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Layout of a newspaper page using lines cast by a Linotype typesetting machine, Budapest – 1938. Source: Fortepan / Chuckyeager tumblr

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Special Editor of the Issue

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Introduction

Why does past press ownership matter? To understand the current state of media ownership in Europe – a key factor in shaping democratic societies – we need to trace its roots back to the national and political developments of the press from the 18th to the 20th centuries. While the press history of most Western European countries is well documented for the modern era, research on Central and Eastern Europe still lags behind. From a Central European perspective, for example, the interwar period is particularly significant, as it marked the emergence of many nation-states from the ruins of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Tsarist empires. Although this era has been thoroughly studied from a political history standpoint, press history in Central European countries remains underexplored.

Nevertheless, it is hard to deny the significance of the interwar period in press history, as the years following World War I brought major shifts in press practices across Europe. The press largely remained privately owned and nationally based – with the notable exception of the communist Soviet Union – but by the 1930s, media content increasingly began to cross borders in terms of themes and genres, as Catherine Bertho-Lavenir and Frédéric Barbier argue in their work *Histoire des médias, de Diderot à Internet* [A History of the Media: From Diderot to the Internet].[1] While this period did not yet witness the rise of the transnational media corporations that would later dominate the

1 Bertho-Lavenir, Catherine, and Frédéric Barbier. *A History of the Media: From Diderot to the Internet*. Originally published as *Histoire des médias: de Diderot à Internet*. Paris: Armand Colin, 1996.

landscape, cross-border financial support for media organizations began to play an increasingly important role. This funding often served as a tool of political influence, and was not limited to totalitarian regimes like Nazi Germany, which actively supported pro-Nazi journalists, editors, and media abroad.

Another key trend in 1930s Europe was the simultaneous rise of entertainment-focused press genres and content, alongside the increasing politicization of press ownership. Commercial newspapers with large circulations increasingly focused on entertainment and non-political content to attract a wider audience – yet they often also promoted political agendas, either subtly or overtly, and often prioritized partisanship over balanced reporting. At the same time, political parties and trade unions became more deeply involved in media financing, further entrenching political interests behind editorial decisions.

Despite these broad trends, press ownership across Europe was far from uniform, involving a mix of private owners, political and religious affiliations, early media conglomerates, and growing efforts at state control. Newspapers funded by political parties were common, particularly in the newly established Central European nation-states that arose after the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In countries like Czechoslovakia, party-affiliated press became the norm, shaping both content and distribution. Another distinctive feature in Central Europe was the minority press – newspapers that served ethnic communities within the new multiethnic states. These publications highlighted the tension between efforts at national integration and the reality of ethnic pluralism in the interwar years.

This special issue explores the similarities and differences in press ownership across interwar Central Europe, focusing on the countries – except Romania – that emerged from the former Austro-Hungarian Empire: Czechoslovakia, Hungary, the interwar Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and Poland. It examines national developments in the context of broader European and global trends and focuses on the dominant ownership models in each country. It also examines how ownership structures affected editorial independence, content diversity, and practices of censorship and propaganda.

Studying press ownership of the interwar period is not straightforward. Unlike today, when ownership information can be found in commercial registers, historical data often remains scattered and incomplete. In the absence of centralized records, sources like newspaper reports, contracts with printers, and court documents provide valuable clues

about who controlled the press. Many press archives have unfortunately been lost over time, making research even more challenging. Still, compared to today's fast-changing media corporations, media companies in the past were generally more stable and easier to define during specific periods.

This issue brings together press history experts from the region to analyze specific media sectors and organizations, trace changes in ownership, identify key players in the press landscape, and explore how ownership concentration influenced journalism in the new nation-states in Central Europe.

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Ownership in the Development of the Polish Press in the Interwar Period:

Legal, Political, and Economic Contexts. A case study of the Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny (Illustrated Daily Courier Company)

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Abstract

Abstract: The purpose of this article is to describe the unique case of the Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny Company (Illustrated Daily Courier Company) within the context of the Polish and European press in the interwar period. This will give a Polish perspective on the development of ownership structures in the press market through the unique case of the Illustrated Daily Courier Company. As the largest press company of the interwar era, its publications remain emblematic of that time.

Keywords

polish press in the interwar period, Illustrated Daily Courier Company, Marian Dąbrowski, development conditions

Katarzyna Drąg - Marta Woźniak

Ownership in the Development of the Polish Press in the Interwar Period:

Legal, Political, and Economic Contexts. A case study of the Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny

(Illustrated Daily Courier Company)

Introduction

Andrzej Paczkowski distinguishes between four periods in the development of the Polish press sector in the Second Republic. The first period lasted from 1918–1921, during which the press industry was rebuilt after the First World War. The second included the years 1922–1928, which are considered a time of rapid development. The total number of newspaper titles in Poland increased by approximately 25–30% during these years. From 1929 to 1934, the rate of development slowed, but from 1935 to 1939, it again accelerated significantly. In summary, the press market in interwar Poland was characterized by high volatility and uncertainty. Between 1918 and 1935, 9776 new titles were founded, but up to 70% of them subsequently failed.[1] The Cracow-based *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* undoubtedly stood out among the remaining 30% of titles, those publications which were successful in this period.

1 Paczkowski, "Prasa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918-1939), 53–54.

The purpose of this article is to examine the specific features of the Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny Company (Illustrated Daily Courier Company) against the background of the Polish and European press in the interwar period.

The resulting description of the conditions for the development of the mass press in Poland after 1918 addresses both general and specific issues typical of the period and the region of Central Europe and those specific to of Polish history, politics and economy.

Structuring the article in this way allows, firstly, the main topic – the activities of the press tycoon Marian Dąbrowski – to be placed in its proper context and, secondly, the text to be used in comparative studies of the history of the press in Central Europe in the interwar period. Such comparisons are interesting because, at least in part, Hungarians, Czechs, Slovaks, and Poles had functioned under a single state structure – the Austro-Hungarian Empire – until World War I.

In sum, this article provides a Polish perspective on the development of ownership structures in the press market in the interwar period through the unique case of the Illustrated Daily Courier Company (1910-1939).

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The conditions for the development of the press in the Second Republic of Poland

In November 1918, Poland regained its independence. That year also marked a turning point in the history of the Polish press. After 123 years of partition and repression, the press was able to express itself more freely and develop without being under the control of foreign states. Although the conditions for its development were created at this time, the social, political and economic situation influenced its uneven functioning in the following years.[2] The years from 1918–1926 were the most favourable for the development of the press in Poland in the Second Republic. The Polish state was rebuilding itself after the end of the war, and the emergence of a free press was part of this process. New titles appeared, new printing houses were established and the printing industry expanded. The state did not interfere much in the press in these years. It was not

2 Habielski, "Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne", 67; Drąg, *Lwowskie korzenie polskiego dziennikarstwa*, 37.

until 1926, i.e. following the May Coup[3], that the state began to exercise greater control over the press. In general terms, the development of the press in the Second Republic[4] was influenced by political, socio-cultural, economic, and ownership factors. On the other hand, more specific factors which shaped it include press legislation and technical conditions related to communications, the printing sector and the paper industry in this era in Poland.

Polish politics in the interwar period can be divided into three periods. The first is the period of the formation of political structures, including the borders of the state in 1918–1922. It should be remembered that in the early years of the interwar period Poland was at war, chiefly with Bolshevik Russia. Until March 1921, when the March Constitution was adopted, the laws of the partitioning states were still in force. The second distinct period in Polish politics that can be distinguished lasted from 1926–1935. After the events of the May coup, power was consolidated by the camp of Józef Pilsudski. The third period lasted from the moment of his death in 1935 until the outbreak of World War II, during which there were programmatic changes in most of the political movements in Poland, from the left (Popular Front) to the right (attempts to totalise public life, including by the Camp of National Unity).[5]

The interwar period was a time of significant politicization of the press.[6] The problem of the relationship between the press and political parties and of the political tendencies of the various newspapers was very complicated during the Second Republic. After the restoration of independence, a polycentric system was created on the basis of existing political parties. Many of the parties were internally divided, not only by their approach to current political, social or economic issues, but also by past conflicts caused, for example, by the different

3 The May Coup – was a coup d'état carried out in Poland by Marshal Józef Piłsudski from 12 to 14 May 1926. The attack by Piłsudski's supporters on government forces resulted in the overthrow of the democratically-elected government of President Stanisław Wojciechowski and Prime Minister Wincenty Witos and led to hundreds of fatalities.

4 The Second Republic is the name of the Polish state from the end of World War I to the beginning of World War II.

5 Paczkowski, *Prasa codzienna Warszawy w latach 1918-1939,* 62, as cited in Borowiec, *Jesteśmy głosem milionów*, 29.

6 Mielczarek 2009.

approaches their members had taken to the struggle for Polish independence. If we add to this the fact that certain politicians and parties changed their minds on many issues, it can be argued that the political situation really was a mess. The main political camps during this period were the National Democratic camp, the Piłsudski-Sanation camp, the Christian Socialist camp, the peasants' party and the workers' party. As Paczkowski notes, all these parties – or almost all of them – sought and obtained their own press representation, and as a result the number of publications that could be described as 'political' was considerable. In the printed sources of the interwar period, 250-300[7] titles could be included in this category at any one time.[8] The political press in Kraków alone numbered as many as 175 titles.[9] For example, the weekly "Piast" was the organ of the PSL Piast, while "Robotnik" belonged to the Polish Socialist Party. Kraków had a long cultural tradition and was at the same time an academic city, which is why it was one of the most developed centres of the Polish press in the inter-war period.

The factors shaping the development of the press also stemmed from the peculiarities of social life at the time. Poland was a country that had just been devastated by the First World War, with an overpopulated countryside and an anachronistic social structure. In the early 1920s, 64% of the population still lived in rural areas. The illiteracy rate among the rural population in 1921 was around 40%. The intelligentsia and the petty bourgeoisie were not numerous at this time. The intelligentsia made up 5% of the society, while the petty bourgeoisie made up 11%. This social structure meant that the press had little reach in non-urban areas.[10]

Another related factor was the low level of education. At the beginning of the Second Republic, about 30% of the population was illiterate. Data from the 1921 census showed that in Poland at that time: "people who could not read (and thus write) accounted for 33.1% of the total population aged 10 and over. The proportion of those who could at least read ("educated") was 62.4%. Ten years later, according to the 1931 census, the

7 The difference is due to methodology (some titles may fall into different categories).

8 Paczkowski, "Prasa w życiu politycznym drugiej Rzeczypospolitej, 33.

9 Brzoza, "Kamienie i prasa: z dziejów kultury politycznej międzywojennego Krakowa", 105.

10 Habielski, "Dwudziestolecie międzywojenne", 69.

percentage of those declaring themselves unable to read and write was somewhat lower, averaging 23.1% nationally (compared to 23.9% in the 1921 census area), while the percentage of those able to at least read ("educated") was 76.6% (it had been 75.8% in the 1921 census area). Thus, in the inter-census period, the percentage of educated people increased by more than 13%."[11] The data show that there were large gaps in the education of larger parts of the population. Only the introduction of compulsory education in 1921 for children aged 7 to 14 contributed to a gradual improvement in the reading rate. The high levels of illiteracy had a major impact on newspaper readership and sales. Its decline obviously implied an increase in the number of potential readers and buyers.

It should be added that Poland during the Second Republic was not a nationally homogeneous country. During this period, it should be characterised as a multinational and multicultural state. "The multinational composition of states in eastern and south-eastern Europe was basically a normal phenomenon, although Poland occupied one of the first places in this respect".[12] National minorities made up about 35% of Poland's total population in this period. The most numerous of these were Ukrainians, Jews, Belarusians and Germans. Members of ethnic minorities were mainly interested in their own newspapers and magazines. According to the data, the total number of periodicals published by national minorities between 1918 and 1939 exceeded 3,500 titles, with the Jewish, Ukrainian and German press accounting for the greatest numbers of publications.[13] To illustrate this, it is worth briefly discussing the Jewish press, which is the most striking example. Between the wars, Jewish newspapers were published in Yiddish, Polish and Hebrew. In the press sector, the largest companies in terms of share capital were those that published daily newspapers in Polish: "Chwila" (in Lviv, founded 1920), headed by Henryk Hescheles (1886–1941), brother of Marian Hemar; "Głos Poranny" (in Lviv, founded 1929) by Jan Urbach (1895–1987) and "Nasz Przegląd", founded in 1923 by Jakub Appenszlak (1894–1950) and published by Unia in Warsaw. The leading Yiddish publishers were the Alt-Naj Publishing Cooperative (founded 1932) – which published, among other dailies, "Hajnt", "Hajntige Najes",

11 Stańczyk, "Wykształcenie ludności II Rzeczpospolitej w świetle badań GUS", 11.

12 Brzoza, *Polska w czasach niepodległości i drugiej wojny światowej 1918–1945,* 51.

13 Kolasa, "Kierunki badań nad prasą mniejszości narodowych 1918–1939, 59.

"Handels-Welt" – and "Nasza Prasa" (founded 1910) – publisher of "Der Moment", "Warszawer Radjo", "Sportcajtung". Both were located in Warsaw.

When describing another of the factors affecting the Polish press in the interwar period – the economic situation – it should be noted that Poland's development in this respect between 1918 and 1939 was not homogeneous. It can be divided into four periods. The first phase (1918–1923) is associated with the creation of the Polish state. It was characterised by high inflation and the orientation of industry towards war production. The second phase (1923–1930) was a period of reforms under Prime Minister Władyslaw Grabski and saw revived economic development. The third period (1930-1935) was associated with the Great Depression which affected the whole world. The final phase – the fourth – (1935–1939) was generally one of improved economic development. Among other things, inflation was reduced, employment increased and the construction of the Central Industrial District began. However, the outbreak of World War II interrupted this successful process.[14] Economic cycles took their toll on publishers. When hyperinflation hit Poland in 1923, demand for newspapers plummeted, resulting in the closure of many titles, while the resulting financial difficulties impacted circulation figures and the content of individual editions.

One of the specific factors affecting the functioning of the press in the Second Republic was press legislation. Although the Polish state had adopted the forms of representative democracy and political pluralism, it did not in fact implement the principles of private property in the economy to the extent that is typical of such a system. A clear manifestation of the authoritarianism prevailing in Poland at this time was the May coup. Liberal-democratic forms of government were gradually supplanted by authoritarianism. For this reason, it is important to clearly separate the letter of the press laws in Poland during these years from the actual practice. As Andrzej Notkowski points out "The press law of the Second Republic underwent an evolution from the relatively liberal principles of the February 1919 decrees on temporary press and printing regulations for the former Russian partition to the severe restrictions on freedom of speech introduced by the November 1938 decrees on unified press regulations and protection of the interests of the State."[15] In the period immediately following 11 November 1918, Poland had three different laws regulating the press market. In the absence of specific

14 Jabłonowski, *Z dziejów gospodarczych Polski lat 1918-1939,* 84. Cited in Borowiec, *Jesteśmy głosem milionów*, 23.

15 Notkowski, "Państwowa polityka prasowa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918-1939)", 79.

legislation, the press laws of the partitioning states remained in force for a long time.[16] Later, under parliamentary rule, freedom of the press was guaranteed by the Constitution of March 1921. However, this constitution referred to freedom of the press only in general terms. Since there was a lack of specific legislation to regulate the press, the press laws of the partitioning states remained in effect for a long time after the partition ended. These matters were not legally unified and organised, and this allowed the administration to interpret the laws according to the needs of the authorities.

