

THE EARLY POPULAR PRESS AND ITS COMMON READERS IN *FIN-DE-SIÈCLE* PRAGUE ¹

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Introduction

This chapter focuses on the emerging Czech popular press in the period of rapid urbanisation and population movement at the turn of the 20th century, and on the experience of its readers, who found themselves caught between their traditional, rural mindset and the modernity of the city. The newcomers to urban areas needed a replacement for their oral traditions of sharing news and entertainment and were searching for a different cultural identity. The sensational illustrated press became not only a guide to life in the new environment, but helped readers to develop a shared sense of urban selfhood.² The discussion that follows examines the specific way the Czech sensational press blended traditional folk culture with modern urban popular culture to attract its new audience. The key examples include *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt* (1879-1882), which was influenced by early print culture, such as murder ballads and popular fiction; and *Pražský Illustrovaný Kurýr* (*Prague Illustrated Courier*) (1893-1918) which, unlike other contemporary Central European sensational press publications, positioned itself between the rural and the metropolitan, the traditional and the modern. The latter will be discussed through analysis of its content as well as its illustrations, and by undertaking a comparison with other Central European press publications.

Although educated Czechs welcomed the arrival of technological innovation in Prague in the late 19th century, the nationalist and mostly conservative élite was wary of foreign intellectual and cultural influences, and particularly hostile to urban popular culture represented by the sensational press. This is reflected in the words of the editor of the democratic weekly, *Pochodeň* (*Flambeau*), who characterised the *Courier* as a '[...] paper that ... can satisfy only perverted people, who are aroused by horrible daubs depicting various murders and spectacles in gaudy manners and whose thirst for sensation could only be satiated only this way.'³

According to Peter Fritzsche, the crisis of cultural authority precipitated by modernity resulted in the liberal bourgeoisie losing its dominance over accepted moral values, and over ideas on the future of society.⁴ Their reaction to this loss of cultural authority was to rail - like the editor of *Pochodeň* - against the predominantly urban mass culture, which, instead of encouraging the wider population to subscribe to approved bourgeois ideals, offered them an unauthorized sensational stream of information, ideas and interpretations with no apparent hierarchy of values.⁵ Crucially, events that were considered important by élite culture and the serious press were replaced by sensationalism. Following earlier examples from abroad, popular newspapers headlined crime, affairs and gossip while the political or economic events valued by the serious press were relegated to inside pages and submerged among short telegraph messages. Political articles and speeches were rather rejected. The sensational press also ceased to promote self-improvement and focused on entertainment and popular culture rather than 'high art'.

Because of its increasing importance in this critical period of change, the emerging popular press can fruitfully be analysed both for its social influence and as a marker of modern Czech urban experience. Its significance is reinforced further because of the rarity of sources such as diaries and memoirs referring directly to the life of lower class urban migrants - a situation which differs from the United Kingdom, as Michelle Deininger and Christopher Ferguson show in their chapters. Even official documents of the period often omitted discussion of lower class life, whereas popular culture, although produced by the élites, addressed ordinary people and offered them a set of meanings relevant to their lives. This chapter therefore explores further the origin of the Czech popular press, how it became representative of the masses, and why it was so attractive to the urban newcomers.

Central European urbanisation in the 19th century and the transformation of society

Martin Conboy has argued that the development of printed materials played a crucial part in the transition from pre-capitalist folk culture to modern popular culture.⁶ Furthermore, the commercial imperative of print culture encouraged entrepreneurial initiatives to win lower class audiences by appealing to widely held traditional beliefs and opinions within an environment increasingly shaped by key features of urban life: materialism, mechanisation, new forms of work, social mobility, and greater freedom and scope for entertainment. The success of popular culture and its capacity to speak to ordinary people was thus bound up with

its capacity to incorporate elements of tradition into the new cultural environment, and the press was particularly effective in achieving this. As people moved from the countryside to the city, they were forced to acquire new behavioural patterns, to adapt to different forms of social organisation, and to confront unfamiliar ways of thinking and a new range of experiences. In these circumstances, the cultural influence of the cities increased while that of the provinces and rural areas declined.⁷

