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Australian Cartoonists and World War I

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Abstract
The total effectiveness of a cartoonist in time of war has depended on the artist's quality of mind, and on his skill to express concepts graphically. The Australian-born Will Dyson demonstrated this when producing his 'Kultur' cartoons in London during World War I.
The total effectiveness of a cartoonist in time of war has depended on the artist’s quality of mind, and on his skill to express concepts graphically. The Australian-born Will Dyson demonstrated this when producing his ‘Kultur’ cartoons in London during World War I.

What distinguished Dyson’s cartoons of the period was of course his draughtsmanship, combined with an intellect that rejected the then popular propaganda lauding the heroism of ‘our gallant lads fighting the bestial Hun’, the latter stereotyped by the Dutch cartoonist Louis Raemakers’ hack-clichés of slobbering Germans with naked babies impaled on their rifle bayonets. Dyson, with most supporters of the majority Labour movements of Britain, France and Germany, accepted the First World War as a just and necessary one. His approach to cartooning was intellectual, literary, characterized by his ‘grand manner’ concepts, heavy with symbols and allegory-science, death, vice, peace, and his most telling of all images, the devil, a gross beast symbolizing the evil of the Kaiser and German militarism.

The essential task of the cartoonist during a war is to bolster morale of both civilians and of the serving troops. In Australia during World War I three notable but disparate cartoonists who rose to the occasion were Norman Lindsay, Claude Marquet and David Souter. Another, the young David Low recently arrived from New Zealand, was to get only an occasional chance as a Bulletin staff artist and that was late during World War I, for, from the very beginnings of hostilities Norman Lindsay had been appointed to produce the full-page cartoon comment as the Bulletin’s chief cartoonist. Low’s contributions concentrated in the main on the political happenings at home and in particular those events involving the then Australian Prime Minister, William Morris Hughes. The few ‘war’ cartoons drawn by Low for the Bulletin were almost indistinguishable from Dyson’s ‘Kultur’ cartoons. Seemingly, Low was experimenting, even borrowing Dyson’s ‘split-brush’ technique together with the ‘grand manner’ presentation with symbolic and allegorical images dominating. Plainly this approach was not Low’s ‘handwriting’, and he had, as all artists do, to discover his
own style and direction. Curiously, just twenty years on during World War II, David Low was to become a major influence on public opinion throughout the world and the dominant cartoonist of the Western nations.

In contrast, Norman Lindsay, it would seem, had a confused concept of the 1914-18 hostilities. Lindsay's son Jack has said that Norman, for the one and only time, found himself in accord with the ruling powers, without the least sense of the real political and social issues involved; indeed, he had no feeling at all for the need to attempt to understand. But, towards the end of the war, he had revolted against what was happening, not by any acquired political analysis, but by a revulsion from the whole event.

As with David Low from London, Will Dyson was also setting the pace for Norman Lindsay, who adopted the 'grand manner' approach, by borrowing Dyson's cloven-hoofed devil image, to link the cruel excesses of the Kaiser and Prussianism to the ultimate of evil. His themes, mostly supplied by editorial staff, were worked up into magnificent pen paintings, or occasionally studies in crayon, declaring both his graphic skill and his early commitment to the British cause. At this time Lindsay had acquired a unique and most remarkable facility in that he could draw with a pen held at arms' length, controlling it by direct, unsupported contact with the paper.

During the 1914-18 period Lindsay commented also on home-front issues such as strikes and war profiteering, which because he was pro-conscription, became a repeated subject for his cartoons as he underlined its social divisiveness. Angered by Lindsay's jibes at the Irish and his eagerness to involve others in the fighting, the Catholic Monthly Review Australia published this taunt in February 1918:

The sad part of it all is that Mr Lindsay himself shows no sign of going to help Britannia ... although he is of military age and not married. He seems to have marvellous powers of resistance to be able to stay at home while the fate of the Empire is in the balance. He is fond of drawing; he is even very clever at drawing – but not the sword.

It is difficult to judge from this distance just what influence Lindsay's cartoons had on Australians then. Because the Bulletin's circulation was large, 20,000 copies a week at the outbreak of war, we can assume it was significant, but – not significant enough to win the 'Yes' vote for the two military-conscription referendums of 1916 and 1917 doggedly pursued by the Prime Minister of the day, William Morris Hughes.