The changes in press law that occurred from 1926 onwards were closely linked to the transformation of the Polish political system and party system The scope of press freedom was systematically restricted in this period, while at the same time the penalties for press offences were increased, and the powers of the administrative authorities to control the press were strengthened.[17] The 1935 April Constitution no longer explicitly mentioned freedom of the press as one of the constitutional principles, although Article 5 contained a provision guaranteeing citizens' freedom of speech. This constitution and the 1938 Press Decree represented the government's efforts to eliminate political opposition, which included introducing forms of preventive censorship and establishing a system of concessions.[18]

The development of the press in the Second Republic was also affected by what can be termed technical conditions. Among these, the situation of the paper industry in Poland at this time should be highlighted. Southern Poland imported paper from Austria, while western and northern Poland imported it from Germany, and central and eastern Poland imported low quality paper from Russia (and at the same time Poland sold 50% of its production of higher quality paper to Russia). The situation was serious and the press suffered from paper shortages. In 1924, the domestic paper industry covered only 40% of the demand. The most basic problems facing the press were difficulties in obtaining paper or spare parts for printing machines. As a result, the Polish press was dependent on other countries. Private publishers were in much better shape than public ones in this regard. Most printing houses were privately owned but some were state owned. Private printing houses of the time included, for example, the "Dom Prasy"

16 Habielski, "Ewolucja prawa prasowego w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej; Bates, Freedom of the Press in Inter-War Poland.

17 Notkowski, "Państwowa polityka prasowa Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej (1918-1939)", 80.

18 Pietrzak, *Reglamentacja wolności prasy w Polsce (1918–1939)*.

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printing house in Warsaw and the St. Adalbert Printing House in Poznan, while the state-owned facilities included the printing press in Lublin.[19]

In addition, the poor condition of printing plants posed a significant problem in this era. Many of them had suffered serious damage during the war and it took several years to rebuild and repair them. A further problem, especially in the 1920s, was the frequent strikes by printers.[20] Another obstacle to press distribution was the underdeveloped network of transportation networks, both road and rail. The geographic locations of the press companies, inherited from partition times, was also not conducive to smooth distribution nationally. Regionalisation was still evident, which hampered attempts to create dailies with a national character.

In the first years after independence, the Polish press faced many problems, challenges and constraints. First and foremost, among these was the lack of printing plants, printing equipment and paper. The poor communications and postal networks also posed problems, making it difficult to distribute the press in the provinces. The development of the press was also hampered by the anachronistic social structure of the Second Republic and the low level of literacy among the population. However, with the reconstruction of the country and its gradual development in the years leading up to the Second World War, this situation improved.

The phenomenon of the IKC press group

Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny was the largest newspaper company in the interwar period in Poland. At its peak – between 1929 and 1993 – the Illustrowany Kuryer Codzienny had a circulation of 180,000 copies and employed 1,400 people. Its founder, owner and editor in chief was Marian Dabrowski (1878–1958). The history of the Kraków-based IKC began on 18 December, 1910, when the first issue of the daily newspaper *Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny* was published. This newspaper had already appeared on the press market in Krakow during period of the partitions. The "IKC" publishing fund consisted of the capital of Dąbrowski, that of his brother Tadeusz, a well-known patron,

19 Borowiec, *Jesteśmy głosem milionów*, 25.

20 Ibid., 26.

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and shares held by Jewish financiers in the persons of lawyer Gustav Bauder, wealthy glassmaker Roman Grünwald, the innkeeper Rose, the owner of Kraków's first cinema (Circus Edison), Jozef Kleinberger, and an actor named Poleński, a relative of Bazes, a porcelain maker.[21] The IKC was the first national daily newspaper in Poland after 1918. The transformation of the "IKC" into a powerful publishing company took place in the 1920s.

The financial basis of the "IKC" is not entirely clear. To establish the newspaper, Marian Dąbrowski used money from the "Głos Narodu" newspaper, from the sale of his wife's shop and from the sale of kennels on Krakow's Blonie (meadows). He was also supported financially by his father, who donated his savings to fund the project. According to Borowiec, Dąbrowski's initial capital was 100,000 crowns and his partners contributed around 80,000 crowns.[22] In 1913 Dąbrowski and his brother became independent shareholders in the company. He then took on PSL MP Jan Stapiński as a partner who took a half share in the publishing house, promising to support the paper in the election campaign. However, Dąbrowski concealed the paper's financial links with Stapiński and his political party – the agrarian party – from the public. In 1923, Dąbrowski became the sole owner of the publishing house after buying out the shares of his other two partners. In 1918 the Kuryer Publishing Company was established as a limited liability company. Subsequently, in 1923 Dąbrowski, having bought out the shares of the other two partners, became the sole owner of the publishing house. The acquisition of the 'IKC' cost him a total of 20 million marks (10 million for each shareholder). On 29 November 1924, a separate company was established named 'Światowid – Ilustrowany Kuryer Tygodniowy, spółka z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością'. The share capital of the company was PLN 20,000 (divided into 200 shares of PLN 100 each). Marian Dąbrowski owned 130 shares. The remaining 20 shares belonged to Karol Groak, the director of the Viennese printing house where the weekly Swiatowid was first printed. Another transformation of the company took place on 12 August 1937. As a result of an agreement between Marian Dąbrowski, Michalina Dąbrowska and Henryk Paschalski, a trading company called 'Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny, Marian Dąbrowski and Company' was established. Dąbrowski also remained a co-owner of two other companies: the company 'Światowid – Ilustrowany Kuryer Tygodniowy, spółka

21 Bańdo, *Nie tylko krew na pierwszej stronie*, 69.

22 Borowiec, *Jesteśmy głosem milionów,* 90.

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z ograniczoną odpowiedzialnością' and another company called 'Spółka wydawnicza Kuryer, spółka akcyjna', of which he was a member of the board of directors and a shareholder.[23]

As Dabrowski's income from the sale of copies of the 'IKC' increased, he launched several new magazines.[24] The "IKC" was his main daily paper, so in these other ventures he concentrated on publishing different formats of newspapers. The first of these was the weekly newspaper "Światowid", founded in 1924. It reported on current political, cultural and scientific events in Poland and abroad. It took the form of a weekly chronicle. Other major titles included the weekly "Na szerokim świecie" (from 1928 onwards), the satirical weekly "Wróble na Dachu" (since 1930) the sports weekly "Raz, dwa, trzy" (since 1931), the illustrated crime and court weekly "Tajny detektyw" (since 1931), an afternoon paper titled "Tempo Dnia" (since 1933), as well as the social and cultural weekly "As" (since 1935)[25]. The various magazines were aimed at different audiences and covered a wide range of topics. The women's magazine Kurier Kobiecy deserves special mention. It was the first weekly supplement of its kind in the Polish press and almost immediately gained great popularity, displacing many fashion or advice publications that had appeared regularly. Most of the major dailies followed the IKC's example and started publishing their own women's supplements .[26] The one-time circulation of the titles published by the company was more than 400,000 copies.

Adam Bańdo describes the activities of the IKC company in terms of "the American dream." He argues that what was "truly American and innovative, for the time, were

23 Bańdo, "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" w dziewięćdziesiątą rocznicę powstania (1910-2000), 134–135.

24 Pelczarski, "Niektóre fakty z historii koncernu IKC."; Władyka, *Krew na pierwszej stronie: sensacyjne dzienniki Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej.*

25 Other titles, usually as supplements, included: "Kurier Literacko Naukowy" (from 1924 onwards), "Kurier Sportowy" (from 1924 onwards), "IKC – dodatek tygodniowy" (1925), "Kurier Radiowy" (from 1927 onwards), "Kurier Filmowy" (from 1927 onwards), "Kurier Kobiecy" (established 1927), "Kurier Gospodarczy i Finansowy" (established 1929), "Kurier Lekarski" (established 1928), "Kurier Metapsychiczny – Dziwy Życia" (from 1928), "Kurier Techniczny" (from 1928), "Kurier Prawniczy i Sądowy" (1928), "Kurier Turystyczny i Zdrojowy" (1929), "Kurier Ogrodniczo-Hodowlany" (from 1932), "Dodatek Fotograficzny" (from 1932), "Kurier Morski i Kolonialny" (from 1935), "Telegram Wieczorny" (1939) i "Dodatek Powieściowy" (Bańdo, "Dzieje koncernu „Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny", 67).

26 Bańdo, *Nie tylko krew na pierwszej stronie*.

(its) methods of operation, including marketing and public relations. Also American was the company's brutal and ruthless attitude to competition and (its) approach to doing business. For this, Dąbrowski earned the name of a financial shark."[27] The IKC differed from other Kraków newspapers in both its content and form. Its editors focused on sensationalism, scandal, crime and gossip. Dąbrowski also used the paper to pursue his personal ambitions. When he tried to be accepted onto the list of parliamentary candidates of the Polish People's Party "Piast" – he was second on the list after Franciszek Bardl – the IKC launched a series of publications strongly attacking Bardl. Dąbrowski ultimately won. Investment – including the purchase of more printing machines – played an important role in the creation of the IKC's printing empire. As issue 1 of the newspaper promised: "The Illustrowany Kuryer Codzienny will circulate 20,000 copies of the daily edition in the first quarter. In order to make it possible to fulfil such a large task in a way that has not been practised in Poland so far, the publishing house has brought in a special machine, the so-called Rotary, with a printing type of 10,000–14,000 copies triple-folded and ready for immediate dispatch" (b.a. 1910).

Another factor in the company's success was the speed and timeliness of information. There was no shortage of paper, nor of accurate news obtained by telegraph and telephone. Solid financing and good political links with representatives of various parties enabled it to print the latest news, and an extensive distribution network enabled it to reach the provinces. Newspapers from Kraków had previously reached various parts of Galicia by post, sometimes with a three-day delay, while Dąbrowski's newspaper always arrived on the day of publication.

These activities were made possible by the good relations between Dąbrowski and several important politicians of the time. As Renata Rozbicka notes: "Marian Dąbrowski was a figure with fluctuating political views. He ran for the Sejm of the Republic of Poland initially from the PSL 'Piast' list (pro-government), then from the BBWR (oppositional) list. After the May Coup, he adopted a pro-government course in his writings. However, there were deliberate instances of 'controlled' criticism of the Sanacja, intended to appeal to readers critical of Józef Piłsudski. Examples of such 'controlled' insubordination could be found in the satirical magazine mentioned above, *Wróble na Dachu* (Sparrows on the Roof). After 1935, the IKC struck out on its own, when it sup-

27 Bańdo, "Dzieje koncernu „Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" w latach 1910-1939", 65–66.

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ported the political programme of Deputy Prime Minister Eugeniusz Kwiatkowski (Focused on the development of the industry) and criticised the authoritarian inclinations of Marshal Edward Rydz-Śmigły".[28] In pursuit of his political aims, Dąbrowski used his press empire and the power of its influence.[29] His goals included cooperating with the government and using various sources of funding, including government ones.[30]

Another factor which contributed to the success of the newspaper enterprise was the innovative approach it took to editing periodicals, particularly the daily "IKC". The paper did focus solely on significant political events, which all newspapers covered, but also highlighted smaller, everyday stories that captured its readers' attention. As Czesław Brzoza points out: "The news was reported in an innovative way also in technical terms, using different typefaces, bolding, large titles, etc."[31] At the time, most of Kraków's dailies modelled themselves on the ornament-free, subdued yet monotonous "Czas" newspaper. In contrast, the "IKC" used a unique layout of columns, articles, drawings, and advertisements. This layout was less orderly, more varied, and could even be chaotic, but was ultimately attractive for readers. Illustrations played an important role in the magazine, and Dąbrowski published drawings from the very beginning. The first column of each issue was always taken up by a large illustration, usually of a sensational nature. Drawings were also printed inside the magazines. These included innovative infographics, such as graphical summaries of the demographics of European nations. There were also satirical illustrations.[32]

Marian Dąbrowski was seen by both his employees and the public "as a ruthless dictator and political chameleon, on the one hand, and a genius endowed with an extraordinary sense of the economy, a modern manager, and on the other hand – philanthropist."[33] Undoubtedly, the success of his magazines was due not only to his management skills, but also to the ability of the journalists he employed. Thanks to the financial health of the company, Dąbrowski was able to hire top professionals and pay them high salaries.

28 Jabłoński, „Jego gazetę czytała cała Polska".

29 Bańdo, "Marian Dąbrowski i legenda "Ilustrowanego Kuriera Codziennego", 196.

30 Rudziński, "O koncernach: "Prasy Czerwonej" i "IKC" 1926-1939", 152.

31 Brzoza, *Polityczna prasa krakowska 1918-1939*, 126.

32 Stachnik, "Marian Dąbrowski, prawdziwy przedwojenny magnat prasowy."

33 Bańdo, "Marian Dąbrowski i legenda "Ilustrowanego Kuriera Codziennego", 195.

He placed high demands on his employees but also knew how to show appreciation for their skills. According to Adam Bańdo: "What distinguishes the corporation from other publishing houses is not contained solely in the wealth of technical means, the sense of the economy, the ability to meet the tastes of readers, but above all in the craft of journalism. It is not without reason to say that the "Illustrated Daily Courier" developed a model of modern journalism in Poland, which in its character resembled Western models, especially American ones.".[34] In September 1919, the "IKC" employed 17 journalists in Kraków and also had an extensive network of correspondents in Cieszyn, Lviv, Moravian Ostrava, Poraż, Poznan, Warsaw, Vienna and Vilnius. By 1927 its staff had grown to 124 members. Just before the outbreak of World War II, the number of staff had reached a thousand.[35] According to Wiesław Władyka: Dąbrowski did not pay his journalists a salary, but signed contracts with them, guaranteeing them higher monthly salaries than they could earn by writing for other editorial offices. In return, Dąbrowski actually obliged them to carry out continuous and unlimited specific work.[36]

The development of the Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny Company was interrupted by the outbreak of World War II. After the country's defeat in September 1939, the occupation authorities confiscated the publishing house and the Palace of the Press on Wielopole Street, where the corporation's headquarters were located. The last issue of "IKC" was published on 26 October 1939. In January 1945, some of the company's employees attempted to reactivate the daily newspaper IKC, but they were stopped by the communists. After the war, the IKC's assets were nationalised. During the occupation it had no chance to survive as an informative press.

34 Ibid., 205.

35 Borowiec, *Jesteśmy głosem milionów*, 81 as cited in Woźniak, Świat wartości w krakowskiej prasie katolickiej, 61.

36 Władyka, *Krew na pierwszej stronie: sensacyjne dzienniki Drugiej Rzeczpospolitej*, 288.

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Conclusion

Examining the conditions under which the press developed in the Second Republic from a subjective point of view, it is evident that the intensity of political life in the international and domestic spheres could have provided plenty for the press to write about, while on other hand, from an objective point of view, the literacy rate, the income level and the spending structure of the Polish population were unfavourable to its development. The outdated structure of the printing industry, along with the structural weakness of the paper industry and the underdeveloped road infrastructure were also unfavourable to the development of the press Above all these factors is a general one: the internal division of a country that, for more than 100 years, had been composed of three regions operating under completely different state systems. The process of unification took many years and involved, among other things, disparities in the economic development of the regions, different political traditions, and different cultural habits. The effects of division are still visible to this, including on Poland's rail network.

The most dominant cities in the press system of the Second Republic, in order of importance were: Warsaw, Poznan, Lviv and Kraków, Katowice, Lodz and Vilnius. Despite the fact that Kraców was only in fourth place in terms of the number of publications and the level of press exports, when listing the titles of the interwar press, the "Ilustrowany Kurier Codzienny" from Kraków is mentioned first in the list of inter-war press titles. The "IKC" in the interwar period became the first daily newspaper to have a national character, and the company managed by Marian Dąbrowski, became the largest press enterprise of that period. The success of the company is undoubtedly linked to Dąbrowski's talent for management, speed in reaching readers and innovative editorial style. The company played a unique role in the history of the Polish press, due to the great success and modern tools used by Dąbrowski. Its creation marked the beginning of a new era in the history of the Polish press – the era of mass magazines – and it undoubtedly influenced the development of the media, including the post-war media.

The example of Marian Dabrowski's company provides an indirect insight into the peculiarities of the Polish press market, while at the same time allowing

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comparisons with the most important press companies in other Central European countries. The issue of media ownership still has great potential for research, both in historical and contemporary terms. This article discusses a fragment of this issue from the perspective of the history of the Polish press.