Prague's rapid urban population growth mirrored that of other major European cities in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1840s, urban dwellers comprised only one fifth of the society of the Czech lands⁸; in 1880 this reached one third, and in 1910 almost 50 percent. In the most intensive phase, the urban population doubled between 1869 and 1930.⁹ The metropolitan area of Prague (which, until 1918, was split into several municipalities) saw a record population rise of 25.7 percent during the 1890s.¹⁰ In 1900, sixty percent of the Prague metropolitan population had been born outside the area, but 95 percent came from Bohemia and only 2 percent from Moravia and Silesia. Hence, Prague functioned as migration destination for its region only because the German speaking population of Bohemia tended to move increasingly to Vienna.¹¹ The most rapid growth was to be observed in the suburbs, where the majority of incomers settled in newly constructed and mostly small flats.¹² These reflected the living standards not only of newcomers but of the population as a whole – three quarters of Prague households had no servants. Prague had a relatively high number of state and land officials, but also a large percentage of industrial workers, petty artisans, subaltern clerks and unskilled staff.¹³ On their arrival in the city, many of the latter shared one rented room with the whole family and possibly also with apprentices.¹⁴ The most skilled, such as iron workers, rollers, printers and typesetters, usually occupied a whole flat, including a kitchen and one room.¹⁵ These, then, were the people whom the popular press sought as an audience; and as they increasingly benefited from rising standards of education, better economic prospects and new possibilities for political involvement, they soon became targets for existing as well as newly formed political parties who used the new mass media as an ideal platform to capture support amongst the expanding electorate. As had happened earlier elsewhere, the cultural dominance of the upper class was gradually eroded with the increase of commercially produced and circulated cheap books, newspapers and magazines which had to be circulated on a mass scale to guarantee profit. Publishers therefore adapted the content, form and political stance of their productions to suit ordinary people, who had

minimal experience of élite culture. Thus, print culture itself ceased to belong exclusively to the élites and gradually became accessible to a broader audience.

The Cheap sensational press

The growth of the sensational press, especially in its illustrated variants, reflects this shift from a political press designed for specific educated readers to urban newspapers providing the general public with information and entertainment. In the 1830s in New York, *The Sun* had been launched as the first penny paper and its immediate success encouraged other publishers to follow its example. In Central Europe, Vienna was a pioneer in developing a cheap illustrated paper in the 1870s with *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, and this served as a model for the Czech publishers to launch their own illustrated newspaper. (The popularity and commercial rewards of the penny press are reflected in the fact that, after the turn of the century, this type of publication was even launched in the Galician local metropolis, Cracow.)

The penny press covered its production costs by advertising: in the *Prague Illustrated Courier*, the most common advertisements were for books and magazines, food and drink, clothes and fabrics, and medical services. Illustrations became the main selling feature of the sensational press, as they were intelligible to less literate readers and also appealed to those from the lower strata of the population, who had never seen anything like them. The engravings themselves followed the conventions and iconography of élite culture, but in a less elaborated, simplified form.¹⁶ The most frequent title illustrations depicted various crimes, police actions, criminals and their victims. These account for about one fifth of all the illustrations. Another fifth can be described as representations of miscellaneous curiosities and another fifth show diverse disasters and accidents. Other popular subjects include homicides and suicides which constitute about 15 percent of the illustrations, and more serious pictures of festivities, processions and parliamentary sessions. Portraits, however, formed only about 8 percent of all cover illustrations.¹⁷

In Prague, the first successful illustrated daily went on sale in 1893 under the name of *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr* (*Prague Illustrated Courier*). By this stage Prague's economic development had reached the point at which the necessary conditions to sustain a cheap press - a critical mass of urban dwellers, with enough purchasing power and sufficient leisure time to read newspapers - had been achieved. This situation contrasts with the circumstances that had led to the collapse of *The Courier*'s earlier unsuccessful antecedents. Between 1874 and

1879, for example, the Czech National Conservative Party published a non-illustrated, but popular and sensational daily *Brousek* (*Whetstone*). Although it had a circulation twice as high as that of the existing serious press, like the publication of its rival party *Obrana* (*Defence*), it had to be subsidized by its publisher. A similar situation arose later when a private publisher tried to break into the market. These cases illustrate the indispensable importance of the right social and economic conditions for the cheap press to become commercially successful.

Regular news for almanac readers

The first illustrated Prague-based newspaper was the *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt*, published by J. B. Brandeis between 1879 and 1882. Initially published in German, the newspaper was most likely aimed at the German and Czech middle and upper class residents of the city, who were accustomed to reading in German (the publication also included advertisements for Czech theatre performances).¹⁸ The majority of cover illustrations depicted significant residents of Prague or members of the Austrian emperor's court. However, in January 1881, a markedly more sensational Czech supplement was added, most likely aimed at the lower, predominantly Czech speaking, classes. This Czech supplement was rather unusual and entirely atypical for a newspaper of the time.