The most outstanding and successful feature of the anti-conscription campaign of 1916, with the resultant 'No' vote was the printing and distribution of one million copies of Claude Marquet's now famous cartoon 'The Blood Vote', drawn with verse written by W.R. Winspear, originally published in the Worker newspaper.
NOTHING SACRED TO HIM

"This too, must come down to my level"

Norman Lindsay
"Peace rumors have been remarkably persistent in financial circles. As a result, the market for shipping shares and industrial stocks, which has been rising for months, showed marked weakness, and nervousness was expressed in some quarters lest the golden dreams of speculators were to be shattered by a speedy conclusion of hostilities."—"Economist."

THE EXPLOITER: "O, Merciful Providence, I thank Thee for the golden opportunities Thou hast vouchsafed me in these perilous times; and oh, I beseech Thee, heed not the pleas of unauthorised persons for a premature peace!"

C. Marquet
Long before the anxious years of 1914-18, the name of Claude Marquet was a household one with the Trade Union movement, the Australian Labor Party and the radical intelligentsia of Australia. Commencing his working life in the Wallaroo mines, South Australia, Marquet later became a printer's compositor and a process engraver. From this background he emerged as a proficient self-taught black and white artist, selling his work to the *Bulletin* and to trade union newspapers, to be eventually invited to Sydney as a staff cartoonist of the then called *Australian Worker* newspaper.

Marquet's cartoons and illustrations were invariably drawn with pen and ink in the traditional three-dimensional style, and, unusually, revealing no influences from the styles of other artists. That he could draw, and draw well, cannot be questioned, although on occasions his line work, because it was bold appears somewhat hard. But this style ensured his work reproduced well at a time when newspaper printing was frequently rough and ready.

Marquet’s 1914-18 war-time cartoons were in theme essentially home-front concerns – critical of Sydney’s daily press for its anti-working class, anti-Union policy, the bickering and inconsequential posturing within politics, the greedy Trusts, war profiteers, again the persistent threats of military conscription which was the theme of many of his *Worker* cartoons, and with only an occasional excursion into the international scene.

Adopting the Labor point of view from actual experience, Marquet was the first 20th century Australian cartoonist of note to adopt and perpetuate 'Fat' as the symbol for Capitalism. 'Fat', a paunchy, bloated figure in top hat and spats was originated by Australian cartoonists late in the last century to serve the Socialist cause. At the same time, Marquet has recorded some finely drawn political history, among it, 'The Blood Vote' cartoon which has rewarded him with a degree of immortality.

That Australia has any cartoon comment on events during World War I is fortuitous really, for it was not until well into the present century that the political cartoon became a feature of Australian daily newspapers. So, what documentation of the period we have, apart from the *Bulletin* reference, was produced for a handful of illustrated magazines most of which did not survive for long. One such was, to give it its full title, *The Sydney Stock and Station Journal* which published full page war cartoons drawn by David Henry Souter.

A Scot from Aberdeen, Souter worked both in that city and in Natal, South Africa, drawing for the press before coming to Australia where he contributed drawings to the *Bulletin*. He had the distinction of having at least one cartoon published in every edition of that journal for over forty years.

David Souter's beautiful, decorative drawing style of exceptional
"Terrible war – isn’t it?"

"Frightful – why this is the seventh Red Cross Dance I’ve been to this week!"

D.H. Souter
grace of line reflected the emerging Art Nouveau fashion that had originated in Scotland and Belgium. He brought this style, in no way tempered, to his war cartoons drawn for the *Stock and Station Journal*, a style enormously effective for his concepts, again, in the mode of the time, in the 'grand manner'.

In theme, these cartoons had no concern for home-front matters – Souter's vision focused on the conflict in Europe, interpreting it with national images allegoric and symbolic: goatee-bearded Uncle Sam, Britannia with helmet and trident, the British Lion, the German Eagle, and the Imperial Russian Bear all became set pieces not only with David Souter, but with cartoonists the world over including the German artists of, for instance, the satirical Munich magazine *Simplicissimus*.

In Australia during the years of The Great War as it was called then, other cartoonists both professional and amateur, competent and not so, were producing journeyman comment lacking concept, presentation and inspired style of draughtsmanship. None of them came anywhere near approaching these qualities in the work of Norman Lindsay, Claude Marquet and David Souter all of whom have made a significant contribution to the national achievement.

“Behold! I stand at the door and knock”  
D.H. Souter