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In a Whirlwind of Political Turmoil:
Press Ownership in Interwar Yugoslavia (1918-1941)

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the ownership of print media in the interwar period (1918-1941) in the territory of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918-1929), and in its successor state, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1929-1941). This period, marked by political turmoil, was also characterized by a high illiteracy rate and low newspaper readership. Nevertheless, various types of newspapers were present on the market, ranging from informative daily newspapers to magazines, and party newspapers. In the interwar period large publishing companies such as Tipografija and Jugoštampa were established (both in Zagreb in 1920) as well as the first news agency Avala (in 1919 in Belgrade). This paper will investigate the various types of print media ownership during the interwar period in Yugoslavia. It will also provide an account of the journalistic profession and media laws in this period and offer a list of the most important daily newspapers along with accompanying data on their owners, editors-in-chief and circulation.

Keywords

interwar period, media ownership, print media, Yugoslavia

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Introduction

The interwar period[1] in the countries which comprised the two successive South Slav states: the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia can be classified as the first period of modernization of the constitutive societies.[2] These years saw the beginning of industrialization and political pluralization in these countries.[3] The specific characteristics of the first phase of modernization, which were reflected in the political, socio-economic, cultural and symbolic fields also shaped the media system(s)[4] of the societies in the region during this period. Peruško et al. (2021) applied Acemoglu and Robinson's (2012) distinction between inclusive and extractive political institutions to analyse the conditions that shaped the political and economic development of the

1 The interwar period spans from the end of the WWI and the formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes on 1 December 1918 to the 6 April 1941, the date when German and Italian troops invaded Yugoslavia.

2 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems.*

3 Ibid., 41–42.

4 Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*.

countries in the region, including their media systems.[5] While extractive institutions are coercive in nature, inclusive political institutions support private property, ensure the rule of law, provide public services that enable free exchange and the conclusion of contracts and the entry of new businesses, allowing large numbers of individuals to choose their careers for themselves and to participate in economic activities.[6] Democracy is a necessary condition for inclusive institutions, but is not sufficient in itself. Interwar Yugoslavia was a politically unstable state with coercive institutions and only a few periods when a rudimentary version of the rule of law prevailed, while power and resources remained in the hands of small elites: high-level administrators and bureaucrats, influential members of the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy and high-ranking clergy. In terms of socio-economic conditions (literacy and economic development) interwar Yugoslavia had a low level of literacy and was among the least developed countries in Europe.[7] Regarding the indicators from the cultural and symbolic field that shape media systems[8], the media in interwar Yugoslavia were privately owned but were subject to state control (through state censorship) and faced restrictions and repression, with weak media markets, a low level of professionalism in journalism, relatively low circulations and relatively high political parallelism.

Media ownership, which is the focus of this paper, is considered to be a variable of the media market that is closely related to the legal framework (state and media), political parallelism[9] and journalistic autonomy. The issue of political parallelism will be only briefly addressed here, mostly in relation to the emergence of the party press.

After a brief overview of the characteristics of the political and socio-economic context in the interwar period of Yugoslavia (Kingdom SHS/Kingdom of Yugoslavia) and the status of the Yugoslav journalism in the same period, the paper will examine the characteristics of media ownership in the most developed parts of the country in the

5 Acemoglu and Robinson. *Why nations fail: The origins of power, prosperity, and poverty*.

6 Ibid., 74.

7 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems.*

8 Hallin and Mancini, *Comparing Media Systems*; Peruško at al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems.*

9 Political parallelism refers to the degree to which the organization and substance of the media system mirror the political divisions and affiliations within a particular society (Hallin and Mancini, 2004; Peruško et al., 2021).

interwar period within Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. The focus will be on the emergence of large media companies and their publications, the publishers of other important daily newspapers and the publishers of the political party press.

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and the Kingdom of Yugoslavia were established from the unification of states that were part of "two different and opposing empires": the Habsburg Empire (Croatia, Slovenia, parts of Serbia) and the Ottoman Empire (contemporary North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina) with "divergent political, social and cultural conditions".[10] The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was created on the 1 December 1918 through the unification of the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro with the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.[11] The country was a parliamentary monarchy with a multiparty system, headed by the Serbian-rooted Karađorđević dynasty. It was politically unstable due to internal divisions over the resolution of the national question, the state organization[12], differing government styles (the legally-based Habsburg bureaucracy vs. clientelism and corruption[13]), lack of legitimation, failed socio-economic development, structural injustice and the reluctance of international community to support it.[14] The country took a dictatorial turn on 6 January 1929 when King Alexander I abolished the constitution, dissolved the assembly, banned political parties and proclaimed a dictatorship, while the country was renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.[15] The return of political pluralism came after the assassination of King Alexander in Marseilles in 1934 and the subsequent elections to the national assembly (held in 1935).[16] "During the last period, Croatia succeeded in

10 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*, 41.

11 The country was formed by "the Austro-Hungarian provinces of Croatia, Slovenia, Slavonia and Vojvodina, Dalmatia, and also Bosnia and Herzegovina (…) together with the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro". (Vujnovic, "*Forging the bubikopf nation"*, 4–5.)

12 Jugoslavija. *Hrvatska enciklopedija – mrežno izdanje (Croatian Encyclopedia – online edition),* accessed 28 February, 2025.

13 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*. 47.

14 Markovina, *Jugoslavija u Hrvatskoj: (1918.-2018.)*.

15 Banac, *The National Queston in Yugoslavia*; Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske: 1771-1939*.

16 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems.*

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negotiating the union of its lands internally in the Croatian Banovina,[17] established in 1939".[18]

Economically, the most developed parts of the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia were the westernmost parts (Slovenia, Croatia) and Vojvodina (northern Serbia) which had the most developed industry and trade, as well as the highest literacy rates.[19] According to the 1931 census, "there were 14,534,000 inhabitants" in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia[20] and 44.6% of the population was illiterate.[21] Despite the emergence of many publications on the newspaper market, the interwar period was still characterized by "a very low newspaper readership"[22], due to the high illiteracy rate among the population.

There was no organized collection of statistical data in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia until 1929 so it is only possible to draw upon the occasional lists of periodicals published in the newspapers of the time.[23] According to one such source from 1921 there were 430 periodicals and 218 newspapers in the Kingdom, or 648 combined, while in 1939 the number rose to 1108 (again combined). Interestingly, the number of daily newspapers fell during the interwar period from around 50 in 1919 to 33 in 1938.[24]

As the data on "the numbers and types of publications are sketchy and incomplete"[25], the goal of this paper is thus to fill this gap in the literature on the interwar media and media ownership in Yugoslavia as well as to provide a list of the most important publishers and newspapers. It will draw on secondary data published in the academic literature

17 Croatian Banovina (Banovina Hrvatska) consisted of Banovina of Savska and Primorska and the districts of Dubrovnik, Ilok, Šid, Brčko, Gradačac, Derventa, Travnik and Fojnica (Croatian Encyclopedia, online edition). It was formed by the Cvetković-Maček agreement in 1939 as the only autonomous political-territorial unit in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia with financial independence and its own Parliament with administrative authorities (Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije*, 25).

18 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems,* 48.

19 Ibid.

20 As cited in: Vujnović, *Forging the bubikopf nation*, 54.

21 Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije*, 390.

22 Ademović, 1998 as cited in Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*, 63.

23 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe*, 165.

24 Ibid., 165.

25 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems,* 63.

on the history of journalism and the history of media in Yugoslavia and data acquired from the catalogues of the National and University Library in Zagreb, the National and University Library in Ljubljana, and the Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries[26] as well as primary data in the digitalized newspapers available in online archives.[27]

Yugoslav journalism during the interwar period

Bjelica (1968) divides the development of Yugoslav journalism in the period 1918–1941 into four stages: 1) a period of the consolidation of state power which lasted from 1918 until the adoption of the Vidovdan constitution[28] in 1921; 2) the period of the parliamentary monarchy ending with King Alexander's proclamation of dictatorship in January 1929; 3) the period of the Sixth of January dictatorship that ended with the assassination of King Alexander in 1934, 4) the period from Alexander's assassination until the March 1941 coup d'état. The first period (1918-1921) was marked by a large number of informative[29] as well as party press newspapers. The emergence of modern informative newspapers began in Croatia with the 1907 Press Law,[30] which enabled colportage and redefined the way that newspapers were sold. That same year, the newspaper *Novosti* began publication, followed by *Male novine* (1910), *Jutarnji list* (1912), joining the preexisting *Novi list* (which had been published since 1900) and

26 SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška baza podataka COBIB.SR).

27 The following archives of digitalized historic newspapers were consulted: Stare hrvatske novine – Portal digitaliziranih novina, Pretraživa digitalna biblioteka and Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije.

28 Vidovdan Constitution was adopted "on 28 May 1921 in the Belgrade Constituent Assembly by a simple majority, without the presence of Croatian representatives, who resigned from the Constituent Assembly due to the imposed majority. The constitution declared a constitutional-parliamentary monarchy with exceptional powers of the king" as cited in Proleksis enciklopedija.

29 Horvat observes that the informative press was located mainly in the capitals or larger towns (in Croatia in Zagreb and Split) while the provincial press was mainly political and usually short-lived and had no influence on daily politics.

30 This refers to the 1907 Press Law of the Dual Monarchy (Horvat, *Provijest novinstva Hrvatske*; Peruško et al. 2021, 55). The most important provisions stated in the Law were: the establishment of a jury in press lawsuits, the introduction of colportage and the abolition of bail for starting a newspaper (Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 69).

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Obzor (since 1871, from 1905 with a new editor-in-chief) as the most influential daily newspapers (all three in Croatia). Vilović explains that *Novi list* marked the starting point for truly informative-political journalism in Croatia.[31]

In terms of the media market, this period saw the formation of a new connection between journalism and large capital, and the appearance of the first news agency in Yugoslavia. The period was also marked by the Obznana, an order through which the government of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes banned the Communist Party and its press. As Novak (2005) puts it, "the system of repression against freedom of expression and journalism was rounded off by" the Law on the Protection of the State enacted in 1921.[32] According to the Article 1 of the Law "any oral or written communist or anarchist propaganda or persuasion of others that the political or economic system in the state should be changed" would be "treated as a crime in terms of the penal code" and was "punishable by death or 20 years' imprisonment".[33]

The second period (1921-1929) was marked by the emergence of new party press periodicals and the appearance of the newspaper *Borba* as "the legal organ of the then illegal Communist party of Yugoslavia."[34] It was also time that the first radio stations in Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Belgrade were established.[35]

Throughout the second period the state continued to tighten its grip on the press. This was achieved by the Pressbiro, a press department within the Ministry of the Interior, established in 1924. The department monitored the circulation of the press, as well as the suitability and political orientation of editorials and editor-in-chiefs.[36] The repression intensified with the enactment of the Law on the Press in 1925.[37] While the law formally guaranteed the freedom of the press (censorship was imposed only during times of war and mobilization), numerous restrictions stipulated in the Law (e.g., two years in prison

31 Vilović, "Novine".

32 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 135.

33 Ademović, 1998, as cited in Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media System*, 54–55.

34 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 143.

35 Ibid.

36 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću,* 145.

37 Ibid.,149.

for anyone who insulted the courts, the army, and members of the Assembly[38]) reflected the prevailing repressive measures. Journalists fought unsuccessfully for a liberal press law in this period. [39] Making a series of contributions in their official newspaper *Novinar,* the Yugoslav Journalists' Association[40] joined the discussion on the adoption of the Law on the Press (1924-25).[41]

When King Alexander proclaimed a dictatorship in January 1929 this marked the beginning of the third period which had many consequences for the media. Political parties and the political press were banned under the new regime.[42] Informative newspapers continued to appear but "were forbidden from publishing any comments regarding the political situation in Yugoslavia"[43] and changes were also implemented in the Law on the Press. Preventive censorship was introduced, whereby newspapers could be completely banned if they had previously been banned three times, and there was no legal remedy against the banning of newspapers.[44]

The fourth period (1934-1941) witnessed the modernization of informative press, while the legal party press returned[45] alongside the emergence of illegal party press pub-

38 As stated in Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću,*149.

39 Bjelica writes how journalists attending the Association-organized congresses, held regularly between 1934 and 1940, most often discussed two issues – pension insurance for journalists and the press law. During congress held in May 1936 in Zagreb, they called out for urgent adoption of a new, free-thinking press law and immediate abolition of censorship.

40 The joint association of Yugoslav journalists was founded in 1921 in Sarajevo at the Second congress of Yugoslav journalists (Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 137.) Prior to this, there were separate organizations – in Croatia there was the Croatian Journalists' Association, established in 1910 (see Lipovčan, "Osnivanje Hrvatskog novinarskog društva"), while Slovenian journalists had also established a professional organization in 1910 (Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 115.) In Serbia, the situation was somewhat more complicated as the division of journalists into various political fractions led to the creation of two journalists' associations in Belgrade in 1906. They were merged into one association in 1911 (Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 106.).

41 Agičić, "Obrazovanje novinara za budućnost medija,", 44.

42 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 162.

43 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*, 55.

44 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 164.

45 "Political pluralism returned after King Alexander was assassinated" and "elections for the national assembly were held in 1935" (Peruško et al. *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems*).

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lications[46] as well as the renewal of the Yugoslav Journalist Association (whose work had come to a halt after the proclamation of the dictatorship).[47] Despite this, the number of professional journalists rose in the interwar period. When the Yugoslav Journalists' Association was established, it had 249 regular members, while in 1938 the number of regular members rose to 463.[48]

In conclusion, the interwar period was, in many ways, a difficult time for the journalistic profession. Apart from the restrictive press laws and censorship, Novak (2007) notes that in the period between 1928 and 1932, six newspaper editors were killed in Croatia, including Antun Schlegel, the president of Jugoštampa consortium and the director of *Novosti,* although the motives for his murder have never been clarified.[49]

The rise of large media companies and their publications

Before 1914 there was no large capital in Croatia that would be interested in journalism because the banking industry in the Dual Monarchy was concentrated in Budapest and Vienna. In the first years after WW1, the banks' approach to financing journalism did not change in essence, with the exception of them making short-term business loans to newspaper companies.[50] Horvat (2003) explains that it was through these occasional relationships that closer ties between newspapers and banks began to develop, and this was especially visible in the case of "politically marked banks". Political banks would give loans to newspaper companies, and in return, the newspapers would support the political agenda and business interests of the banks.[51]An example of this was the relationship between the Democratic Party's newspaper and Slavenska banka (Slavic Bank)

46 Communist Party had published many illegal print editions in different states throughout Yugoslavia.

47 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe.*

48 Ibid.*,* 166.

49 Novak, "Smrtna presuda građanskom novinarstvu," 151.

50 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske.*

51 Ibid., 346.

in Zagreb.[52] The close relationship between banks, media and politics demonstrates the political and business parallelism tendencies within media system.[53]

Tipografija: the largest media company

The largest media company in Yugoslavia during the interwar period was Tipografija. It was founded in 1920 through the merger of the Ignjat Granicz, Jan Novak and Dragutin Schulhof printing offices.[54] The bank capital for the company was provided by Eskontna banka, represented by Karl Heumer in the management, while Milivoj Dežman, editor-in-chief of *Obzor*, company's most prominent newspaper, acted as the newspaper's representative in the management.[55] The first head of the company was Eugen Demetrović. Horvat (2003) describes Demetrović as the first person to connect journalism with "large capital".[56] He was successful in the journalism business and judged the success of a newspaper based on its circulation.[57]

In 1924 a conflict emerged in the leadership of Tipografija between Dežman and Demetrović due to their differing political views: Demetrović supported Radić (of the Croatian Peasant Party) while Dežman opposed him.[58] The conflict ended in 1926 when Tipografija's general assembly dismissed Demetrović, offering him a generous severance package, and Dežman assumed leadership of the company.[59]

52 Ibid.

53 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske;* Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems.*

54 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 347.

55 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 138.

56 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 345.

57 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 138.