Whilst it was a newspaper in form it was not so in its content, which was more closely related to productions of early print culture such as chap books and almanacs, or prints of murder ballads than to the composition of a modern urban newspaper. It followed the formal pattern of the *Illustriertes Wiener Extrablatt*, which inspired the Czech publisher not only by its concept and name, but also by its graphic layout. This is most clearly visible in the design of its cover pages, where the main article accompanied by a large illustration was particularly controversial, given that in Austria selling newspapers on the street was formally illegal. The cover stories were often fantastic and thrilling tales disguised as regular news with headlines such as '*Heartbreaking aerial ride*' (a story about a horse drawn carriage ride through the air), '*Fight in the air*' (a story about a hero's flight using bird-like wings), or '*Crucified by madmen*', referring to a story about a host who was nearly killed by his guests infected with rabies. The headline stories started with deliberately vague information about dates and times, and featured protagonists with names of equally uncertain geographical origin (e.g. Broven, Jar, Taner, Taller, Tegler, Seran, Velvik), which were typical features of period fiction.

Sometimes, a story would begin by introducing a real time and place, as in the article ‘*Dreadful Night*’, which carries the subtitle: ‘(*The Latest Event in the Church of Skeletons in Sedlec /Kutná Hora*)’¹⁹. It then makes a more vague reference to ‘three students well-known in their county’²⁰ (although the county is not named) who went on holiday and spent a dreadful night in the ossuary in Kutná Hora. Finally the article, ends on even more uncertain terms, pushing the story back into the indefinite, long ago past: ‘That well-meaning sacristan had, to this day no idea what had really happened in the church and if a good friend of our paper Mr Kaftan, now living in Vienna, had not told us the story, we would have never found out.’²¹ Editors also often compromised the previously alleged novelty and originality of their news items, when, at their conclusion, they would state a source for it (e.g. ‘a certain American newspaper’²² in the case of an article that began as story about well-known inhabitant of ‘our’ town); or they might even call into question the truthfulness of the entire story. Nevertheless these texts were supposed to be taken as real news, and were published without attribution, as was customary for news articles of the period. Fictional contributions, on the other hand, had designated authors whose names were found inside each issue of the *Prager Extrablatt*.

Even the cover illustrations of the Prague paper were different to those of the *Wiener Extrablatt* and other illustrated newspapers of the period. Although both were printed using engraving technique (used for copying line drawing and photography) those in the *Prager Extrablatt* seemed to imitate the style of the less sophisticated woodcut illustrations to be found in almanacs and chapbooks. The specific character of the cover illustrations can be seen in the following example of the cover page of the *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt* from 7th of July 1881 (the headline for the story is: ‘Cannibals!’).

Editors also employed seemingly archaic language reminiscent of traditional chapbooks that had been reprinted without changes for centuries. This is evidence of their efforts to address the cultural habits and rural origins of their lower class readers, whom they supposed to be more accustomed to the older forms of printed material familiar in the countryside where they had previously lived, and not yet ready to embrace the format of the modern sensational newspapers. This conservatism of the Prague based readership has also been observed by Martin Sekera,²³ who also highlights the rejection of a new method of reproduction – zincography - introduced in the popular magazine *Květy* (*Flowers*) in the 1860s.

Číslo 128. Ročník III.

Priloha k časopisu V Praze 7. července 1881.

Redakce
a
administrace
Jindřišská ulice číslo 8. nové
I. patro.

Čerstvé zprávy
z města a venkova se přijí-
mají a honorují.

Extrablatt.

Jednotlivá čísla 3 kr.

Vychází
v neděli a ve čtvrtek
vždy o šesté hodině
ránní.

Inzeráty
účtují se co nejlevněji a při
větších zakázkách se účích
zdarma zhotovují.

Lidožrouti!



Nejděvičejší fantazie není s to vymyslet
hrůznějšího děje, nežli onen jest, který se to-
hoto téhodne udál.

Pojednou jakoby začarování, zmizelo asi
před měsícem 6 mladých mužů z města, a
ačkoli policie a úzkostliví příbuzní všechny
možné kouty vysílali, aby zmizelé vypátraly,
přec nechtělo se to nijakým způsobem zdati.
Avšak minulou neděli mělo být jinak. Pověst
roznesla se městem, že zmizelí jsou nalezeni.
Pověst tato nelhala. Oni zmizelí byli skutečně
nalezeni, avšak v jakém stavu!

