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Robert Hunt

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Book Review

'Peace Angel' of World War 1

review by Robert Hunt

Hilary N Summy
'Peace Angel' of World War 1
 University of Queensland,
 The Australian Centre for
 Peace and Conflict Studies
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History is presented from the ... standpoint of conquest and power, of kings and bloody wars, whereas the emphasis should be laid upon the great struggling movements of the people towards social justice and economic freedom.

Margaret Thorp

Charisma knows only inner determination and inner restraint ... The charismatic leader gains and maintains authority solely by proving his [sic] strength in life.

Max Weber

Hilary Summy is a peace historian, presently completing a PhD thesis in the Department of History of the University of Queensland.

In her book she recounts part of the life of a truly remarkable young woman, Margaret Thorp, and her involvement in the contribution of the Women's Peace Army (WPA) to the anti-war movement during World War 1. The WPA took a prominent role in opposing conscription for overseas military service which was rejected by a relatively narrow majority vote in the two referenda held in 1916 and 1917, a process which exposed deep divisions in Australian society.

Ms Summy's account of Margaret Thorp's role in these events is illuminating, interesting, well written, impeccably researched, and provides a lot of food for thought in our present times.

Margaret Thorp was a young Quaker who was 19 years old when she arrived in Australia from England with her parents at a significant time in Australia's history: 10 years after Federation, when Australia was still struggling to establish its own national identity within the British Empire.

As a Quaker Margaret Thorp was dedicated to Christian pacifism and Christian socialism. Notwithstanding her youth, gender and relative inexperience in the ways of the world, she played a prominent role in coordinating diverse groups on the issue of opposing conscription. Her influence leading up to the conscription referenda was particularly significant in Queensland and arguably extended into the other eastern States, particularly among women voters. Her charisma was apparently quite remarkable. She found ways of making connections between pro-war and anti-war factions, between the middle and working classes, migrants and locals, the rich and the poor, the believers of various faiths and non-believers, radicals and conservatives. She stepped into the middle of conflicts which seemed impossible to resolve, and was herself subjected to physical attack by angry pro-war activists. Yet she never lost her sense of mission (to be a reconciler), her capacity for tolerance and forgiveness, or her vision of a world at peace.

Compulsory military training was introduced in Australia during the first decade after federation. The *Immigration Restriction Act of 1901* was the first major piece of legislation passed by the new Parliament, and enshrined the 'White Australia' policy as a basis of Australia's national identity. This policy was then seen as essential for Australian unity and purity as a European outpost. It was also promoted by the labour movement as a counter to 'coloured' workers lowering wage standards, and formed the first policy plank of the new Australian Labor Party.

To protect a 'White Australia' meant that the question of defence inevitably received a high priority, resulting in Parliament passing the *Defence Acts 1901-1909*, prompted by fear of both the growing power of Japan and the territorial encroachment in the Pacific by Imperial Germany.



In 1907 Prime Minister Alfred Deakin officially endorsed the principle of universal compulsory military training for both army and navy as the future basis of the defence system of Australia. This development greatly disturbed many Australians who associated conscription with the undemocratic and militarist systems operating in Germany and France. When Mr Deakin introduced a Bill for compulsory training in 1909, supported by all parties in the Parliament, these concerns became a reality, and Australia became the first English-speaking nation to introduce compulsory military training in peacetime. From 1 January 1911 all youths between the ages of 12 and 26 were required to undergo compulsory military training.

By early 1916 the issue of conscription for overseas service was being hotly debated in Australia. In the face of a deteriorating military situation in Europe, the Australian Government was under a great deal of pressure from the British War Cabinet to increase the numbers of Australian troops to help turn the tide as well as to replace the heavy losses in dead and wounded. By this time the initial enthusiasm of young Australian men to be involved in the 'great adventure' of the War had been significantly dampened by the appalling carnage experienced in the trench warfare of the Western Front and at Gallipoli. This brought into question whether voluntary enlistments would be sufficient to supply the 50,000 additional troops which Prime Minister William Morris Hughes committed Australia to provide to the Allied cause in late 1915.

The question posed in the first referendum on 28 October 1916 was: 'Are you in favour of the Government having, in this grave emergency, the same compulsory powers over citizens in regard to requiring their military service, for the term of this war, outside the Commonwealth, as it now has in regard to military service the Commonwealth?' The majority of Australian voters rejected conscription for overseas military service by 1,160,033 to 1,087,557, a majority

of 51.61 per cent. 'No' majorities were recorded in New South Wales, Queensland and South Australia, with 'Yes' majorities in Tasmania, Victoria, Western Australia and the Commonwealth Territories.

Following the first referendum, antagonism increased within Australia across a wide range of groups. The conscription issue split the Australian Labor Party, which Mr Hughes left to form his 'Win the War' Nationalist Party in November 1916. There was a widening gap between the 'patriotic'

an increased majority of 1,015,159 in favour and 1,181,747 (53.70 per cent) against. Although one more State (Victoria) voted against conscription, the narrow margin showed a deeply polarised Australian society. At least, the result of the referendum undoubtedly prevented the unnecessary sacrifice of even more young Australian lives in the muddy trenches on the Western Front.