58 Dežman was supporter of the Little Entente and the ideas of the League of Nations (in terms of country's foreign policy), and supporter the fraction of Hrvatska zajednica (Croatian Community) and Hrvatski blok (Croatian Bloc) (Novak *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 139.).

59 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 141.

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Dežman initially supported King Alexander, but when he himself faced censorship as the editor-in-chief of *Obzor*, he started supporting a return to constitutionalism.[60] In 1940, Dežman left his position as the head of Tipografija, and Rudolf Maixner took over. The new owners supported the policies of the Croatian Peasant Party and Tipografija tried to become the official press of the Croatian Banovina (Banovina Hrvatska), but the Croatian Peasant Party established its own newspaper, *Hrvatski dnevnik,* as a competitor to Tipografija's *Jutarnji list.*[61]

During its existence, Tipografija published three daily newspapers: *Jutarnji list*, *Obzor* and *Večer*, as well as one very successful weekly magazine – *Svijet.* The newspaper with the longest tradition was *Obzor*, which had been published since 1871 under this name (having been established even earlier, as *Pozor* in 1860). Although Obzor struggled with circulation from 1919[62] onwards, it was renowned for its role in training and educating journalists in Croatia.[63] From 1905 until his death in 1940, the editor-in-chief of *Obzor* was Milivoj Dežman.

During WWI, *Jutarnji list* (1912-1941) was a strictly informative newspaper. However, after the war, it adopted a sensationalist style, modelled on the newspaper *Az Est* from Budapest. It was one of the first newspapers with integrated special sections such as sports, "Women's world", and "Legal advisor".[64] From 1926 onwards, its editor-in-chief was Josip Horvat and the newspaper became a supporter of Radić and the Croatian

60 Novak, "Novinstvo Hrvatske u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji," 171–172.

61 Ibid., 172.

62 Horvat writes how the circulation of *Obzor* fell from 12-15 thousand copies to below 5 thousand copies in the first half of 1919 mainly due to the fact that its publishers failed to develop a correspondence service in both the country and abroad (Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 342.)

63 Prior to 1950s there were no schools of journalism in Croatia (Majstorović et al. 2022, 108.) and Horvat highlights the role of Vladimir Lunaček, the editor in *Obzor*, who turned the newsroom into a journalism seminar where he taught the new generation of journalists the beginnings of journalistic work (Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 343.)

64 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 344.

Peasant Party.[65] During the interwar period the circulation of *Jutarnji list* was slightly over 20,000 copies (see Table 1 in the Appendix).

Večer was a daily newspaper established in 1920 as an afternoon edition and it immediately became very successful.[66] Its first editor-in-chief was Eugen Demetrović.

From 1926 until 1938 Tipografija published an illustrated weekly magazine, *Svijet,*[67] which was still a novelty on the Yugoslav media market. It was a glamorous magazine, aimed at the upper social classes and was full of illustrations, photographs and lavish advertisements.[68]

Jugoštampa

The second largest newspaper company in Croatia, Jugoslavenska štampa or Jugoštampa was established in 1920, in the same year as Tipografija, and centred around the influential daily newspaper *Novosti.* It was founded on the basis of the Hrvatska tiskara (Croatian Printing House) and the Hrvatski štamparski zavod (Croatian Printing Office).[69] The most prominent president of the company was Antun (Toni) Schlegel. The sources detailing how the company came into existence are rather limited. According to the unpublished biography of Antun Schlegel, written by his brother Josip Schlegel, several board members originated from Slavenska banka (Slavic bank) and Prva Hrvats-

65 *Jutarnji list. Hrvatska enciklopedija – mrežno izdanje (Croatian Encyclopedia – online edition).* The Croatian Peasant Party was a political party founded in 1904 by brothers Antun and Stjepan Radić (leader of the party until his death in 1928). The party's program changed with time, i.e. adapted to political circumstances. The party also changed its name several times. In: Hrvatska seljačka stranka. *Hrvatska enciklopedija – mrežno izdanje (Croatian Encyclopedia – online edition).*

66 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 138.

67 Later published (both by Tipografija) as*: Svijet 7 dana* (1938-1939), and *7 dana* (until 1941). As cited in the catalogue of the National and University Library in Zagreb.

68 Vilović, *Povijest vijesti*.

69 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću.*

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ka štedionica (First Croatian Savings Bank).[70] This aligns with Horvat's (2003) observations regarding the close ties between Democratic Party newspaper and the Slavenska banka (Slavic Bank) in Zagreb.[71]

Novak (2005) discusses how Schlegel initially aligned himself with the politics of Svetozar Pribićević[72] but later, after his 1924 split within the Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka), which triggered a "behind the scenes" struggle inside Jugoštampa, he distanced himself from Pribićević and, with the help from the government in Belgrade, he connected the company with Belgrade bank capital, and in return it rendered services to the Radical Party (led by Nikola Pašić)[73]

Prior to becoming the head of Jugoštampa, Schlegel served as the director of two newspapers – *Riječ* and *Agramer Tagblatt*.[74] On 22 March 1929, Schlegel was assassinated in front of his apartment in Zagreb. Following his death, Slavo Jutriša, the editor-in-chief of *Novosti*, became the new director of the company.[75] The final director of the company was another journalist, Ive Mihovilović.[76]

During the interwar period Jugoštampa published several successful newspapers, most notably: *Novosti, Riječ Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* and *Kulisa*, all of which ceased publication in 1941 or earlier.

Novosti was the flagship newspaper of Jugoštampa. It entered the newspaper market in 1907 as an informative newspaper and was the first newspapers to be successfully sold through colportage.[77] *Novosti* also pioneered the coverage of sports, particularly football, and distinguished itself through the use of photo-essays.[78] The paper report-

70 Schlegel, Biografija Tonija Schlegela. Manuscript can be found in State Archive of the City of *Zagreb* – Državni arhiv Zagreba (DAZ), R-169.

71 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 346.

72 Svetozar Pribićević founded the Democratic Party in 1919, and it was based on the program of a unitary Yugoslav state with a centralist structure. Due to the conflict with Ljubomir Davidović, who was inclined to moderate centralism and reached an agreement with Stjepan Radić, he resigned from the party in 1924 and founded the Independent Democratic Party. As cited in: Croatian Encyclopedia (online edition).

73 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 142.

74 Novak, "Novinstvo Hrvatske u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji," 171.

75 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 175.

76 Novak, "Novinstvo Hrvatske u Kraljevini Jugoslaviji," 171.

77 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 309.

78 Ibid., 310.

ed on national and international news and paid considerable attention to non-political topics (social chronicles, accidents, crime, courtroom, sports, fashion, etc.). It also incorporated the use of illustrations, including drawings and photographs.[79] As Novak (2005) explains, the advertising section, introduced in 1914, became *Novosti*'s business foundation and played a crucial role in expanding its readership and audience.[80]

Riječ Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca was a daily newspaper affiliated with the Demokratska stranka (Democratic Party).[81] It was published between 1919 and 1920, after which it continued under the title *Riječ* until 1931. The newspaper represented the ideological positions of Yugoslav unitarism.[82]

In contrast, *Kulisa* was a "magazine for theatre, cinema, variety, society and sport". It was launched in Zagreb in 1927 and continued to be published until 1941 (with a break in 1936).[83]

Publishers of other influential daily newspapers

Apart from the larger newspaper publishing companies (Tipografija and Jugoštampa), "separate publishing consortia published dailies in Ljubljana (*Jutro*) and Belgrade (*Politika* and *Vreme*)".[84]

Politika was established in 1904 (at a time when 13 daily newspapers were being published in Belgrade)[85] by Vladislav Ribnikar who had previously worked as a correspondent for a Parisian paper in Berlin where he became acquainted with modern journalism and consequently implemented many of its practices in editing *Politika.*[86] He edited the newspaper with his brother Darko (both brothers died at the beginning of

79 *Novosti.* In *Hrvatska enciklopedija – mrežno izdanje (Croatian Encyclopedia – online edition).*

80 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 130.

81 Horvat, *Povijest novinstva Hrvatske*, 347.

82 Riječ Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca. In encyclopedia *Krležijana (1993–99).*

83 Senker, "Ilustrovani polumjesečnik Kulisa i popularizacija kazališta," 171.

84 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems,* 66.

85 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 98.

86 Ibid.*,* 99–100.

WWI[87]) and, after a pause in the publication of the newspaper between 1915 and 1919, the ownership of Politika passed to their brother Slobodan Ribnikar.[88] In 1924 Politika became a joint-stock company.[89] It was the most successful daily newspaper in the interwar period (under the leadership of Vladislav Ribnikar, the son of Slobodan Ribnikar and nephew of Vladislav Ribnikar) in Yugoslavia as its circulation was more than twice as large as the following newspaper on the list – *Vreme* (see Table 1 in the appendix for all circulation figures).

Vreme (Time) was a daily newspaper published in Belgrade from 1921 to 1941.[90] The owner and director of the company Vreme as well as its editor was Kosta M. Luković. The initiative for establishing *Vreme* was personally given by King Aleksandar to Momčilo Ninčić, along with Milan Stojadinović, who was the real owner of the newspaper. In order for *Vreme* to compete successfully with *Politika*, Kosta Luković, a former associate of that newspaper, was hired as its director.[91] Bjelica (1968) notes that *Vreme* was the first Belgrade-based newspaper established as a joint-stock company.[92]

Pravda (Truth) was established in 1904 by Pavle Marinković, and its first editor was Stevan Petrović. In 1913 the publishing of the newspaper was taken over by Sokić brothers who, in less than three decades, turned it into an exemplary newspaper.[93]

Judging by their circulation figures, the three Belgrade-based newspapers were the most successful daily newspapers in interwar Yugoslavia. According to the data for April 1941, *Politika* had a circulation of 145,700 copies, *Vreme* 65,000 and *Pravda* 45,000.[94]

Both *Jutro* and *Mariborski večernik* were published by the Jutro consortium (based in Ljubljana). *Jutro* (Morning) was a daily newspaper that focused on the economy,

87 Ibid.

88 As stated in Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška baza podataka COBIB.SR).

89 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 132.

90 As stated in *Vreme,* Pretraživa digitalna biblioteka.

91 As stated in the Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries. See: SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška baza podataka COBIB.SR).

92 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 132.

93 As cited in *Pravda*, Pretraživa digitalna biblioteka.

94 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 165.

education and politics[95] and was published in Ljubljana from 1920 till 1945. From 1924 it became a bulletin of the Independent Democratic Party in Slovenia (Samostojne demokratske stranke v Sloveniji) and had separate editions for the regions of Gorenjska, Primorska, and for abroad.[96] The newspaper *Mariborski večernik* was published in Maribor from 1927 till 1941 as a continuation of the *Tabor* newspaper.[97] The Slovenian daily newspapers (*Večernik* and *Jutro*) had circulation figures around 20 thousand copies or fewer (see all figures in Table 1 in the Appendix).

During the interwar period more than 30 women's magazines[98] appeared on the newspaper market. However, most of them lasted only for a few years.[99] Some were weekly, other monthly editions, but none were published by major publishing companies; instead they were issued by various consortia. One such venture, which was interesting from an ownership perspective, was *Eva*, a political magazine for women founded by two entrepreneurial brothers – Adolf and Franjo Rautenstrauch. The magazine was in publication only for three months and was edited solely by men.[100] *Jugoslavenska žena,* a monthly magazine for women, was edited by Zofka Kveder Demetrović whose husband was Juraj Demetrović[101], brother of Eugen Demetrović[102], director of Tipografija.

The two most successful women's magazines were *Ženski list* (Zagreb) and *Žena i svet* (Belgrade). *Ženski list* was published by the Konzorcij za izdavanje tiskopisa (Press Consortium) and edited by famed Croatian journalist and author Marija Jurić Zagorka from 1925 till 1938, while *Žena i svet* was published by Izdavačko udruženje "Ilustracija" ("Ilustration" publishing association).[103] It was edited by Jelena Zrnić, the

95 As stated in the first edition of the newspapers – *Jutro: dnevnik za gospodarstvo, prosveto in politiko* (24.08.1920), volume 1, issue 1.

96 As cited in: *Jutro*, Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije.

97 As cited in: *Mariborski večernik "Jutra*", Digitalna knjižnica Slovenije.

98 Some of those were: *Jugoslavenska žena* (Yugoslav woman), *Ženska misao* (Women's Thought), *Slovenka* (Slovenian woman), *Eva, Naša žena* (Our Woman), *Ženski list* (Women's Paper), *Ženski svijet* (Women's World), *Žena i svijet.* See: Ida Ograjšek Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije. Rodni stereotipi u međuratnoj Jugoslaviji* (Srednja Europa, 2014).

99 Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije*, 127.

100 Ibid., 127.

101 Ibid., 128.

102 Demetrović, Hrvatski bibliografski leksikon.

103 As stated in the catalogue of the National and University Library in Zagreb: Ilustracija went

wife of the editor of *Ilustrovani tjednik* and, in the beginning, it was published as a free supplement to that magazine.[104]

Political parties as newspaper publishers

Political party newspapers were abundant in the early days of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. A total of 40 parties participated in the elections for the Constituent Assembly in 1920, and 16 of them succeeded in being elected.[105] As Bjelica (1968) observes, all the parties used the press as the main tool of their political propaganda, and it was common for a political party to launch a newspaper before an election, only to cease publication of it once the elections were over.[106]

Bjelica (1968) also provides an account of the most important party newspapers – in Belgrade those were: *Samouprava* (of the Radical Party), *Demokratija* (Democratic Party) and *Republika* (also associated with the Radical Party).[107] The Democratic Party (Demokratska stranka) had a special newspaper in every larger town in Croatia, and in Zagreb the main one was *Riječ* (published by Jugoštampa). However, the most successful party newspaper was *Dom*, the official newspaper of Croatia's strongest political party – Radić's Croatian Republican Peasant Party (Hrvatska republikanska seljačka stranka).[108] According to Novak (2005), the circulation of *Dom* was around 80 thousand copies.[109] Hrvatska zajednica, a political party established in Croatia in 1919, published the newspaper *Hrvat.*[110] In Slovenia, some of the party newspapers were: *Kmetijski list* published by the Independent Peasant Party (Samostalna seljačka stranka) and *Nova pravda* published by the People's Socialist Party (Narodno-socijalistička stranka).[111]

bankrupt in 1930 and the magazine was acquired by new owners and there was a change in the editorial team (as cited in: Ograjšek Gorenjak 2014, 138).

104 Gorenjak, *Opasne iluzije*, 138.

105 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 131.

106 Ibid.

107 Ibid.

108 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe*.

109 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 124.

110 Ibid., 128.

111 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 131.

Various newspapers published by different political parties also existed in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Vojvodina, and Montenegro.

The situation for party newspapers became increasingly dire over time. Novak (2005) described the proclamation of Obznana as "a significant blow to the freedom of expression and journalism"[112] and referred to the enactment of the 1921 Law on the protection of the state as a tool by which "the regime protected itself from all who thought and wrote critically".[113] The final blow to the party press, and to the press in general, came in the form of the proclamation of dictatorship in January 1929 and the further censorship measures that followed it.

Ownership of news agency and radio in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia

The first news agency in Yugoslavia – Avala – was established in Belgrade in 1919 by French journalist Albert Mousset, who was also its first director. Initially it operated as a kind of private enterprise subsidized by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes[114] and the agency held a complete monopoly on distributing domestic and foreign news[115] which was provided by news agencies Reuters, Havas and Swiss Telegraphic Agency.[116]

Avala was acquired by the state in 1926[117] and in 1929 it became a joint-stock company with the state as its majority shareholder and several newspapers as minority shareholders.[118]

The first attempts to broadcast radio programs, prompted by the actions of several engineers, came in 1924 almost simultaneously in Belgrade, Ljubljana and Zagreb

112 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 132.

113 Ibid., 135.

114 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe*, 135.

115 Novak, "O ulozi i važnosti Hine u hrvatskom medijskom prostoru," 118.

116 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 136.

117 At the beginning of 1927, Avala came under the jurisdiction of the Press Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and was being financed from the state budget (Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 143.)

118 Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe,* 136.