Minulou neděli totiž časně z rána šel
hajný Dittmar lesem, který panství Salselskému
náleží. Tu pojednou musil kroky své zasta-
viti, neboť přišel k místu hustým křovinám po-
rostlému. I zdálo se mu, když tak stál a
rady si nevzděl, kam se má obrátiti, že ze
země zavznívají k němu bolestné hlasy. Zůstal
státi a naslouchal. V skutku se nemýlil ve-

lice, neboť bolestné hlasy byly určitějšími.
Hajný se nahnul nad křoviny a volal: „Kdo
jsi nešťastníče, který v srdci země sténáš a
naříkáš? Rej jak byh ti pomohl!“ Chvilu na
to panovalo ticho, posváté, hrobové ticho,
avšak brzy opakovaly se tytéž hlasy, po nich
následovaly bolestné vzdechy a kvílení.

„Pro Bůh! kdo to asi jest?“ myslil hajný
a přemýšlel, jakým způsobem by možno bylo
pod zemí se dostat a ubohým ku pomoci
přispěti.

Avšak čím více se namáhal, tím nesnáze
mu bylo z tohoto labyrintu vyvážniti. „Zde
mé síly nevystačí,“ pravil k sobě bodrý muž a
spěchal kvapně k vesnici, aby představenstvo a
orgány bezpečnosti o události té zpravil.

Za hodinu bylo několik mužů na nohou,
kteří lopatami a motykami ozbrojeni k místu
spěchali, aby vrstvu země odhalili. Práce byla
namáhavá, poněvadž daleko rozvětvené křoviny

terpve odstraněny býti musily. Avšak lidé pra-
covali ustavičně a tak se stalo, že v krátké od-
straněno bylo křoví. Tu na úpatí starého dubu
viděti bylo lze zamřížované okno, kterým vzduch
a světlo do podzemní prostory vnikaly.

Jeden z dělníků vzal nyní provaz, upevnil
naň kamen a zkoušel hloubku podzemní pro-
pasti. Obnášela tři metry. Odstraněna také
mříž a nyní jak se spustiti dolů? Provaz oto-
čen okolo dubu, muž odvážný se ho chopil a
již již byl dole. Nahmatl tu něco živého a jak
jedovatým ještěrem uštknut odskočil — neboť
dotknul se ledového obličej zsmalé mrtvoly.
Muži nahoře rozžali smolnice a svítili dolů. Dě-
lník, který dole, dlel uhlídal tu něco strašlivého.
Nie méně než pět osob jako vosk bledých,
ztrhaných obličejů se zapadlými očima tu leželo
majíce hluboké rány, které tomu nasvědčovaly,
jakoby zuby nějakého dravého zvířete to byly
způsobily.

Pražské demonstrace a jejich následky, str. 2.

Picture 1: Cover page of the *Illustrirtes Prager Extrablatt*, 7th of July 1881. Author's collection.

Thus, the publisher of *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt* was, on the one hand, inspired by the modern sensational illustrated press and eager to imitate its techniques, but on the other hand, he understood the need to temper these innovations to the needs of a readership who were still insufficiently acculturated into their new environment to comprehend and feel at ease in urban popular culture. He assumed the population of Prague to be unprepared to read only about everyday events from around the world and therefore offered them a compromised blend of traditional folk and modern urban culture. This blend included fantastic stories instead of fresh news, a traditional format of graphic representation instead of a 'realistic' depiction of events, and an old-fashioned form of written language instead of a written variant of the language of contemporary everyday speech. Yet although the circulation of *Extrablatt* was considerable (it came second in Prague and accounted for two thirds of all newspaper sales ²⁴), this does not appear to have been enough to make the business profitable. The publisher of *Extrablatt* tried to promote the newspaper by promising attractive and tempting serial fiction stories such as a translation of Émile Zola's novel *Nana*, or a novel about the arsonist who destroyed the National Theatre only few days after the fire took place. Often, however, these promises were not kept. Other promotional attempts included inviting the reportedly famous mesmerist, Hansen, to present a private performance 'for supporters and friends of the newspaper'²⁵. Compared to the later publication, *The Courier*, the *Extrablatt* included markedly less advertising, possibly because of its numerous lower class readers who were not considered sufficiently affluent to be consumers of goods and services.

Prague citizens and the *Illustrated Courier*

Pražský Illustrovaný Kurýr (*Prague Illustrated Courier*), published between in 1893-1918, can be regarded as the first successful Czech illustrated daily newspaper. It was established as a picture supplement to *Hlas národa* (*Voice of the Nation*), the official newspaper of the Staročeská strana (Czech National Conservative Party), and, in contrast to the *Prague Extrablatt*, was similar to its illustrated sensational press counterparts in Vienna or Berlin.²⁶ The *Courier* was originally launched in order to improve the circulation of the main paper as the publisher was suffering economic hardship, but due to its immediate success it was produced as a separate, independent publication from the beginning of 1893 onwards. The *Courier* cannot be described as a strictly partisan publication, such as the *Voice of the Nation*, although it mostly supported the point of view of Czech nationalists who were

opposed to Germans and to social-democratic policies rather than agitating against rival Czech political parties.

