

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF CZECH TABLOIDS BEFORE FIRST
WORLD WAR**

Author: Mgr. Jana Dorčáková, Ph.D.

Workshop: Popular Culture in East-Central Europe before First
World War (24th October 2014, Prague)

The history of Czech tabloid press has been neglected for many years. While history of tabloid press in USA, United Kingdom, Germany and France is well known, the knowledge about Czech tabloids is poor.

However, the reasons for development of this kind of press are similar. The questions of why and how has been tabloid press formed were occupying minds of many scientist. They identified the main reasons for creation of the tabloid press as follows: the industrialization of society, mass education and natural development of newspaper industry (f. e. Schudson, 1978, p. 23; Nerone, 1987, p. 384 -396.; Altick, 1998, p. 81; Nerone, 1987, p.384 -396).

As it is known the development of these three factors varied in the East, Central and Western Europe and the New World. Let us focus on Europe, especially Czech lands in comparison with United Kingdom, France, Germany and Austria.

The industry revolution started in Czech lands with the delay of some decades compared to United Kingdom and France. If we look for a reason of that delay we can run into arguments as lack of infrastructure, lack of educated people but the real reason is the Habsburgs. According to James Robinson in the book *Why Nations fail?* Francis I. was against the development of industry, because industrialization leads to creation of factories, concentration of workers in towns, mainly in Vienna, and the concentration of ideas which are against absolutism. It was really important for Habsburgs to maintain the status quo in the society. The patent from 1802 Francis I. banned the construction of any factories in Vienna; Francis in fact did not even support the development of railways. His successor Ferdinand I. was popular but because of the health issue was not able to king. The industry revolution in Austro-Hungary started with the governance of Francis Joseph I. And the most interesting reason why the two kings in the 19th century were

not able to start with such needed reforms is that both were mentally retarded as the results of the marriages between close family (Acemoglu; Robinson, 2013, p. 213 – 245).

The industrialization in Austro-Hungary started in the fifties of 19th century. However, in Czech lands the industrialization started increasing dramatically in the second half of 19th century. To show some examples: 60 - 70 % of whole Austro-Hungarian industrial production came from Czech Countries, noticing that Czech Lands formed only 21 % of the whole Monarchy area (Cuhra, 2006, p. 29). All this led to massive movement of people from country to cities. The scholar reforms took place which meant the increasing number of people were able to read. People all of a sudden had free time because of the more sophisticated machines which shortened the time of production. To summarize - it was a perfect timing for the creation of mass, penny and tabloid press.

The beginning of the 20th century is again marked by a gradual transition to a post-industrial society with the development of communicative third sector groups and quaternary sector (Macháčová; Matěječek, 2002, p. 56). Quaternary is characterized by the emergence of a democratic and developed society. This period is also characterized by industrialization and urbanization. Prague, the capital of the Czech republic had 102 thousand inhabitants in 1830, a hundred years later it was 942,000 inhabitants (Horská; Maur; Musil; 2003, p. 197). The number of inhabitants of the Czech Countries exceeded five million in 1820 for the first time and ten million was reached in 1909 (Horská, 1996, p. 197). Overall, the population of the Czech Countries during the 19th century roughly doubled. For comparative illustration - the total population of United Kingdom between the years 1750 - 1850 tripled. In the nineties, the progress of the Czech nation was even faster. The last two decades before the First World War were one of

the most economically successful periods in the whole Czech modern history. The construction of a strong electrical industry, motorcycles, cars and locomotives and the first attempts to construct airplanes - all proving that the Czechs wanted to have the most technically advanced nations of Europe (Pokorný, 1996, p. 14).

Whit the changes in society the meaning of the terms changed

The changes in the society and in newspaper field brought the new meaning of terms: folk, mass and popular culture. Since industrialization culture can be reproduced thanks to the new technologies. Consequently, the ideas about the role of culture in the society were turned upside down.

The folk culture in industrialized Europe is in the opposition to mass culture. Folk culture belongs to pre-industrial period; the folk culture yet it was gradually replaced by consumerism. Mass culture is the secondary product of the industrial revolution and urbanization. Popular culture is part of mass culture because it is a mass one because it reaches the masses. The results of popular culture are products that are easy to understand. Popular culture in mass culture is not created by people but by producers who want to control people.

In the concept of three cultures (Folk, Mass and Popular) we can talk also about Popular, Penny and Tabloid Press. Each term has in English speaking countries its own representatives. However, there are slight differences between the meanings of these types of newspapers on the Czech territory. Therefore, I am going to use the Czech terms to avoid mixing the English development with the Czech one. I will point out the differences between those terms.