(Bjelica, 1968). Radio stations in Zagreb (founded in 1925, program started in 1926), Ljubljana (founded in 1927) and Belgrade (founded in 1929) were established as joint-stock companies. The president of Radio d.d. Zagreb was Aleksander Šandor and its board consisted of 11 members.[119] Radio Ljubljana and Radio Belgrade were both established without state support, or in fact any support from domestic capital. The exclusive owner of the joint-stock company Radio Belgrade was the firm Markoni.[120]

Conclusion

Although the development of media and journalism in the interwar period in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia (1918-1941) can be divided into several stages (see Bjelica, 1968), the overall conclusion that can be derived for the period as a whole is that was a very turbulent time. On the one hand, it was characterized by the establishment of the first large and privately owned media companies along with the proliferation of newspapers, while on the other hand this was followed by a ban on party newspapers and there was crude censorship throughout the era (especially after the proclamation of dictatorship by King Alexander I). As Peruško et al. (2021) summarise: "the Kingdom of SHS/Yugoslavia presented a mixed picture of conditions and state treatment of the press".[121]

Regarding media companies, the period saw the formation of two major companies: Tipografija and Jugoštampa. Each had its own interesting story of entrepreneurship and both struggled for supremacy. These companies were both Zagreb-based, connected to banking capital and were close to certain political parties. Tipografija published *Jutarnji list*, *Obzor* and *Večer* (all three were daily newspapers) and a weekly magazine entitled *Svijet* while Jugoštampa published the daily newspaper *Novosti* (informative) along with *Riječ Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (the Democratic party's newspaper) and the weekly culture magazine *Kulisa.* Both *Svijet* and *Kulisa* were novelties on the newspaper market, which certainly contributed to their success.

Interestingly, many other privately owned newspapers existed, published by separate consortia, despite the fact that almost half of the population (according to the data from

119 Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 151.

120 Ibid.

121 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems,* 55.

the 1931 census) was illiterate.[122] Still, this obviously placed a limit on the full expansion of informative newspapers as their circulation was fairly low, apart from Belgrade-based daily newspapers *Vreme*, *Pravda* and *Politika*, which was the most successful of the three with a circulation of 145 thousand copies.[123] The fact that the commercial press was published despite these low circulation figures and the weakness of the market demonstrates the importance of the institution of the press in the modernization period. This study also shows how state control in authoritarian regimes, combined with the restriction of political information, can lead to the commercialization of the press which to some extent is similar to contemporary China.[124]

Private ownership was not confined to print media as both Avala, the first news agency, and the radio stations in Belgrade and Ljubljana were established with foreign capital and, similar to Radio Zagreb, the state gave them no financial support. All were established as joint-stock companies, but the Avala news agency was later acquired by the state, albeit after its establishment. The role of foreign capital and economic growth in developing the media sector is thus confirmed.

This seeming lack of interest by the state in media ownership is misleading. In fact, from the early days in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia onwards the tendency of the state to exert control over the media was visible in official documents. This became particularly evident with the proclamation of the Obznana (in 1920), a decree by which the Communist Party and its press was banned. State control over the media was later confirmed with the Law on the protection of the state of 1921. Furthermore, the Law on press of 1925 contained provisions that enabled state censorship. Still, the toughest period for journalism came after King Alexander I proclaimed dictatorship in January 1929 and banned political parties and their press. Amendments to the Law on the press enabled preventive censorship which meant that informative newspapers were no longer able to comment on the political situation in the country.

"Despite these adverse conditions", both prior to and after the proclamation of dictatorship, "a host of new newspapers were established during the interwar period" and

122 See Bilandžić, *Historija Socijalističke Federativne Republike Jugoslavije;* Troch, *Education and Yugoslav Nationhood in Interwar Yugoslavia*.

123 Data for 1941 as cited in Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe.*

124 Stockmann, *Media commercialization and authoritarian rule in China*.

after the assassination of King Alexander I in 1934 "the censorship was somewhat relaxed."[125] Also, as Peruško et al. (2021) explain: "the growing number of publications, books, and magazines made it more difficult for the state to monitor everything closely."[126] This, coupled with the fact that "the commercialization of newspapers and the profit motives of their owners contributed to the development of a general information press"[127] makes the interwar period particularly interesting to study from the perspective of media and media ownership.

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125 Peruško et al., *Comparing Post-Socialist Media Systems,* 55–56.

126 Ibid., 56.

127 Ibid., 72.

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Source: Fortepan / Salusinszky Imre

Appendix

Table 1. The most important daily newspapers in the interwar period (in order of appearance on t

Name of the print edition	Started publication	Ceased publication	Imprint[128]
Obzor	1871	1941	Dionička tiskara (1905-1920); Hrvatski štamparski zavod (from 1920)
Politika	1904	continues to this date (break in publication 1915-1919 and 1941-1944)	V. Ribnikar
Pravda	1904	1941 (break in publication in 1915-1916)	Štamparija Bojovića i Mićića "Miloš Veliki"
Novosti	1907	1941	Jugoslavenska štampa
Jutarnji list	1912	1941	Tipografija

128 As stated in library catalogues or digitalized newspaper editions.

129 As stated in library catalogues, unless indicated. When multiple names, given in order in which they a

130 Data for 1929 taken from Novak, *Hrvatsko novinarstvo u 20. stoljeću*, 252–254.; data for 1941 taken

131 As cited in the catalogue of the National and University Library in Zagreb.

132 As cited in Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška ba

133 As cited in Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška ba

134 *Jutarnji list. Hrvatska enciklopedija – mrežno izdanje*.

he market)

Place of publication	Editors-in-chief [129]	Circulation and date[130]	Remark on the owners/publishers and change in name
Zagreb	From 1920 Vladimir Lunaček; from Rudolf Maixner	3400 (in 1929); 2500 (in 1941)	Published by Tipografija; Before 1871 published as *Pozor* (1860-1867), *Novi Pozor* (1867-1869), *Zatočnik* (1869-1871), *Branik* (1871).[131]
Belgrade	For the period 1919-1944: Slobodan Ribnikar, Miomir Milenović, Vladislav Sl. Ribnikar	145700 (in 1941)	Owner Slobodan Ribnikar (from 1919), Vladislav Sl. Ribnikar (from 1924), Miomir Milenović (from1925), Vladislav Sl. Ribnikar (from 1935).[132]
Belgrade (from 1916 till 1918 Solun)	Last editor Damjan M. Sokić (from 1928)	45000 (in 1941)	Established by Pavle Marinković; owners Sokić family.[133]
Zagreb	From (1919 onwards): Lj.Z.Kara, Krešimir Kovačić, Ljudevit Kara, Krešimir Kovačić, Aldo Mandl, Hrvoje Macanović, Ive Mihovilović	36000 (in 1929); 23400 (in 1941)	Published by Jugoštampa.
Zagreb	Eugen Demetrović (1920-1926); Josip Horvat (1926-1941)[134]	24000 (in 1929); 21000 (in 1941)	Edition of Tipografija.

ssumed office.

from Bjelica, *200 godina jugoslovenske štampe*, 165–166.

aza podataka COBIB.SR), accessed July 20, 2024.

aza podataka COBIB.SR), accessed July 20, 2024.

Jugoslavenski list	1918	1941	Sarajevska tiskara i litografija[135]
Jutro	1920	1945	Konzorcij Jutra
Večer	1920	1941	Tipografija
Vreme	1921	1941	Vreme
Mariborski večernik	1927	1941	Konzorcij Jutra
Jugoslovenska pošta	1929	1941	Metodije Kujić, 1929-1941 (before *Bosanska pošta*)

135 According to Bjelica the newspaper was published by a consortium of three journalists (Bjelica, *200*

136 As stated in library catalogue – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška baza podataka COBIB.BH).

137 As stated in the first edition of the newspapers – *Jutro*, vol. 1, no. 1, 24 August 1920.

138 Slovenian biographical lexicon mentions no relation to Ribnikar family, owners of *Politika*. See: Kra

139 As stated in the Joint catalogue of Serbian libraries – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-katalo bib/131149575#full

140 As stated in the first edition of the newspapers – Mariborski večernik "Jutra", 2 May 1927, accessed 69a958e9d1ef/PDF

141 As cited in library catalogue – SVE biblioteke (uzajamna bibliografsko-kataloška baza podataka CO

Sarajevo	Ivan Peserle	7000 (in 1941)	During the war in 1941, it continued to be published under the title “Sarajevski list” and “Sarajevski hrvatski list”.[136]
Ljubljana	Vik. F. Jelene[137]	18000 (in 1941)	Publisher Adolf Ribnikar.[138]
Zagreb	Eugen Demetrović, Antun Platzer, Bogoljub Bratić, Dragan Bublić, Miroslav Golik, Mirko Dečak, Đuro Vilović, Antun Velcek, Đuro Vilović, Branimir Gršković	8000 (in 1929)	Edition of Tipografija.
Belgrade	Kosta M. Luković, Sava U. Jovanović, Boško Bogdanović, Grgur Kostić, Đorđe Pecarski, Grgur Kostić, Dušan Glišić, Grgur Kostić, Dojčilo Mitrović and Borivoje Glišić	65000 (in 1941)	Director from 1921 Kosta Luković; Owners and publishers for the Printing and Publishing Company “Vreme” (Štamparsko-izdavačko preduzeće Vreme): Nenad Đorđević (from 1924), Milutin Stevanović (from 1925), Dušan Glišić (from 1938), Danilo Gregorić (from 1940)[139]
Maribor	Stanko Virant[140]	20000 (in 1941)	Published by Konzorcij “Jutra” in Ljubljana.
Sarajevo	Radmilo Grdić	15000 (in 1941)	Owner Metodije Kujić; in 1941 changed name to “Pošta”.[141]

godina jugoslovenske štampe, 132).

njec, Silvo: Ribnikar, Adolf (1880–1946). Slovenska biografija.

ška baza podataka COBIB.SR), accessed 21 July, 2024, https://plus.cobiss.net/cobiss/sr/sr_latn/

20 July, 2024, https://www.dlib.si/stream/URN:NBN:SI:doc-VSJZQNKZ/7f92a665-bc35-4cac-a2b9-

BIB.BH), accessed 22 July, 2024, https://plus.cobiss.net/cobiss/bh/bs/bib/24223238#full

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The Bottomless Barrel
The Ownership and Financing of a Catholic Publisher: The Central Press Company in Interwar Hungary

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Abstract

The Central Press Company, founded in Budapest in 1918 by Catholic clerics and intellectuals to promote Christian national values, published two major dailies: Nemzeti Újság and Új Nemzedék. These papers were highly popular in 1919–1920 but soon faced a steep decline in sales, creating chronic financial problems. To survive, the company relied on state support from István Bethlen's conservative government in the 1920s, which also imposed political constraints on its editorial policy. Later, the owners sought aid from Catholic bishops, who introduced the "culture pennies" poll tax among the faithful, but this caused conflicts and failed to stabilize finances. In the early 1930s, after the Great Depression, Új Nemzedék was turned into a tabloid, achieving commercial success. In 1935, the Gömbös government tried unsuccessfully to take over the paper through financial pressure. The study examines the company's interwar financing within its political, social, and ecclesiastical context.

Keywords

Bangha Béla, Central Press Company, Ecclesiastical Taxation, Gömbös Gyula, Great Depression, Hungarian Catholicism, Hungarian Legitimism, Hungarian Catholic press ownership

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The Bottomless Barrel

The Ownership and Financing of a Catholic Publisher: The Central Press Company in Interwar Hungary

In 1927, Ferenc Eckhart, a renowned historian, summarised his views on the theoretical problems of researching the history of the press, somewhat ironically, in the columns of the *Nemzeti Újság* [National Newspaper]. He argued that one of the major difficulties for historians was that newspaper publishers depend on various sources of financial support, such as the state or private companies, while political groups influence their editorial staff. However, these interdependencies are often poorly documented, if at all, making it difficult for researchers in subsequent eras to critically evaluate the content of newspapers.[1] This observation is particularly relevant when examining the history of the Central Press Company (CPC), which produced the *Nemzeti Újság*.

This publisher was founded in Budapest in 1918 by Catholic clerics and intellectuals as a public limited company to promote so-called Christian national values. The company's daily newspapers quickly gained popularity in 1919 and 1920, but experienced a sharp decline in sales shortly thereafter. The financing of the company required serious efforts from its owners, who employed various strategies for this purpose. These challenges were not unique, as observers have

1 Eckhart, "Sajtó és történetírás," 4.

noted, as the financial situation of Hungarian newspapers was generally unsatisfactory, with many companies facing persistent financial difficulties.[2] Consequently, the Hungarian press was not entirely market-driven: private companies, local authorities, cities and the government regularly subsidised certain newspapers.[3]

This paper presents a case study examining the financing and ownership challenges of a unique company by exploring its political, social, and ecclesiastical context.

A Stormy Beginning: Revolutions and Counter-Revolution, 1918–1921

Hungarian political Catholicism made several attempts to start competitive political newspapers from the end of the 19th century onwards, but these efforts were unsuccessful. Various factors contributed to the failure of these initiatives.[4] However, at the end of the First World War, Béla Bangha, a Jesuit priest, had the idea of establishing a public limited company and relying primarily on small investors. Bangha secured the approval of the Episcopate for his plans and in 1918 the CPC was founded, issuing shares with a low nominal value of 25 crowns to attract a broad base of investors.[5]

The company launched a loud, spectacular, "American-style" stock subscription campaign, an approach that was highly unusual in the Hungarian Catholic community. In organising the campaign, Bangha followed the practical advice of László Szabó, a Catholic journalist and the assistant editor of the prestigious

2 Raichle, *Das ungarische Zeitungswesen*, 96.

3 Sipos, *Sajtó* és *hatalom a Horthy-korszakban*, 119.

4 Klestenitz, *A katolikus sajtómozgalom Magyarországon 1896–1932*, 17–137. With the exception of Germany, however, the Catholic press generally remained one-sided, mostly characterised by traditionalism and adherence to integralist values. Atkin and Tallett, *Priests, Prelates, and People*, 172.

5 Szabó and Molnár, *Bangha Béla emlékezete*, 231–232.; Klestenitz, *Pajzs és kard*, 174–182.

liberal tabloid *Az Est* [The Evening]. Szabó, who was also a trusted adviser to Cardinal János Csernoch, played a key role in shaping the campaign's strategy.[6] Unusually, this initiative received the enthusiastic support of the Catholic clergy, driven by their fear of potential social upheaval after the end of the war. The clergy was following the news of revolutionary events in Russia at this time with great concern, fearing that anti-clerical currents could also gain strength in the Hungary of the Dual Monarchy. Supporters of the CPC warned, "It is foreseeable that the Christian faith and morals will be the target of many attacks. The evil that rains war upon us will portray the war as a failure of Christian truth".[7] However, the organisers of the press movement doubted that Catholic anti-communist propaganda which relied solely on political and ideological arguments could be successful. To address this, they introduced a completely novel approach in the Catholic context: the promise of material gain. They argued that the company's shares represented a good investment that would pay dividends in a few years, offering returns that would be higher than bank interest rates.[8]

To the public's surprise, the campaign quickly proved successful: within a few months, from January to June 1918, the CPC raised 10 million crowns, far exceeding their initial expectations. Subscriptions from the clergy amounted to around one and a half million crowns, but most of the funds came from small investors, numbering around 200,000 individuals.[9] Reports from the time suggest that a wide range of people participated in the subscription. For instance, the Catholic Press Ladies Committee of Székesfehérvár collected 500 subscriptions in that town, while the "press ladies" of Kalocsa gathered 10,000 crowns.[10] Despite this success, the clerics behind the initiative remained cautious about the institution of a public limited company. They feared that their ideological opponents might later purchase shares and turn the company into a radical left-wing

6 Klestenitz, *Fejezetek az egyházi sajtó történetéből*, 46–49.

7 "A keresztény sajtóvállalat ügye," 1.

8 "A Katolikus Sajtóvállalat Részvénytársaság," 1.