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Despite her critical importance in the peace movement during this turbulent period, her ability to reach people across the length and breadth of Australian society, and the high esteem in which she was held by her contemporaries, Margaret Thorp is now a little-known figure. She deserves far greater recognition in the pages of history.

middle class and the 'unpatriotic' left, particularly the trade unions, which faced worsening economic and social conditions. Sectarianism thrived, with the Labor Party being equated with Irish Catholicism, which was firmly anti-British after the 1916 Easter Rebellion in Ireland.

A second referendum was announced by Prime Minister Hughes in November 1917. The Allied position in Europe was seriously weakened by the withdrawal of Russia from the War after the March 1917 Revolution. Intense recruitment drives and public appeals failed to produce the required number of volunteers, and the Australian Imperial Forces sustained appallingly high losses at Bullencourt, Messines and Ypres on the Western Front. Britain and New Zealand had introduced conscription, and Mr Hughes argued that it was Australia's duty to do likewise to support the Empire.

Passions ran high. Despite a virulent campaign by Mr Hughes to defeat the 'disloyalists' throughout Australia, the voters again rejected conscription, with

people across the length and breadth of Australian society, and the high esteem in which she was held by her contemporaries, Margaret Thorp is now a little-known figure. She deserves far greater recognition in the pages of history.

Hilary Summy suggests two possibly explanations for this lack of recognition:

- first, the zealous work of the wartime censors in preventing dissemination of her writings — given the threat which the pacifists were seen to pose to the war effort; and
- second, she does not fit easily into a neat category (other than the fact that she was a Quaker) — she was not identified with feminism and socialism, notwithstanding that she repeatedly and unflinchingly demonstrated her commitment to their principles.

It is particularly timely to reflect on the life and times of Margaret Thorp in September 2006, on the fifth anniversary of the terrorist attack on the World Trade Centre in New



York. It is now three-and-a-half years since Australian troops took part in an invasion of Iraq by US-led military forces (arguably in violation of international law and in breach of the United Nations Charter) to forcibly disarm the regime of Saddam Hussein on the bases of its alleged possession of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and alleged links with the Al Qaeda terrorists responsible for the New York attack.

Notwithstanding the fact that it is now widely accepted that the US, British and Australian governments either knew, or should have known, that there was no proper basis for either allegation, the political consequences have been negligible. It would appear that we now live in a political climate where the re-election prospects of

governments are governed by policies aimed at the hip pockets of voters, and not by adherence to ethical and moral principles demonstrated by governments or whether they misled or deceived the voters to whom they are ultimately responsible.

Margaret Thorp is quoted as saying 'Whatever the social pressures, there would be no compromise with militarism'. Her unflinching commitment to principles, and the manner in which she lived her life, set an example we can and should aspire to, and stand in stark contrast to the approach taken by our present political leaders. ●

Robert Hunt is a member of the ADRB editorial panel and can be contacted at <robhunt@bigpond.net.au>.

developments in ADR

■ The **NSW Law Society** celebrated the inception of the **Collaborative Professionals (NSW) Inc** at a dinner in July. The group has been established to provide ongoing education and training on collaborative law to the public and practitioners. The process of collaborative law consists of four-way structured meetings conducted in an information environment, and is designed to give lawyers the incentive to find creative solutions which satisfy the wants and needs of both parties.

■ **Penang High Court Justice Datuk Su Geok Yiam** recently presented findings from her paper titled **Court-Annexed Mediation** to the Asia-Pacific Conference on Contemporary Trends in Mediation and Arbitration in Kuala Lumpur. Justice Su presented findings that a pilot project for court-ordered mediation in civil cases in Malaysia has shown a success rate of 75 per cent. This was followed by comments from the keynote address by Malaysian Chief Justice Ahmad Fairuz, who stated that his country is considering mediation legislation that would cover both voluntary and court-directed mediation in order to reduce court backlogs.

■ The **Victorian Parliament** has passed amending legislation to their adjudication regime, the *Building and Construction Security of Payments Act 2002*, and while the implications of the some of the changes are being evaluated, it is expected that the changes will bring Victoria more into line with the amendments made

by other States that have adopted adjudication legislation.

■ **CEDR** has created new **Model ADR Contract Clauses** to include other areas of the broadening field of ADR. The new clauses, designed for inclusion in commercial contracts to provide a smooth access to solution if a dispute arises, have just been published in the Second Edition of *International Mediation — The Art of Business Diplomacy* and are now also available on the CEDR website at <www.cedr.org.uk>.

■ After six years of litigation over the 2000–01 energy crises in California and other western States, more than 200 appeals from the **Federal Energy and Regulatory Commission (FERC)** actions remain before the US Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit. In August, the Ninth Circuit sent the parties to mediation, which led FERC Chairman Joseph T Kelliher to hail the move as a way to bring closure. He stated that settlements of FERC-related cases have already yielded over \$6 billion for consumers, while litigation has yielded nothing thus far and might continue for another five or 10 years.

■ The Australian Government has selected a firm to provide mediation services throughout the country to assist the **Produce and Grocery Industry Ombudsman**. The Produce and Grocery Industry receives subsidised dispute resolution services under its Code. The mediation firm's contract is overseen by the Department of Industry and Tourism.