Like other Central European press publications of its kind, the *Courier* was aimed at new readers from the lower classes rather than existing readers of serious newspapers. As I have shown elsewhere,²⁷ its typical reader would have come from a family of small artisans, retailers, state employees, clerks, or skilled workers. The news reports were tailored to such people, covering, for example, topics to do with trade associations, changes affecting clerks, officials and some skilled workers. Analysis of the paper's advertisements – particularly the small ads – confirms the low social status of many of the readers, but there is also evidence of an appeal to the middle-class aspirations of better paid skilled workers and artisans.

The key distinguishing mark of the *Courier* was its large cover illustrations, often taking up the whole page, and the popularity and appeal of these are shown in grotesque and unexpected way through a court report from a rival daily paper, *Národní politika* (*National Policy*). Recording the case of a 19 year old accountant who shot and wounded his beloved in a suburban forest, the report continues:

He left for Prague, visited the music hall *Varieté* and then he messed around in cafés. He waited for the morning issue of the '*Illustrated Courier*'. There, he found a report of his crime but he looked in vain for an illustration of the event. Disappointed, he came to the police station to denounce himself.²⁸

The paper's content included references to sensations, spectacles and important personalities, as well as serialised fiction and picture riddles. In effect, therefore, it adapted many aspects of the content of the daily bourgeois press, adding a twist of sensationalism and drama to subjects such as government policy and social commentary to engage the attention of its lower middle- and upper working-class readers. Editors also shaped their readers' understanding of the meaning of particular news items by mythologizing them. For example, rather than formally reporting events, news items were framed and categorised as tragedies, horror stories or comedies by accentuating the good and the evil. This style of reporting was used by other newspapers of the period, but the *Courier's* editors employed it by far the most often and with particular extravagance, as the following example taken from a report of events during a parliamentary session shows:

[MP Wolf] roared with his shrilly annoying and repugnant voice. Others guffawed in the face of prince Lobkovic with impudent mockery. German MPs remained close together, heckled and behaved like rascals indeed.²⁹

The commentaries and captions linked to title illustrations were often given tragic overtones or evoked ideas of an unfortunate shocking event, as the next example demonstrates:

A cruel, horrible love drama. So curious and unusual that we look in vain in the rich chronicle for an example quite like it. Something dreadful is emanating from this picture, which announces that fate has chosen a strange way to plan its attack.³⁰

Wit and humour, too, were used on occasion. Thus, in an article about conflict between tenants in a tenement house and a poisoned cat found in the courtyard there is a witty, colloquial, pun that can be roughly translated as ‘Amina [the name of the cat] ceased to be Amina’.³¹ But when comedy was used in reports on the regular clashes between groups of social and national democrats, it was commonly criticised by other newspapers for trivialising things that were important, as can be seen in this expression of anger by young leftist activists: ‘*At the same time we condemn the illustrated courier for cheaply sensationalising recent serious events*’³².

The *Prague Illustrated Courier* was also functioned as a platform for promoting a sense of the life shared by the residents of the city. It did this on the one hand by publishing detailed reports of mundane local news as well as sensational events. There were accounts of small injuries, street accidents, misfortunes, and petty crimes; reports about associations and from entertainment venues like popular theatres and music halls; and listings of funerals, bankruptcies and voluntary contributions. On the other hand, the paper assisted in shaping the collective imagination by including news of ‘serious’ events not only in Prague, but from the rest of world. As these were not separated out within the layout of the paper, they created a kind of counterpoint to the previously mentioned examples of urban everyday life. Nevertheless, even serious political news was not spared from being depicted as spectacle and

was placed alongside reports of bloody crimes, disasters, and riots. Reports from parliament were a favourite, as the Czech and German nationalist MPs regularly launched into quarrels and brawls, which the *Courier* anticipated before the session had even started, as in the following example:

A Czech MP seized him and threw him off the table into a row of chairs. MP Mayer rose again and ran, with his fists clenched, amongst the Czech MPs, followed by MPs dr. Herold from Most and nobleman Dr. Kriegelstein and nobleman Stransky [...] MP Schreiter **appeared with a piece of wood amongst the German MPs, but one of the Czech deputies pounced on him and snatched the piece of wood with such violence that MP Schreiter's finger was ripped apart [sic] by a splinter.** Ceaseless whistling and pounding on tables.³³

As events like these were a regular occurrence, they fitted easily into the mosaic of everyday reports of urban life.