9 Klestenitz, *A katolikus sajtómozgalom*, 162.

10 Klestenitz, *A katolikus sajtómozgalom*, 155.

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newspaper. As a result, in May 1918, under the leadership of Béla Bangha, a share syndicate was established. The syndicate members were empowered by the board of trustees to vote on their behalf at general meetings.[11]

However, the company's organisation was delayed by Austria-Hungary's defeat in the First World War and the political uncertainty that followed. In November 1918, the monarchy was overthrown, a republic was proclaimed, and the Social Democrats, alongside the bourgeois Independence Party, began to play an increasingly prominent role in the government. The leaders of the CPC attempted to buy an existing left-wing newspaper in an attempt to create their own organ, but the newspaper's journalists, backed by the Social Democrats, successfully thwarted the attempt.[12]

More worryingly, in March 1919, the Hungarian Soviet Republic was proclaimed.[13] The communist regime did not ban religious practice outright, but it made it much more difficult. It also imposed severe restrictions on the activities of churches and related organisations and began to nationalise their property.[14] The constitution of the new communist system, adopted in June 1919, permitted workers alone to freely express their opinions, and granted them the exclusive right to publish all printed matter.[15] The central management of the Hungarian press was placed under the control of a newly created state body, the National Council for Intellectual Products. All the assets of the CPC were nationalised and used for the benefit of this body.[16]

The Soviet Republic collapsed in the autumn of 1919, following its military defeat by the Romanian army, plunging Hungary into political chaos with

11 Esztergomi Prímási Levéltár (Primatial Archives in Esztergom, EPL) Cat. 44/3155-1918. From the Organizing Office of the CPC, 1 May, 1918.

12 Klestenitz, *A katolikus sajtómozgalom*, 171–185.

13 On its history see Hatos, *Rosszfiúk világforradalma. Az 1919-es Magyarországi Tanácsköztársaság története*.

14 Fazekas, "'A likvidáló hivatal.' Megjegyzések a Tanácsköztársaság egyházpolitikájának intézményi hátteréről,", 102–113.

15 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 322–324.

16 Klestenitz, Az egyházi sajtó és a Tanácsköztársaság, in *A Tanácsköztársaság és az egyházak. Egyházpolitika, kereszténydözés, egyházi útkeresés*, ed. Fejérdy, 89–90.

no recognised central authority. The economic situation was very unfavourable for the press, for a variety of reasons including inflation, paper shortages and a shrinking market. However, the political circumstances proved favourable for the Catholic press movement, as public opinion embraced the pledge that the new leaders made for the restoration of Hungary's territorial unity as part of the Christian national ideology that prevailed after the fall of the communism.[17]

A new consensus was born, declaring Hungary to be a Christian nation. The traumas of the defeat in World War I, the Soviet Republic, and the Romanian occupation in quick succession intensified the anxiety of many Hungarians about the nation's future, making it widely accepted that the survival of the Hungarians in a hostile international environment – between the secularizing West and "godless Bolshevism" to the east – could only be secured through a return to Christian values. The idea of a "Christian nation", however, held different meanings for the various groups that espoused it. Secular nationalists often interpreted it as the exclusion of the Jews and as a form of militant anti-Semitism, while others called for an intense religious renewal and the reorganisation of public life based on religious principles.[18] The Catholic Church emphasized the integrative function of the national idea, defending it as a political dogma. "In doing so, it conceived of a historical continuity within Hungarian national history, which was to serve as a basis for legitimising its claim to be a first-rate interpretative authority and suggested the message that nation, state and (Catholic) Christianity formed – as they always had – an inseparable unity."[19]

Very little is known about the actual financial conditions surrounding the launch of the CPC's newspapers. According to one board member, the National Council for Intellectual Products had spent one million crowns of the company's assets,[20] while another member reported the amount was only four hundred thousand crowns.[21] Bangha later claimed that the Soviet Republic had spent all

17 Klestenitz, "Sajtó és újságírás Trianon árnyékában," 306–317.

18 Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary*, 80–83.

19 Spannenberger, *Die katholische Kirche in Ungarn 1918–1939*, 59.

20 "A keresztény nők sajtóakciója," 9.

21 "A Központi Sajtóvállalat Rt. egyik vezérférfiának nyilatkozata az új sajtóorgánumokról," 1.

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the company's assets, so they had to find other ways to raise money.[22] Without clear archival sources, this question cannot be answered definitively. However, an account provided in a later memorandum written by the leaders of the CPC seems to be the most plausible. According to this memorandum, the situation was resolved in autumn 1919 by Frigyes Korányi, Minister of Finance, who was an old friend of some of the CPC founders. He secured an agreement from the government to transfer five million crowns to the company to compensate for the capital seized by the Soviet Republic.[23]

By the autumn of 1919, the conditions for publishing the CPC's newspapers and journals had been established. The leaders of the publishing house immediately decided to publish seven organs, including three national dailies (*Nemzeti Újság*, *Új Nemzedék*, and *Új Lap*), a national daily in German (*Neue Post*), a weekly (*Gondolat*), an illustrated weekly (*Képes Krónika*) and a legal journal (*Magyar Jogi Szemle*) in order to win over public opinion as quickly as possible. However, this decision was risky, as it required the immediate mobilisation of all the company's financial resources.[24]

Initially, this strategy seemed to be a huge success. A major factor in this was the strong support that the right-wing governments provided to the CPC, not only through financial assistance, but also by helping with the distribution of newspapers and propaganda. In contrast, the liberal-minded rival newspapers were constantly under attack from right-wing movements, and were accused of being unpatriotic and loyal to the Hungarian Soviet Republic, with campaigns being launched against them.[25] All of this had an effect. By the beginning of 1920, the CPC's organs had 50,000 subscribers and 750 paper-carriers in Budapest.[26] By the end of the year, the daily circulation of the company's papers had reached 140,000 copies.[27]

22 Nyisztor, *Bangha Béla élete és műve*, 228.

23 EPL Cat. 63/927-1926. Memorandum of the CPC, undated.

24 Nyisztor, *Bangha Béla élete*, 258.

25 Sipos, *A politikai újságírás mint hivatás*, 28–46.

26 "Ellenőrző osztály," 6.

27 Nyisztor, *Bangha Béla élete,* 273.

In October 1920, looking back on the first year of the company, Bangha reported to the papal nuncio in Budapest that the Catholic publishing house was flourishing. He noted that CPC was using the largest paper quota of any of the newspaper publishers at the time, accounting for one third of the total Hungarian press requirements. However, he also openly acknowledged that the company owed much of its success to the support of state and military bodies, including government-backed propaganda efforts and preferential tariffs for rail and postal transport. The company's power, as well as its limitations at that time are well illustrated by its ability to purchase one of the most modern printing houses in the Hungarian capital, the Pallas Literary and Printing Company. However, it could not cover the full purchase price, which was around 50-60 million crowns, on its own, and attempted to find a co-owner from among the foreign Catholic publishers.[28]

Nevertheless, this era of success and expansion did not last long for the CPC. The unity of the right-wing political camp had already broken down by 1921. Divisions arose, stemming from the question of the future form of government: the legitimists believed that the time was ripe for the restoration of the Habsburg monarchy, while the other party sought to uphold the rule of Miklós Horthy as Regent of Hungary. The key players of the CPC, like the majority of the leaders of political Catholicism and a large proportion of the higher-ranking clergy, aligned with the royalists, while the government's press policy was controlled by their political enemies. This raised the spectre of the company losing crucial state aid.

Bangha realized that his publisher had found itself in a very delicate political situation, so in October 1921 he travelled to the United States of America to collect donations from the local Catholic Hungarian community there to support the CPC. By January 1922 the Jesuit father had visited the main Hungarian

28 Klestenitz, "Bangha Béla jelentése a budapesti nunciusnak a Központi Sajtóvállalat helyzetéről," 72. It was common for newspaper publishing companies of the period to seek to buy a printing company in their economic interests. The best-known example of this is the Est group, which purchased the long-established Athenaeum printing house in 1917. Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó,* 364.

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settlements. The results of his work were, in his own words, "not spectacular, but not despicable". The exact amount he raised is not known, but according to a Catholic source, five thousand dollars were collected in the first month,[29] and the final amount, according to the left-wing émigré press in Vienna, amounted to 14,000 dollars.[30] In any case, the results of the overseas fundraising drive were more modest than expected.

Press strategies of the legitimist aristocracy and the Catholic Church in the 1920's

The firm's financial problems were eventually resolved by a group of legitimist aristocrats led by Count János Zichy. In March 1922, the company held an extraordinary general meeting, at which its share capital was increased to 19 million crowns.[31] This amount was later increased by the Annual General Meeting to 20,250,000 crowns in September 1923.[32]

The political profile of the CPC was subsequently largely shaped by the leader of the new investor group, who was aligned with a conservative Christian party loyal to the government. As the new chairman of the company's board, Zichy directed the newspapers not to follow the demands of the masses, but to return to the pre-war paternalistic concept of the conservative aristocracy, and he wanted the journalists to renounce opposition to the government. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this concept did not appeal to the newspapers' readers, and the CPC's papers, as mouthpieces of the conservative Catholic aristocracy, failed to attract the masses. In the late 1920s, the average circulation of the company's two dai-

29 "A mi élhetetlenségünk," 1.

30 "Bécsi rágalom egy budapesti lapban," 6.

31 Budapest Főváros Levéltára (Budapest City Archives, BFL) VII. 2. e. Register of Companies, Volume 78. 364.

32 BFL VII. 2. e. Register of Companies, Volume 78. 365.

lies was 24-25 thousand copies (*Nemzeti Újság*) and 18-19 thousand copies (*Új Nemzedék*).[33] The editors therefore attempted to boost their sales figures and to reach as many readers as possible. From 1925, for example, crime reports were allowed to appear on the front page, although this had the potential to offend the moral sensibilities of many conservative Catholics. New sections on literature, sport and horseracing were introduced, as well as cartoons, crosswords and prize draws to reward loyal readers.[34]

Despite these efforts, the company soon faced a serious financial crisis. In early 1926, the management of the Central Press Company sent a petition for help to the Catholic Episcopate. According to their report, the CPC's advertising and economic revenues had halved within a short period, while its outstanding debts continued to remain very high. The management attributed the deteriorating economic conditions to increased competition in the press market. In the management's view, the large newspaper companies in Budapest were trying to take over the entire market by destroying competing companies, and were even prepared to exhaust the wealth they had accumulated during the First World War to do so. The management pointed out that the CPC was being forced to compete for readers' favour, but the company was still using its finances sparingly and it had the smallest deficit among the major publishers.[35]

In private letters, the owners also asked a number of wealthy aristocrats for financial support. János Zichy explained the company's financial crisis as follows: "The majority of our readership comes from the clerical class, such as postmasters, railway officials, municipal and administrative clerks, as well as from the industrial and petty bourgeoisie. It is well known that it is precisely these social strata that are financially the weakest, so that one copy of our newspaper is read by several families. We have noticed, for example, that, in rural

33 Székesfehérvári Püspöki és Székeskáptalani Levéltár (Archives of the Diocese and Chapter of Székesfehérvár, SzfvPL) 7122. Strictly confidential information for the use of the reverend archdeacons, undated.

34 "Új rovatokkal kibővülve, nagyobb terjedelemben jelenik meg az Új Nemzedék," 3.

35 EPL Cat. 63/927-1926. Memorandum of the CPC, undated.

areas in particular, small and large groups of people come together to subscribe and pass the paper from hand to hand. Selling an average of 34,000 copies on a Sunday, therefore, means that at least 200,000 people are reading it, because, for instance, in rural farmers' clubs and casinos there are queues to read our papers, but our supporters do not have the financial means to buy them in numbers equal to the number of people who read the liberal papers." Zichy also referred to the supportive stance of the influential deputy prime minister, the Catholic cleric József Vass, who also believed that it was in the best interests of the country's richest people to maintain the Christian press, as this could help to prevent the spread of left-wing "revolutionary" views. The letter also reveals that there were three main groups of shareholders at the time: the company's founders, the legitimist aristocrats who came on the scene in 1922, and a group of government supporters who appeared later, at an unknown date, led by Count Károly Khuen-Héderváry.[36]

A few months later, the leader of the company made a more urgent request to the bishops, asking for a fixed operating subsidy to be paid three years in advance.[37] The Episcopate found this request to be justified because it considered that the CPC had been able to counteract the influence of the liberal, so-called "destructive" press in the public sphere, and it also wanted to avoid the bankruptcy of the Catholic newspapers for reasons of prestige. The Episcopate therefore decided that the bishops should levy an ecclesiastical tax on the parishes in their diocese, to be determined according to their size and capacity. Parish priests were made personally responsible for collecting the tax. The revenue would be used to support the company.[38]

A serious problem, however, was that the Episcopal Body could not enforce binding decisions on its members, and some bishops had serious objections to the system. As a result, the CPC received only a small fraction of the promised

36 Fazekas and Klestenitz, ""Mentőakció" a keresztény sajtóért 1926-ban (Zichy János levele Festetics Taszilónak)," 51–53.

37 EPL Cat. 63/927-1926. Memorandum of the CPC, March 1926.

38 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között,* Vol. I, 176.

ecclesiastical subsidies and came close to bankruptcy in early 1927. In this situation, the head of the Hungarian Catholic Church, Prince Primate and Cardinal János Csernoch, asked the Prime Minister Count István Bethlen for help in saving the company. The main argument he made for this was the political reliability of the company's newspapers under the leadership of the legitimist aristocracy: "The Press Company played a lion's share in preparing the national atmosphere which helped Your Excellency's wise policy to triumph in the elections. The political education of the Catholics, who make up the vast majority of the country's population, has been carried out with a completely reassuring result through the newspapers of the Central Press Company, in spite of very many difficulties." The Cardinal's intervention bore fruit, and the Prime Minister allocated state funds to help the CPC through the crisis.[39]

The introduction of the "culture tax" and the Great Depression

In June 1927, the Episcopal Body again considered it "urgent" to recapitalise the Company, and at that time each bishop undertook to collect a culture tax of four pennies per parishioner.[40]At its meeting in October, the Body decided to create what was dubbed the National Catholic Cultural Fund from the cultural tax, and to transfer a monthly subsidy of 10,000 *pengő*s to the CPC.[41] This decision effectively created a culture tax to support the CPC, which was collected in Hungarian dioceses from then until 1944.

The introduction of this culture tax posed serious challenges to the clergy, who were made responsible for collecting the money, and the practical problems surrounding the levy were often discussed in the clerical journals. These largely arose from the novelty of compulsory ecclesiastical taxation, as the culture

39 EPL Cat. B/249-1927. Letter from Cardinal János Csernoch to Prime Minister István Bethlen, 25 January 1925. Response from the Prime Minister, 5 February 1925.

40 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között,* Vol. I, 195.

41 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között,* Vol. I, 206–207.

