for young readers. López's drawings, despite being of indisputably high quality, might be referred to as old school. They are not the kind of drawings that teenage comic book readers are used to. Nevertheless, this

“weakness” can become an opportunity if the teacher knows how to use it well. First, the fact that the drawing is different from what we find in the most widespread entertainment products for young people (such as manga or superhero comics) can help students to differentiate between texts used for learning and those intended for entertainment. Second, as teachers, we have a duty to educate students so that they know how to appreciate artistic expressions other than those to which they are most accustomed. Thanks to the interaction between text and image, comics can be a great resource for generating interest in the story and somehow softening its content. This mixture of iconic elements and written text means that students can experience the learning process as fun whilst also developing their critical ability. It is often necessary to know how to read both the text and the images to capture the information that the author wants to transmit (Hernández, 2015). This means that, contrary to what one might think, reading a comic requires concentration on two levels.

In light of the above, we propose a didactic activity based on the comic. First, each student reads the comic at home. After this, they hold a debate in the classroom on the nature of the trade union movement and its role in history. This would be a good tool for fostering understanding of the notion of social class and class struggle, key concepts for understanding how many of the political events in the 20th century arose from the antagonism between the interests of the bourgeoisie and the working class. During the debate it could be proposed that students identify the interests of both classes and even carry out a role play in which opposing groups defend the interests of employers on the one hand and trade unionists on the other. To prepare for this debate, students should first work on the comic book by making diagrams, concept maps, timelines, etc. All these tools, as Dolors Quinquer (2004) tells us, are key to learning history in a competence-based manner.

To conclude, comics in general can be as valuable a teaching tool as any other cultural product, their value depending, as always, on the rigor and documentation with which they are written. In this particular instance, we have a suitable resource for students to approach this critical

but often confusing moment in history which is key to understanding the great events in 20th century Catalan and Spanish history, not least the resulting Spanish Civil War and the Franco dictatorship. This unresolved class antagonism was caused by an elite who condemned a people to oppression and misery just to protect their privileges, a fact that must not be lost sight of when teaching the events of this period.

## References:

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