Although the *Courier's* success proved to be limited and temporary - it is thought to have reached its highest market share in 1898 and was in decline after 1908,³⁴ the scale of its readership confirms that during a particular period its aim and content suited its readers, who chose it as their main means to access information on their new environment as well as to gain information about the wider world.

Prague as a big neighbourhood

In this way, therefore, the popular press reflects the dialogue between tradition and modernisation in turn-of-the century Prague. Compared to the sensational press of other Central European cities, the *Courier* and other examples of the Prague-based press offered their readers a less exclusively metropolitan view of life in the rest of the world. On the contrary, the extensive and specific detail with which the editors of the *Courier* reported on local events can be read as a surviving remnant of the oral transmission of news in rural communities, as the following example, which appeared under the heading, 'Accidents', suggests:

Yesterday, Anna Řadová, the 59 year old wife of a mill worker in Klecany, was picking plums in order to make dumplings. She fell from the ladder and broke her arm.

Constable Václav Melichar, who was picking walnuts, endured a similar injury. He fell from tree and injured himself. –Yesterday, a 14 years old student Jindřich Fehrer from Ústí n. L., living in Jungmann street in Karlín, broke his leg on the playground.³⁵

This kind of reporting on persons known to the majority of the readers living in small area was a standard feature of the provincial press, and may be compared with the reports of ‘Aunt Maria’ in the *South Wales Star* discussed by Michelle Deininger. It is also highlights a significant contrast with the impersonality of metropolitan life.

The persistence of reports in this style in the Prague press may be understood as a sign that the largest part of the population continued to perceive their surroundings and their own lives primarily as if they were located in a small town, or even in the countryside, rather than identifying themselves with the anonymity of city life³⁶. It appears to be as a result of this mentality that the kind of detailed and personal news typical of the provincial press continued to be so important for the *Courier* readers in Prague. As Michel de Certeau noted, memories which interconnect dwellers with their places, are personal, and may be of little interest to anyone else, but they provide a neighbourhood with character.³⁷ We can thus think of *Fin de siècle* Prague as one large neighbourhood in the eyes of its inhabitants which they found represented in the *Courier*. As the suburbs of Prague grew, becoming in themselves major population centres, and as opportunities for gossip and the exchange of information in markets or at public pumps and fountains declined for increasing numbers of people, the *Courier* and other papers provided an alternative means of preserving the sense of a neighbourhood community.

This contrasts with the practices of the press in cities such as Berlin or Vienna where ordinary citizens were only mentioned by name if they had accomplished some extraordinary deed or suffered a tragedy, and where everyday news reports were reserved for the likes of prominent residents and significant court or theatre celebrities. In time, however, even in Prague news coverage increasingly concentrated on events and individuals in the city and its suburbs, and less attention was paid to reports from the rest of Bohemia and Moravia. This development is indicative of the declining interest of the former newcomers to the city in their places of origin, and of the growing strength of their ties to the urban community in which

they were now living. Places where the *Courier* and other illustrated popular press were displayed and sold became gathering points for people keen to discuss the lurid illustrations and the latest news whether from home or abroad. For the crowds who regularly met in this way, the newspaper was an important agent in sustaining a sense of community because it provided a focus for people to share their interests and concerns. As one of the illustrators remembered³⁸, the latest issue of the *Courier* with its large title illustration of some kind of disaster or murder outshone other newspaper titles and Prague citizens would look curiously at it and start a discussion with others who were on their way to work. Thus, the *Courier* is an important example of a paper whose editorial policy was based on a shrewd understanding of its readers' expectations and habits in a period of cultural change, and which found an effective way of satisfying these through a skilful combination of traditional and modern news reporting.

Nationalist rather than inter-urban tendencies

According to research undertaken by Peter Fritzsche³⁹ and Nathaniel D. Wood⁴⁰, the popular press in Berlin and Cracow became an important guide to life in the city as it helped its readers to recognise themselves as a part of a larger metropolitan public. Popular urban newspapers were so much favoured by their metropolitan readers that they completely overtook their more serious competitors, including the socialist press. Illustrated newspapers were simultaneously a local as well as an inter-urban phenomenon. Their mix of local news and foreign spectacles was also part of an international network of sharing news and sensational stories. Whilst the depiction of metropolitan culture itself was interpreted variously in different cities, their citizens nevertheless read the same stories whilst performing the same urban rituals such as sitting in cafés, travelling by tramway or promenading in the streets. Although the inhabitants of rather provincial Central European cities such as Prague or Cracow had only limited possibilities to sample the more exotic and extreme experiences and sensations associated with metropolitan centres such as Paris or Berlin, their daily papers shared enough common ground with the French and German press to stimulate Czechs' interest in stories from such very different locations. As a consequence, Central European urban readers felt themselves to be part of a wider inter-urban network of news as well as members of a specific city, and they consciously began to differentiate themselves from their rural neighbours. Moreover, they felt that their self-consciously urban identity linked them to modern city-dwellers everywhere, and was different from their sense of local or national