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tax was the first attempt to introduce mandatory church taxation throughout the country (apart from the capital). The general impression was that many priests themselves were not keen on compulsory collections. It was difficult to make the faithful pay. The principle of rationing was felt to be particularly unfair by poor families with many children and farm servants, who had not previously paid regular church contributions. [42] For this reason, many clerics wanted to be relieved of the burden of collecting the tax.[43] As one parish priest succinctly put it, the culture tax was popular neither with the faithful nor with the priests. He warned that the faithful would eventually tire of the constant "begging", especially if their financial sacrifices did not produce visible results. He also wrote that priests had a primary duty to mitigate the "harmful effects of tax collection, so as not to damage religious life". [44]

At the same time, the culture tax also had the effect of increasing the bishops' desire to control the content of the CPC's newspapers. In 1930, for example, the Prince Primate, Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, wrote to the editor of the newspaper *Nemzeti Újság*, sharply criticizing the advertisements published in the paper. "We are also fighting against *décolletage* in the context of exaggerated women's fashion. I believe that this struggle should be welcomed and supported by a Catholic newspaper, at least to the extent that it does not undermine what has been achieved through persistent work in this difficult field with similar advertisements". In his reply, the editor assured the Cardinal that the advertisements in question would not be republished, but he also made it clear to the Cardinal that the CPC was put at a financial disadvantage by such overly strict ecclesiastical requirements. He stressed that they had always been careful about morality, even if it meant incurring a competitive disadvantage in the marketplace compared to other newspapers. For example, they did not publish an advertisement for Josephine Baker's Budapest programme, which would have brought in 10,000 *pengő*s a month. They also suffered significant losses because they refused to

42 Schoderbeck, "Az egyházmegyei kötelező gyűjtésekről," 170–171.

43 Kiss, "Az egyházi adó kérdéséhez," 17.

44 Biczi, "Az egyházmegyei kötelező gyűjtésekről," 16–17.

advertise books that were on the ecclesiastical Index of Forbidden Books. [45]

From 1929 onwards, the effects of the Great Depression hit Hungary in several waves. In 1929 agriculture suffered economic setbacks, then in 1930 it was the turn of industry and the following year the financial sector fell into crisis. The rapid rise in unemployment which accompanied the depression led to severe social unrest.[46] Some opinion leaders believed that the country's poor economic situation should be alleviated by nationalising the wealth of the privileged classes. In 1931, Count Imre Károlyi, in his book entitled The Crisis of the Capitalist World Order, proposed the secularisation of the property of the Catholic Church, which caused a great stir.[47]

The deterioration in the financial situation of the population had an immediate impact on the CPC, whose revenues plummeted rapidly. In November 1930, the College of Bishops held a serious debate on whether to continue supporting the company. In particular, Lajos Szmrecsányi, the Archbishop of Eger and Gyula Glattfelder, the Bishop of Csanád supported the CPC. Szmrecsányi stated that "if we let these newspapers fail, we will be even less able to sustain a new one". Glattfelder, meanwhile, felt that the possible withdrawal of aid would be "a very sad capitulation". The bishops of Vác and Veszprém, on the other hand, announced that they could not personally guarantee that the culture tax would continue to be collected, while the bishop of Győr only committed himself to it being paid in future, not to the arrears, and the Greek Catholic bishop of Hajdúdorog declared that he would not collect the culture tax at all. This position was in the minority, however, and in the end the bishops agreed to continue to transfer the monthly aid. [48]

The issue of the CPC was discussed again by the bishops in March 1931. The company reported that even maintaining the old subscriber base was causing serious problems, while advertising revenues had almost disappeared, and the in-

45 EPL Cat. 56/888-1930. Letter from Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi to László Tóth, 12 March, 1930. Response from Tóth, 17 March, 1930.

46 Romsics, *Magyarország története a XX. században*, 167–168.

47 Károlyi, *A kapitalista világrend válsága*.

48 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között*, Vol. I, 334–335.

come of the newspapers had fallen to a minimum. The Church also faced serious hardships: it had become more difficult than ever to collect the culture tax, and some bishops proposed reducing the CPC subsidy by 25%. This proposal was finally rejected by the Episcopate by a narrow vote of 9 to 5.[49]

Subsequently, serious attempts were made to collect the taxes in all dioceses. As part of this effort, the bishops even required parish priests to use the reserves of church funds (otherwise to be used only for parish purposes) to pay off the arrears of the culture tax. This regulation naturally provoked serious opposition in many places. This is illustrated by the account of a priest in a small parish, in the village of Tököl, who, on the orders of his bishop, had to pay 300 *pengő*s in arrears: "I understand, Your Excellency, the matter of the Central Press Company, I am also aware that with the loss of the Catholic cause the basilica can be turned into a stable, but to digest the idea that even the church funds must be emptied today in the interest of the Catholic press my parishioners, and others' too, are uncultured. With newspapers I cannot feed those who are blinded by hunger."[50]

Nevertheless, the crisis did the company some good because it forced the management to innovate. In 1932, the CPC decided to adapt its daily newspaper, *Új Nemzedék* to market demand: it was reduced to six pages and distributed very cheaply for four pennies. In addition to financial considerations, political intentions also played a role, as it was the only way for the company to compete with liberal newspapers that were spreading a so-called "destructive" ideology. The CPC tried to turn the crisis to its advantage and quickly adapted to changing market conditions. The new editor-in-chief of the *Új Nemzedék* considered it important to adapt to readers' needs[51] and he transformed the newspaper into

49 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások* története és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között, Vol. I, 393–394.

50 SzfvPL 7122-15/1932. Report of parish priest Ferenc Szabó to Bishop Lajos Shvoy, 29 December, 1931.

51 Even today, the most successful Catholic newspapers are following a similar strategy. Biehlmann, *How two Catholic newspapers are reinventing themselves to survive in a secular Europe.* https://reutersinstitute.politics.ox.ac.uk/news/how-two-catholic-newspapers-are-reinventing-themselves-survive-secular-europe

a typical tabloid, which would be more accessible to the masses thanks to it carrying sensational news, pictures, short articles and a large number of reports. Costs were also significantly cut by reducing the size of the paper and cutting the editorial staff. The reforms led to an increase in the newspaper's readership: by 1934, the *Új Nemzedék*'s daily circulation had risen to over 100,000, making it a major player in the press market. [52]

However, there was a downside to these changes: bishops and clergy often complained that the *Új Nemzedék* had lost its Catholic character completely after the restructuring, and on several occasions they tried to intervene in the editorial process, demanding a more ecclesiastical tone. Their efforts ultimately proved unsuccessful, as the logic of business took precedence. On one occasion, for example, the company asked for extraordinary support from the Episcopal Body. The Archbishop of Eger insisted that the CPC newspapers would pay more attention to Catholic issues. However, Nándor Rott, Bishop of Veszprém said that many subscribers had already protested to the company because they felt that the proportion of church news in the papers was too high. The Bishops' Body eventually accepted this argument and agreed to continue the subsidy on the same terms. [53]

Clearly, then, the editors of the newspapers of the Central Press Company, due to their multilateral financial dependence, had to take into account the interests of the Catholic Church, legitimist politicians and the government at the same time. Unfortunately, little is known about the details, and even less about the evolution of the ownership structure. What is certain is that in 1934 the founding circle led by Béla Bangha held 1013 shares, János Zichy's Legitimists had 1488, and Count József Károlyi's group owned 1601. The "other major shareholders" possessed 766 shares and the "other small shareholders" 1158.[54]

52 EPL Cat. D/c/3247-1934. Gyula Czapik's report on the CPC, 10 September, 1934.

53 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között, Vol. I,* 459.

54 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások és jegyzőkönyvei 1919–1944 között*, Vol. II, 38.

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Problems of the Gömbös era (1932–1936)

The largely legitimist and deeply conservative Episcopate had serious reservations about the rise of Gyula Gömbös to power. Before his appointment as head of the government, Gömbös had tempered much of his earlier extremist rhetoric in order to win the support of conservative circles, but the Episcopate continued to regard him as a far-right politician. These concerns were also shared by many Catholic politicians. In June 1933, Count János Zichy, as the leader of the Christian Party announced in parliament, that his party distrusted the Prime Minister and would go into opposition. However, as the literature points out, "it took some time for the press and the public to become aware of this change".[55] One of the reasons for this may have been that the party's press, due to its high degree of financial dependence, was very cautious about asserting its role as an opposition party. As a result, however, there was a growing dissatisfaction among the Catholic clergy and laity with the company's publications, which were increasingly seen as indifferent to and distant from the genuine spirit of Catholicism, and demands were made to "re-catholicise" the company.[56]

The suspicion of the Catholic community was not unjustified, as Gömbös (who was himself a Lutheran) had also tacitly sought to reduce the social influence of the Catholic Church.[57] The government therefore did its best to weaken political Catholicism, and even tried to take over its most widely read newspaper, the *Új Nemzedék*. This was in line with Gömbös's general press policy of controlling public opinion through propaganda, and to this end he also attempted to reorganise the press market on a political basis.[58] In 1935, when the CPC again ran into financial difficulties and needed urgent financial help from the state, István Antal, Gömbös's press chief imposed a number of serious conditions on such aid: he wanted *Új Nemzedék* to be separated from the company and to be

55 Gergely, *A kereszténységszocializmus Magyarországon (1924–1944),*100.

56 Klestenitz, "A Központi Sajtóvállalat Gömbös Gyula miniszterelnöksége idején,", 201–208.

57 Spannenberger*, Die katholische Kirche*, 89–91.

58 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom*, 147–148.

published by a new public limited company which would be 51% owned by the government and 49% by the CPC. In return, Antal would have guaranteed that the *Új Nemzedék* could remain a Catholic newspaper, but of course it would have had to serve the government politically. At the time, the press chief considered the *Új Nemzedék* to be so important that in exchange for the deal he would even promise that the state would pay all of the paper's printing costs.[59] The company's financial situation had become very precarious, as it had accumulated huge debts with the Pallas printing house, whose shares it had previously had to transfer to the government. As a result of this financial dependence, according to one ecclesiastical assessment, "the newspapers are implicitly pro-government. Catholicism only has a role to play when statements do not affect the mentality of the government". [60]

In the end, Antal's offer was not accepted, because at the last minute, at the end of 1935, the CPC obtained a very large loan, which secured its independence for a few years. The loan was obtained by the aristocratic leaders of the CPC and its source was not even disclosed to the Catholic Church authorities, who investigated the matter for a long time without being able to obtain any credible information. They considered it most likely that the loan came from Austrian legitimist groups or Hungarian Jewish business circles, both of which had an interest in weakening the position of the Gömbös government,[61] which had gained considerable influence in the press.[62]

Once its financial situation had stabilised, the CPC took an openly oppositional stance to Gömbös, criticising the government's policies on the basis of Catholic social teaching. János Zichy wrote to Cardinal Serédi in 1936 that the company's newspapers had finally become independent organs, and that this was

59 EPL Cat. 56/123-1937. Letter from Gyula Czapik to János Drahos, Director of the Archbishop's Office, 17 August, 1935.

60 EPL Cat. 56/123-1937. Report from Gyula Czapik to Cardinal Jusztinián Serédi, 22 September, 1935.

61 EPL Cat. 56/123-1937. Letter from Gyula Czapik to János Drahos, Director of the Archbishop's Office 28 December, 1935, and 31 December, 1935.

62 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó,* 358.

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"the fulfilment of decades of long expectations".[63] There were also positive changes on the part of the Church. In the autumn of 1936, Gyula Czapik, a clergyman appointed by the Episcopate to oversee press affairs, reported that the daily circulation of *Új Nemzedék* had steadily increased to over 100,000 and the popularity of the *Nemzeti Újság* was also growing. In the case of this daily, "its criticism, expressed after the loosening of its ties with the government, tending towards a somewhat stronger catholicity and cautious opposition that before, proved to be beneficial for public sentiment and circulation".[64] According to Czapik, the loan from an unknown source had a very positive effect on the CPC's financial situation; the company paid its bills on time and was even able to pay off significant amounts of its depts. The most significant advantage, he wrote, was that "the independence from the government was also reflected in the intellectual direction of the newspapers". [65]

However, this proved to be only a temporary situation: Gömbös died soon after, in October 1936, after which the differences of interest between the government and the Catholics gradually became less and less important. The CPC's newspapers then began to support the government's policies again, and this remained essentially unchanged until March 1944, the Nazi German occupation of Hungary.[66]

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Since the end of the 19th century, Hungarian Catholics had longed to address public opinion through competitive, modern political newspapers. The CPC was

63 EPL Cat. D/c/3090-1936. Letter from János Zichy to Cardinal Jusztinán Serédi, 17 September, 1936.

64 EPL Cat. D/c/3090-1936. Report from Gyula Czapik, 30 September, 1936.

65 *A magyar katolikus püspökkari tanácskozások,* Vol. II. 128.

66 Klestenitz, *Fejezetek az egyházi sajtó történetéből*, 111–132.

the result of these aspirations, but it was never able to become financially self-sufficient during its period operation up until 1944. However, its owners saw it not primarily as a business, but as a political instrument. As the documents of prelates and aristocratic politicians show, the Catholic press was maintained at all costs during the interwar period primarily to prevent a left turn in public opinion and a possible restoration of the Soviet Republic. As financial considerations played little part in the running of the business, economic crises occurred regularly. Material losses were regularly covered by external sources, including the legitimist aristocracy, the government and the Catholic Church.

The latter source was the most specific in nature: since the CPC was unable to attract the Catholic masses as readers and consumers, these same masses had to contribute to the operation of the company in the form of a church tax. Feedback from parish priests reveals that this situation provoked strong opposition, especially in rural areas, where a significant proportion of parishioners were not yet regular newspaper readers. Although the editors made great strides in adapting to the needs of the public following the Great Depression, especially in transforming *Új Nemzedék* into a tabloid, the company remained a bottomless barrel from a financial point of view.

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Who Owned the News?
Press Dynamics and Public Views in Interwar Hungary

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Abstract

This paper examines changes in press ownership in Hungary between the World Wars, comparing the interwar period to the earlier "Golden Age" of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (1880–1918), and situating these developments within broader Central versus Western European trajectories. It analyzes the political, social, economic, and legal factors shaping press ownership from 1920 to 1938 under Miklós Horthy's authoritarian regime, emphasizing the enduring impact of the 1914 Press Law and the gradual shift toward increased state control by the late 1930s. The study also explores how public perceptions of prominent press owners evolved during this time, contributing to the emergence of the "press tycoon" stereotype. By tracing these historical patterns, the paper sheds light on continuities with contemporary trends in Central and Eastern Europe, where national ownership has resurged following the period of multinational dominance after the 1989 transition.

Keywords

press ownership patterns; press concentration; political instrumentalization; press tycoons; Antisemitism in the press; Jews and the press; far-right press; interwar period; government intervention in the press, editorial autonomy

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Who Owned the News?

Press Dynamics and Public Views in Interwar Hungary

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The landscape of press ownership in interwar Hungary underwent significant change compared to that of the 'Golden Age' of Hungarian journalism (1880-1918), which had been a hallmark of industrial development following the 1867 Austro-Hungarian Compromise.[1] The first part of my paper examines the main dynamics of press ownership during the interwar period, between 1920 and 1938, emphasizing the political and social contexts in Hungary at that time, while also considering some of the economic and regulatory factors involved. It compares the dynamics of the Hungarian press's 'Golden Age' diachronically and – to some extent – Central European changes synchronically, contrasting them with press ownership patterns in the West in the interwar period. During this era, Hungary was governed by an authoritarian parliamentary regime, although the relatively liberal 1914 Press Law – adopted during the earlier period of liberal nationalist consensus – remained in force until 1938, aside from a brief spell of harsh postwar restrictions between 1919 and 1920. In 1938–1939, a new dictatorial framework reshaped the media landscape in the country[2], a development this paper will only briefly outline rather than examine in detail. The second part of this paper explores the evolution of public perceptions of major Hungarian press owners, from early views

1 When Hungarian ruling elites gained an important autonomy in interior politics in the territories of the Hungarian Kingdom.

2 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 111.

of key players to the crystallization of the interwar concept of 'press tycoon.' By combining press analysis with contemporary literature, I aim to uncover the forces behind these shifts. This issue is particularly relevant today, as Central and Eastern Europe is seeing a return to control by local 'media tycoons' after a brief period of multinational ownership following the 1989–1990 transition.[3]

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Hungarian Press Ownership in the 'Golden Age' of the Dual Monarchy

The Hungarian-language press, which had emerged in the late 18th century, expanded significantly after the Dualist arrangement of 1867, as Budapest became a co-capital of the Monarchy and industrial growth increased in Transleithania.[4] This development led to the dominance of market forces in the press by 1880, which "developed from a small industry into a big industry", based on "big capital and great technical and commercial skills".[5] By 1873, following the unification of Buda and Pest, the old-new Hungarian capital had 26 publishing houses with 1,700 workers.[6] By 1881, two-thirds of the newspapers published in the country appeared in Hungarian, and this trend had intensified by the last decade of the 19th century.[7] This shift reflects the growing dominance of the Hungarian language in the public and cultural life of Hungary of the Dual Monarchy, influenced by nationalistic policies and the Magyarization efforts of its leaders. This era marked the 'Golden Age' of the press in the country, driven by major publishers such as Athenaeum, Franklin, Pallas, and the Magyar Hírlapkiadó [the Hungarian Newspaper Publisher], which later changed its name to Hazai Hírlapkiadó [meaning National

3 Stetka et als., "From multinationals to business tycoons: press ownership and journalistic autonomy in Central and Eastern Europe".