The Tabloid was not built in one day

The main goal of my study was to bring the knowledge about the

gradual development of a new type of the press. To accomplish it, it was necessary to choose the newspaper for deeper research. I selected titles on the basis of relevance in the media market, and also on the basis of scientist texts in media. I focused also on the key words that are mentioned in contemporary newspapers and publications such as: asfaltový, bulvár, bulvární, boulevardní, červený tisk, krejcarový, pikantní, plátek, skandalosní, senzacechtivý, šestákový, večerník. That brought me to some concrete titles which I had to test by the definition and criteria of Tabloid press such as low price, high circulations, focus on drama, action, entertainment, simplicity, sex crime, celebrities and scandals in order to catch the wider audience. Since not all the titles fitted all the categories, I realized that I was witnessing a phenomenon that I called gradual development of tabloid press and I characterized it by four stages.

1. Grajciarové noviny, midstage of party Tabloid Newspaper (1874 – 1912)
2. Illustrated Paper (1879 – 1914)¹
3. First Tabloid Evening Paper (1912 – 1925)
4. Spread of First republic Tabloid Newspaper (1926 – 1939)²

¹ The concept of Illustrated Newspapers which spread across Europe. In my opinion the newspapers with title that included the term ‘illustrated‘ fall in into this category. The first page has always an illustration with social rather than comical character.

² Since the topic of the workshop was Popular culture before First World War, this period is not described in this article.

First cheap political dailies

The first stage is a pre stage of Tabloid press when publishers understood that spread their newspapers' and opinions also by lowering prices. This period started in 70's of 19th Century and continued till the year 1912.



The titles *Lid*, *Obrana*, *Brousek* were party newspapers which tried to gain more voters via cheap reading. The titles had not existed for a long time, simply because a low price was not enough to attract a reader.

Grajiarové noviny can be translated as the Penny Press, but it was not the Penny Press as we know it from United Kingdom or United States. Therefore I choose

not to translate this first stage of the Tabloid Press into English. The common attributes were following: low price, the titles were sold for one or two grajciar, its content was mostly filled with party information and the number of scandals. On the contrary to its English or US counterpart the tales from red library were lacking. The publishers later realized that the readers can be attracted also by sensational, popular content but before the first attempt of Tabloid Press, the Publishers started with Illustrated Papers which had success in other countries.

Illustrated papers

The concept of Illustrated paper started to be very popular in the second half of 19th century in Europe. The first papers were published in United Kingdom (1842), Germany (1843), than in

Austria (1872) and also in Prague (1879).

The first attempt in Czech Countries with a name *Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt* was written in German, Nevertheless, the publication of Czech supplement came shortly afterwards. It brought to the Czech



market few primacies The content was totally different from all other newspapers, since it was mostly orientated towards scandals. It brought a new technology on the market – illustration, later on also photography. As the newspaper of German publisher the title did not find too many readers to survive, also because it was sold only in Prague.

The second Illustrated Paper was more successful – *Pražský*

Illustrovaný Kurýr, as the first paper in the country it brought the Sport on the last page. This later became a lay out mainly used in Tabloid Papers.

Tabloid Evening Papers

As I mentioned before the boom of Tabloid Papers in Czech Countries started mainly in First Republic (from 1918). However, the first evening papers with more scandalous, more



popular, more vivid content started its existence in the year 1912 in Austro - Hungary. What is attention-grabbing is that most of them were party newspapers. This was the time when the publisher understood that readers are not attracted only by price but also by content.

The evening paper targeted working people who would return home after a long working day and offered a light reading.

Social democrats started with *Večerník Práva lidu* in 1912, in the same year they started the existence *Večerní České Slovo* – most widespread evening newspaper. Evening *Narodní Politika* existed since the 19th century but only after the new competitors came out it changed its content and started to be more scandalous. This title was also the only independent one of all the tabloid papers in 20th century on Czech market. The last evening papers that started its publication before the First World War was *Večer* mainly focused on sport.

In the table bellow one can see the quantitative research of the content of each title in this period (the quantitative comparison of the anterior newspapers was notable because they were not issued at the same period and also its periodicity was different). The colorful site of the table shows the tabloid topics, while the white one gives you an idea about the quantitative representation of serious news topics.

Table 1: Number of news in each title during second week of may in 1912

	political news	domestic news	foreign news	announcement about decease	culture	economics	sport	label news	curiosities	accidents	murders	suicide	VIP news
2. nd week of may in 1912 in Pražský Illustrovaný Kurýr	9 %	20 %	14 %	1 %	7 %	5 %	1 %	8 %	5 %	14 %	2 %	2 %	2 %
2. nd week of may in 1912 in Večerník České slovo	9 %	10 %	11 %	1 %	5 %	15 %	14 %	8 %	6 %	13 %	2 %	4 %	1 %
2. nd week of may in 1912 in Večerník Práva lidu	6 %	13 %	14 %	0 %	13 %	5 %	0 %	11 %	13 %	20 %	1 %	3 %	0 %
2. nd week of may in 1912 in evening issue of Národní politika	4 %	40 %	15 %	0 %	2 %	4 %	3 %	10 %	8 %	10 %	1 %	2 %	1 %

As you can see the content was not strictly tabloid. Not even one title had the majority of tabloid news. Only *Večerník Práva lidu* informed mostly about accidents.