identity. This particular awareness of a common urban identity was, according to Wood, stronger than the developing attraction of nationalism, even in the case of the provincial metropolis Cracow which was significantly smaller than Prague.⁴¹ As Woods notes, 'Even in an era of intense nationalism, the popular press and its average readers were more concerned on a daily basis with urban issues rather than national ones.'⁴²

However, analysing the content of *Courier*, we can see a rather different picture. Whilst there was less interest in foreign news and fewer images of metropolitan life in its columns, there was a significant interest in politics and especially in militant nationalism. The rhetoric of the paper was strongly nationalistic, and the German population was described as the enemy. This played to the prejudices of many of its Prague readers, as a significant section of Prague citizens, ranging from apprentices and students through to workers, small artisans and traders (i.e. typical *Courier* readers), regularly took part in nationalist riots.⁴³ National identity was a major preoccupation of these activists, and it probably overshadowed their awareness of or interest in a more inclusive inter-urban identity of the kind mentioned above. Instead, a strong sense of nationhood, shared by the Czech rural population, fuelled the agenda in the nationalist fight against the Germans in their midst. The significance of nationalist concerns can be observed in the regular and detailed reporting of national and language-related injustices caused by the Germans (and, by implication, in the silencing or glorification of those injustices perpetrated by Czechs). These issues prompted nationalist rallies and outbreaks of violence incited by a sense of solidarity with the Czech population living in areas with a German majority (e.g. Sudetenland and Vienna). A reserved attitude against this frantic nationalism was to be found in the social-democratic newspaper *Právo lidu* (*People's right*) only. Maybe part of the *Právo*'s success – which is in contrast to other Central European cities where the socialist partisan press lost working class readers to the sensational press, can also be attributed to intensified interest in political agenda (related to nationalist rivalry) of Prague newspaper readers better met by partisan press.

Conclusion

At the turn of the 20th century, the sensational pictorial press was the main feature of Central European urban popular culture. Its emergence was related to the formation of new urban areas, and especially to the rapid growth of metropolitan centres. During the period of the most rapid urbanisation, which was inseparably linked to the advance of industrialisation,

a substantial stream of newcomers from rural areas came to the cities to find a better place to live with greater employment opportunities, higher wages and more scope for entertainment. The move from the countryside to the inner city or the suburbs necessitated the migrants' discovery of a culture that differed from that of their rural origins. Sensational illustrated newspapers helped them with this by acting not only as guides to life in the new environment but also through assisting their readers in developing a shared sense of urban identity. Their success in doing so derived from the Central European publishers' ability to adapt global patterns found in successful mass daily press to address their local audience's specific beliefs, values and desires. In the case of the Prague-based popular press, this involved modifying the newspapers' content so that it combined elements of the rural with the metropolitan, and of the traditional with the modern. The process was further complicated, as the example of *Pražský Illustrovaný Kurýr* shows, because editors also had to compromise the typically inter-urban character of illustrated daily papers to retain readers whose top priority had become the narrower concerns of Czech nationalism.

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² The role of local press as a moral guardian of the of the urban community is discussed in Michelle Deininger's chapter.

³ *Pochodeň*, 14. July 1914, p.2.

⁴ P. Fritzche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 185.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁶ Martin Conboy, *The Press and Popular Culture* (London: Sage, 2002), pp. 23-25. Conboy's work builds on Peter Burke, *Lidová kultura v raně novověké Evropě* (Praha: Argo, 2005).

⁷ P. Horská, E. Maur and J. Musil, *Zrod Velkoměsta: Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa* (Praha, Litomyšl: Paseka, 2002), pp. 8, 11.

⁸ I use the common term Czech lands to describe the area of today's Czech republic, former parts of the Austro-Hungarian empire - Kingdom of Bohemia, Margraviate of Moravia and major part of Austrian Silesia.

⁹ Horská, Maur and Musil, *Zrod Velkoměsta: Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, pp. 197-202, 220.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 201.

¹¹ G. B. Cohen, 'Society and Culture in Prague, Vienna, and Budapest in the Late Nineteenth Century', *East European Quarterly*, 20:4 (1986), pp. 467-484, on p. 469.