I introduced four cheap evening papers that have gained popularity among the masses and after the First World War were reinstated. In comparison with earlier penny political diaries, they brought more scandalous contents that were inspired by western neighbors.

Evening papers did not abandon policy news, but they have turned into a news program slander competitors using scandalous articles with sensational headlines.

To end I offer the table with prices and circulation of the papers.

Table 2:³ The situation in tabloid market between years 1874 - 1925

Grajiarové politické noviny, pre-stage of Tabloid Paper (1874 – 1912)			Illustrated Paper (1879 – 1914)			Evening Tabloid Paper (1912 – 1925)		
Name	Price	Circulation	Name	Price	Circulation	Name	Price	Circulation
<i>Brousek</i>	2 gr.	4000	<i>Illustrierte Prager Extrablatt</i>	3 gr.	1,2 - 6 000	<i>Večerník Práva lidu</i>	2 hal.	112 - 87 000
<i>Obrana</i>	2 gr.	?	<i>Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr</i>	6 hal.	15 - 26 000	<i>Večerní České slovo</i>	2 hal.	104 000
<i>Lid</i>	1 gr.	?				<i>Národní politika popoldňajšie vydanie</i>	2 hal.	39 - 45 000
						<i>Večer</i>	2 hal.	?

In the first stage of Tabloid Press the prices were lower than the prices of serious newspaper. However, the circulation was not higher. During the second stage of Tabloid Press the circulation was comparable to serious newspaper, even though the price was high due to new and expensive technologies for illustrations. In the third stage the circulation was much higher and prices lower, so the final stage of the Tabloid Paper was completed.

The development of Czech Tabloids has its uniqueness. Firstly, most of newspapers were published by political parties, the readers picked its titles according to their political affiliation (winning parties had the newspapers with the highest circulation) and not according the tabloidization.

You can find further information about all the studied titles with more quantitative analysis of its contents, comparisons and also another information regarding labels of tabloid papers or study of its reader and analysis of advertising, as far as the discussion of terminology of tabloid's character in my Ph.D. thesis (Dorčáková, 2015).

³ The numbers of circulation are different, they comes from free sources: 1. Labels, 2. Advertising catalogues, 3. Police archives

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- ACEMOGLU, D., and J. A. Robinson. (2012). *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity and Poverty*. 1st ed. New York: Crown.
- ADORNO, T. W. (2009). *Schéma masové kultury*. 1. vyd. Praha: OIKOYMENH.
- ALTICK, R. D. (1998). *The English common reader: a social history of the mass reading public, 1800-1900*. 2nd ed. Columbus: Ohio State University Press.
- ARENDDT, H. (1994). *Krize kultury: čtyři cvičení v politickém myšlení*. 1. vyd. Praha: Mladá fronta.
- BENJAMIN, W., and R., GREBENÍČKOVÁ. (1979). *Dílo a jeho zdroj*. 1. vyd. Praha: Odeon.
- BIRESSI, A., and H. NUNN. (2007). *The Tabloid Culture Reader*. Roehampton: Open University Press.
- BOURDIEU, P. (2010). *Pravidla umění: geneze a struktura literárního pole*. Vyd. 1. Brno: Host.
- CONBOY, M. (2002). *The press and the popular culture*. London: Thousand Oaks.
- DAHLGREN, P.; and C. SPARKS. (2000). *Journalism and popular culture*. London Thousand oaks, New Dehli: Sage publication, 2000.
- FIALOVÁ, L. (1995). *Dějiny obyvatelstva českých zemí*. Vyd. 1. Praha: Mladá fronta, 1996.
- FISKE, J. (1992). Popularity and the Politics of Information. In *Journalism and popular culture*. C. SPARKS and P.DAHLGREN. London , Thousand Oaks , New Dehli: Sage Publications.
- FISKE, J. (2011). *Understanding popular culture*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- HORSKÁ, P., E. MAUR, and J. MUSIL. (2002). *Zrod velkoměsta*. Praha: Paseka.
- JÖNSSON, A. M., and H. ÖRNEBRIG. (2008). *Tabloid Journalism*

and the public sphere: a historic perspective on tabloid journalism. In *The tabloid culture reader*. BIRESH, A. and H. NUNN. Maidenhead: Open University Press.