¹² L. Fialová et al., *Dějiny obyvatelstva českých zemí* (Praha: Mladá Fronta, 1996), p. 397.

¹³ Horská, Maur and Musil, *Zrod Velkoměsta: Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, pp. 206, 7.

¹⁴ Macháčová and Matějček, *Nástin sociálního vývoje českých zemí 1780 – 1914*, p. 428.

¹⁵ Horská, Maur and Musil, *Zrod Velkoměsta: Urbanizace českých zemí a Evropa*, p. 223.

¹⁶ P. Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture: 1790-1860*, p. 43.

¹⁷ J. Machek, 'Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr. Masový tisk jako obraz světa obyčejných lidí' (Dissertation Thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2012), p. 168.

¹⁸ The Prague German population was predominantly of middle and higher class. The lower class was predominantly Czech, and there was only a gradual growth of higher class families using Czech as a public language during the 19th century.

¹⁹ There is a famous baroque ossuary in Sedlec near Kutná Hora.

²⁰ 'Strašlivá noc', *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt*, 21 July 1881, p. 1.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²² 'Boj ve vzduchu', *Illustriertes Prager Extrablatt*, 10 July 1881, p. 2.

²³ M. Sekera, 'Podíl Grégrů na rozvoji novinářství a politické publicistiky', in M. Řepa and P. Vošahlíková (eds.), *Bratři Grégrové a česká společnost v druhé polovině 19. století* (Praha: Eduard Grégr a syn), pp. 29-37, on p. 31.

²⁴ J. Dorčáková, 'Počátky senzacechtivého tisku v českých zemích' (Masters Thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2010), p. 68.

²⁵ *Národní listy*, 28 February 1880, p. 4.

²⁶ The (Czech) National party was established in 1848 as the first Czech political party. After the secession of the Young Czechs (National Liberal Party), it was later distinguished as the Czech National Conservative Party and gradually lost its influence as well as seats in the Imperial Council after the 1891 election. However, because of a Census suffrage in the Bohemian Diet as well as in the Prague municipality, the Old Czech Party still played a certain role in local policy-making since it was the party of the Czech oriented nobility, the most significant landowners and the bourgeoisie

²⁷ J. Machek, 'Pražský ilustrovaný kurýr. Masový tisk jako obraz světa obyčejných lidí' (Dissertation Thesis, Charles University in Prague, 2012), p. 114.

²⁸ *Národní politika*, 28. October 1896, p. 2.

²⁹ 'Z Říšské rady', *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr*, 15 January 1908, p. 3.

³⁰ 'Kruté, hrozné drama lásky', *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr*, 13 February 1898, p. 2.

³¹ 'Kočka a myš (Drama tichého domu)', *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr*, 17 March 1898, p. 4.

³² O. Kodetová, *Prameny k revolučnímu hnutí a ohlasu ruské revoluce, sv.I., Rok 1905* (Praha: Nakladatelství ČSAV, 1959), p. 365.

³³ 'Velká bouře na sněmu království českého', *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr*, 25 September 1908, p. 2.

³⁴ Circulation figures for the Prague press vary considerably according to different fragmented sources.

³⁵ 'Neštěstí', *Pražský Ilustrovaný Kurýr*, 26 September 1908, p. 6.

³⁶ The uneasy adaptability of newcomers to new, urban modes of thought is observed by Christopher Ferguson and Barry Sloan in their chapters too.

³⁷ M. de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 108.

³⁸ Chlad, B., 'Jak jsem ilustroval „Kurýra“'. *Humoristické listy*, 67:11 (1924), pp. 135, 136, on p. 135.

³⁹ P. Fritzche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1996), p.8.

⁴⁰ Wood, 'Urban self-identification in East Central Europe before the Great War: Cracow's Popular Press and the The Case of Cracow', pp. 30.

⁴¹ Ibid, pp. 15-17.

⁴² Ibid, p. 31.

⁴³ From the 1848 revolution onwards, the Czech-German relationship gradually worsened. The main issue at the core of the conflict was the question of Czech or German dominance in the Czech lands, especially in Bohemia. Whereas Germans dominated the Austrian parliament, Czechs gained dominance in the Bohemian Diet and in many municipalities, while Germans dominated in borderland areas. The intense national conflict was closely tied in with the question of which language was to be used in government offices and which schools would be supported by the municipalities. As a consequence, the Bohemian Diet was often paralysed by obstructions. Regular nationalist clashes took place in the streets, shopkeepers were boycotted by radicals of other nations and, at the turn of the twentieth century, people were forced to leave flats because of their nationality. In Prague, several impositions of martial law took place. However there were no casualties during the riots.