LENDEROVÁ, M, M. MACKOVÁ and T. JIRÁNEK. (2009). *Z dějin české každodennosti: život v 19. století*. Praha: Karolinum.

MACHÁČOVÁ, J and J. MATĚJEČEK. (2002). *Nástin sociálního vývoje českých zemí 1780–1914*. Opava: Slezské zemské muzeum.

MACHÁČOVÁ, J; and J. MATĚJEČEK. (2008). *Problémy obecné kultury v českých zemích 1781–1914*. Opava: Slezské muzeum.

McLACHLAN, S. and P. GOLDING. (1999). *Tabloidization in the British Press :a quantitative investigation into changes within British newspapers from 1952-1997*. Loughborough, Leicestershire: Information & Democracy Research Project, Dept. of Social Sciences, Loughborough University.

MOSSE, R. (1939). *Časopisecký katalog ČSR*. Praha: Rudolf Mosse.

NERONE, J. (1987) The mythology of the penny press. *Critical Studies in Media Communication*. 1987(4): 376-404.

POKORNÝ, J. (2003). *Lidová výchova na přelomu 19. a 20. století*. Vyd. 1. Praha: Karolinum.

SCHUDSON, M. (1978). *Discovering the news: a social history of american newspapers*. New York: Basic Books.

SPARKS, C. (2000). Popular journalism theories and practise. In *Journalism and popular culture*. P. DAHLGREN and C. SPARKS. London: Thousand Oaks.

STOREY, J. (1998). *An introduction to cultural theory and popular culture*. 2nd ed. Athens: University of Georgia.

ŠIMON, R. (1910). *Insertní katalog českých časopisů*. Praha: Politika.

TOMÁŠEK, L. (1930) *Ze zákulisí bulvárního tisku*. Praha: nákladem vlastním.

WILLIAMS, R. (1983). *Culture and society 1780-1950*. New York:

Columbia University Press.

ANALYSED PAPERS

Brousek. Praha: J.S. Skrejšovský, 1874, 1876.

Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt. Praha: B. Brandeis, 1879 - 1881.

Lid: časopis ujařmených. Praha: Emil Špatný, 1906, 1912.

Obrana. Praha: K.V. Toužimský, 1874, 1876.

Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr. Praha: Fr. Hovorka, 1901, 1912.

Pražský večerník. Praha: Českomoravská akciová tiskárna, 1912.

Večer: lidový deník. Praha: Roln. tiskárna, 1912.

Večerník Českého Slovo. Praha: Melantrich, 1912.

DIPLOMA THESIS:

DORČÁKOVÁ, J. (2010). *Počátky senzacechtivého tisku v českých zemích*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze.

HEJLÍK, L. (1976). *České večerníky v druhém desetiletí ČSR*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze.

HODAČ, J. (1971). *Přístupy k problematice kriminality a odraz specifických rysů zločinnosti v období hospodářské krize: (Rudé právo, Rudý večerník a Večerní České slovo)*. . Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze.

KOVAŘÍK, M. (1971). *Diference pojetí kriminální tematiky v pokrokovém a buržoazním tisku na sklonku dvacátých let : (Rudé právo, Rudý večerník, Právo lidu, České slovo a jejich večerníky, A-Zet)*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze. RAUS, J. (1965). *České buržoazní večerníky v prvním desetiletí ČSR*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova v Praze.

DISERTATION THESIS:

DORČÁKOVÁ, J. (2015). *Bulvárne noviny v premenách českej spoločnosti*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.

MACHEK, J. (2012). *Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr. Masový tisk jako obraz světa obyčejných lidí*. Praha: Univerzita Karlova.

ARCHIVE FILES:

NATIONAL ARCHIVE:

folder PP 1, JAF 874/2, no. 140 (1876-1881), Illustrierte Wienerische Extrablatt 21/3, krabice 791 - 792 (783: P14/2-3)

folder Melantrich, box: 162, signature: 1 složka Česká demokracie

folder Melantrich, box. 102, signature: Gratulace k půlmil. Nákladu

folder Melantrich, box: 90, signature: Belinograf

folder PŘ II – OD, box 306, signature: Tisk 235/1 Večerník České slovo

folder PŘ II – ODD, box: 130, signature: Tisk 81/6 Večer; box 306, signature: Tisk 235/4 Večer

folder PŘ II – OD, box: 228 signature: Tisk 120/2 Expres; signature: Tisk 120/2 – 2a Expres

folder PŘ II – OD, box: 271 signature: Tisk 186/2a Polední list

CZECH REGIONAL ARCHIVE:

folder Pr I 635/1914, box 1207, no. 1 – 15

folder Pr I 396/1914, box 1204, no. 1 – 15

folder Pr I 335/1914 box 1203, no. 1 – 11

folder, Pr I 653/1914, box 1207, no. 1 – 19