4 See in general Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*. On a business history approach to the late 19th–century Hungarian press see: Balogh, *Üzleti szellemű fővárosi napi sajtó a Dualizmus korában*. In his unpublished PhD thesis, the author focused on the most important German–speaking daily newspaper named *Pester Lloyd*.

5 Szabó, *A modern ujságírás*, 6.

6 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 184.

7 Elekes, *Budapest szerepe Magyarország szellemi életében*, 134.

Newspaper Publisher].[8] Among these book printers and publishers, Athenaeum Ltd. had the most modern printing plant in the country and was the most prestigious of the publishers, maintaining this dominance until World War II. These print companies drove the growth of the press until the 1890s, after which they shifted their focus to the even more profitable book publishing sector.[9] Modern mass media companies focusing solely on newspapers emerged in the 1890s, often as Ltd. companies, although some adopted this obvious sign of business visibility only after WWI. To fulfil their ownership and publishing functions, the individual newspapers themselves established joint-stock companies, usually with little capital (100,000 to 200,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns).[10] Among the hundreds of newspapers, only a few had higher initial capital, and these publications demonstrated their financial and symbolic power by constructing elegant press palaces on prominent boulevards near railway stations, which facilitated newspaper delivery. Certain entrepreneurs in the press and book industry primarily invested in real estate in the capital, contributing to the city's development.[11] During this expansive and prosperous era, which writer and publicist Gyula Krúdy described as one marked by "an intoxicating competitive spirit" and the seemingly "infinite power of the press," the number of newspapers in the Hungarian part of the Dual Monarchy surged dramatically.[12] This growth was driven by an expanding readership in the country, largely a result of the rise in public education in the last third of the 19th century.[13]

These late 19th-century mass press companies, less politically affiliated and more reliant on bank funding, focused on developing a commercial 'independent press', which led to rivalry with the fading traditional 'opinion press' backed by political groups in power or opposition. These newspaper publishing companies (initially requiring little capital) were established and managed by figures such as Zsigmond Bródy (with Hungária Newspaper Printing Company), the Légrády Brothers (with Légrády Brothers Printing Institute, founded in 1854), Fülöp Wodianer (since 1849),

8 Ibid., 233.

9 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 234.

10 Ibid.

11 Lengyel, *Magyar ujságmágnások*, 52.

12 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 231.

13 Ibid.

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and the playwright, theatre director, and publicist Jenő Rákosi. Some of them founded Hungarian press dynasties that endured for a long time. Bródy and Rákosi even became members of the Upper House of the Hungarian Parliament, reflecting both the authorities' respect for their activities as newspaper owners and their own pursuit of legitimacy by gaining political power, following the model of the English press lords. While the German-language *Neues Pester Journal*, launched by Bródy, was a pioneering commercial success among German-speaking audiences, the *Pesti Hírlap* [Journal of Pest] (re)founded by the Légrády brothers, the *Budapest* and the illustrated *Kis Ujság* [Small Newspaper] edited by Wodianer and Sons and the *Budapesti Hírlap* [Journal of Budapest] founded by Rákosi, were the leading newspapers for Hungarian audiences in the late 19th century. The launch of the *Pesti Hírlap* by the Légrádys in 1878 was the result of a cautious policy of both Prime Minister Kálmán Tisza, a key figure in the Dualist arrangement of 1867, and his opposition: the independent politicians – thus "a loyal, but not pro-government, independent political daily was born" in the Hungarian capital.[14] Moreover, Károly Légrády broke with the tradition of separating content and publishing and sought to exert influence over the content of the newspaper as the owner by avoiding direct party bias.[15] With large audiences and influential content, all of these newspapers – including the *Pesti Hírlap* – were intent on informing rather than educating their readers, whom they began to regard more in terms of a market.[16] They became the leading platforms for news consumption and commercial advertising of their time.[17] The growth of advertising was particularly indicative of the commercial aspect of these press products.[18]

The press owners of the 'Golden Age' were entrepreneurs born between 1831 and 1860 in the Kingdom of Hungary, then part of the Habsburg Empire (the Dual Monarchy would not be established until 1867). They belonged to the *Gründerzeit* generation.[19] Like the second generation of Hungarian economic elites in general, they were the sons

14 Ibid., 219.

15 Ibid., 220.

16 See in general: Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 44.

17 A third, subtler income source, known as "economic incomes," allowed newspapers to profit from both praise and silence about failures in their articles or reports on economic matters. (Lengyel, *Magyar ujságmágnások*, 6.)

18 Szabó, *A modern újságírás*, 7,

19 Lengyel, *Vállalkozók, bankárok, kereskedők*, 26.

of newcomers who had managed to break into the elites by succeeding in business or intellectual careers.[20] They invested their inheritance in the press and entered the Austro-Hungarian economic elite in the late Dualist era – renowned as leading taxpayers in the capital, with reputations built on wealth, capital, and politico-social influence.[21] All of them had Jewish backgrounds or, in Rákosi's case, a German background, representing 19th century Hungary's most urbanized groups relative to their population.[22] By the last third of the 19th century the Magyarization of press ownership was fuelling debates on press modernization, ethnic tensions, and whether newspaper founders were simply entrepreneurs or nation-builders. In 1888, even the liberal politician Ferenc Pulszky condemned the Hungarian press for valuing profit more than national identity.[23] Around 1900, new movements emerged on both the left and right wings, alongside the more traditional pro- and anti-Vienna factions, highlighting the political and economic power of press owners and spurring the creation of new political newspapers.[24] Despite incurring financial losses, the expansion of the press was seen as being politically motivated.[25] Ágnes Széchenyi observed that while ethnic Hungarians (i.e. of Magyar origin) largely dominated political newspapers around 1900 (as they dominated the state), the national identity of commercial press owners became a point of contention – particularly among critics from the impoverished gentry, who often targeted even highly assimilated Jewish figures in journalism. In any case, by 1910, nearly 48% of journalists were of Jewish origin, according to credible data, although figures on press ownership remain unclear.[26] After 1920, this proportion declined as the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the mass emigration following the 1918–19 revolutions reshaped the press landscape.

20 Ibid., 134.

21 Ibid., 16–17.; Vörös, *Budapest legnagyobb adófizetői, 1873–1917*, 86.

22 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 236. Nevertheless, nationalist liberal press owner Jenő Rákosi worked with journalists from both assimilated Jewish backgrounds and the impoverished nobility, the gentry. (Lengyel, *Magyar ujságmágnások*, 114.)

23 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 183.

24 Romsics, Preface. In ibid. ed., *A magyar jobboldali hagyomány, 1900–1948*.

25 Ibid.

26 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 255., 257.

Changes in Hungarian Press Ownership During and After WWI

On the eve of WWI, in 1910, Budapest saw the rise of Western-style printed media, with 1,680 Hungarian-language periodicals, including 202 daily political newspapers, with 651 periodicals published in Budapest, alongside the emergence of American-style tabloids.[27] By 1910 the number of printing plants in Budapest had grown to almost 800. During the conflict, the already high newspaper circulation surged dramatically due to the high demand for news of the war. One of the newspapers which set records for circulation was a daily called *Az Est* [The Evening], launched in April 1910 by Andor Miklós, the former economics columnist for the liberal daily *Pesti Napló* [Pest Newspaper]. Born in 1880, Miklós played a significant role as a press owner during the interwar period – unlike members of the 'Golden Age' generation, whose heirs, rather than they themselves, came to define that era. Miklós's newspaper, *Az Est*, was a liberal, independent daily that brought modern journalistic methods into Hungarian press history: it was the first to adopt an American-style tabloid format, featured a recognizable masthead, and operated with a distinctly profit-driven approach.[28] This high-circulation popular press was founded with 500,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns in initial capital (5,000 shares at 1,000 crowns each) – including a loan secured by the Anglo–Hungarian Bank.[29] (Miklós had been on the board of the Sanatorium Wettenstein before he resigned to launch *Az Est*.) A court document survives from this period concerning *Az Est*, which is all the more valuable since many other later documents, such as contracts with printers and other archival sources, have disappeared.[30] After Miklós founded his own journal, a legal dispute ensued between him and József Surányi, the owner of the newspaper *Pesti Napló* which he had previously worked for. In the end, both parties opted to avoid exposing their business secrets, and in 1912, Miklós ultimately withdrew his complaint. A few years after its launch, during the Great War, *Az Est* – which employed American-style advertising techniques – boasted the highest circulation with 280,000 copies daily, while *Pesti Hírlap*, owned by the Légrádys – prominent figures from the 'Golden Age' generation of the press market – circulated 125,000 copies per day.[31] The

27 Ibid., 232.

28 Róna, *Harminc év az ujságiró–pályán békében, háboruban, forradalomban*, 495.

29 "Az Est lapkiadó rt." 10.; Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 295.; Lengyel, *Magyar ujságmágnások*, 65.

30 Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 75–76.

31 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 232.

1868 liberal press law (revised in 1914) was restricted during the conflict so more direct censorship and especially self-censorship limited press freedom compared to the earlier 'Golden Age'. It was only after 1918–1919, with the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, that the 'Golden Age' of the Hungarian press began its permanent decline—giving way to a less liberal era in the newly independent, but significantly smaller, Hungary, which retained only 40% of its former population and had a downsized press industry with a reduced readership.

Concentration within the Press Field in the 1920s': Liberal and Right-Wing Differences

Between World War I and World War II, Hungary was ruled by the right-wing conservative Horthy regime (named after Admiral Miklós Horthy), which came to power in the autumn of 1919 and sought to exert centralized control while preserving a parliamentary system.[32] Seventy percent of Hungarian press remained within the new, smaller state and it was mostly privately owned – by individuals, organizations, political parties, or unions – most of them in a capitalist form, typically as limited liability companies (Ltd.). However, the press faced considerably greater government influence and pressure than it had before the conflict and the number of journals which fulfilled the conditions for public oversight – that is, which were independent from politics – decreased.[33]

Between 1921 and 1938, Hungary's press saw a gradual return to the liberal laws of 1914, ending the strict censorship imposed after the 1918-1919 revolutions. While media diversity and pluralism re-emerged in this period, they were still constrained, with right-wing views increasingly dominating the fragmented public discourse.[34] Also,

32 Romsics, "Magyar történeti problémák", 23.

33 In contrast, emerging electronic media (i.e. radio and cinema newsreels) were tightly controlled by the Hungarian state. Hungarian broadcasting began in 1925 with significant state involvement, despite being initially operated by a private company. This was alongside the monopolistic national news agency (founded in 1881) and the state–run Hungarian Film Office, which played a key role in enforcing strict cinema censorship. The printed press remained Hungary's primary news source until World War II, while radio gained popularity and became a more significant competitor in the advertising market only during the war. For this reason, radio falls outside the scope of this analysis.

34 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 118.

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a significant divide emerged between the capital and the rest of the new, independent country, along with another new trend. In the 1920s, Budapest's press remained largely liberal, while predominantly supporting the right-wing conservative government headed by prime minister István Bethlen, with 22 Liberal Democrat journals (10% of the total), three Democratic Left-wing journals (with the most important Social Democratic daily, *Népszava*, owned by the party itself, tasked with promoting its worldview), and 51 non-partisan publications.[35] *Népszava* was the most important left-leaning, and arguably the most significant, party-affiliated newspaper – notable not only for its clear political ties but also for its longevity, despite numerous attempts by the authorities to restrict its reach or shut it down entirely.

Over time, however, the number of independent journals in the capital declined, while most of the press increasingly took on a pro-government stance. These shifts marked a more politicized and unstable era, in stark contrast to the 'Golden Age' of the Hungarian commercial press. The most important characteristics of the interwar press in Hungary were the following compared to the 'Golden Age': 1) pluralism persisted but in a limited form; 2) newspapers might rapidly change their political orientation, but they were not capable of altering the power relations; 3) the government's influence on the press expanded through both direct and indirect subsidies, as well as by founding newspapers – resulting in "influence for sale" and clear editorial bias; 4) once a relatively powerful check on the political elites, the press became increasingly suspect and less free; 5) the press that created the impression of independence was also one of the pillars of the Horthy regime; 6) from 1920 onwards there were suggestions that Jewish ownership of the press was driving commercialization as a hidden means of gaining power[36];7) newspaper readership sharply declined at the start of the interwar period, gradually recovering by 1938–1939, when many newspapers faced bans or restrictions; 8) in many cases the owners' main business was the press itself, so they depended either on the traditional business model to stay profitable or on external subsidies; 9) press financing was not entirely market-driven: private companies, municipal authorities, cities, the Catholic Church, and both the state and Hungarian national governments all provided support to numerous media outlets.

35 Sipos, "A médiarendszer és az 'irányított demokrácia' az 1920-as évek Magyarországán", 439–462, at 442.

36 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 257.

In the 1920s, many newspapers across continental Europe came under the control of political parties and were tasked with shaping public opinion.[37] In Hungary, where the 'old' political and commercial press had dominated since the 'Golden Age', this trend contributed to a more polarized environment, with many newspapers being aligned with or founded by political parties. While during the 'Golden Age' of the press in Hungary political newspapers had represented a decreasing proportion of the press as a whole, during the First World War this proportion was reversed and, in an increasingly tense political climate, the proportion of political newspapers grew, a tendency which continued after WWI as a sign of the growing necessity of being informed and having a say in politics. In the 1920s this trend continued and "the press as a medium of political expression"[38] flourished in Hungary. As Balázs Sipos notes, by 1926, 45.3% of contemporary Hungarian political newspapers had been founded after 1919 and this resulted in "a great pluralism of the political press's market".[39] A certain number of these newspapers were owned by or aligned with political parties, although the exact proportion is unclear. This period, marked by the growing influence of political forces on the media, saw frequent shifts in the political stances of press outlets – often driven by financial pressures and party interests. It became clear that, while party-affiliated newspapers were key tools of political partisanship, their reach remained limited due to funding constraints. In 1920s Hungary, government influence on the press was exerted indirectly. The government-backed United Party did not directly control any major newspapers; instead, it used state advertising subsidies to support sympathetic publications and influence press narratives – a practice also common in some Western European countries, such as interwar France. Overall, although party ownership of the press was widespread in interwar Central Europe, Hungary lagged behind this trend – a pattern that only became dominant in the country after World War II, just before the communist takeover. During the interwar period until 1938, despite the rise of party-owned press, individual ownership still played a significant role in the commercial mass press, which pursued a publishing policy that aimed above all to capture the public's attention with various novelties (radio program supplement, Sunday supplement, household supplement, etc.).[40]

37 For France see Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 49.

38 Innis, *The Press: A Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century*, 24.

39 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 110–111.

40 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 363., 364.

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Another key development was the increasing concentration of the press, which accelerated beginning in the early 1920s in Hungary. This trend followed the destruction of numerous newspapers during the turmoil of 1918–1919, as well as the loss of former Hungarian press centers such as Nagyvárad (now Oradea, Romania) after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. A similar concentration took place in the economic field, too, which was a consequence of WW1.[41] The consolidation of the press into fewer hands gave individuals and groups greater power to shape and steer the public agenda – ultimately fostering the conditions that would lead to restrictions of press pluralism over time. The engines of this concentration were still partly the commercial press of the 'Golden Age' – a precursor to the modern media conglomerate. The concentration entered a new phase in the early 1920s, characterized by acquisitions and the launch of new rural morning and evening papers. In 1922, Légrády's *Pesti Hírlap* publishing house bought the political daily *Magyar Hírlap* and became a limited liability company (Ltd.) in 1925 (though the paper itself didn't incorporate until 1938). Meanwhile, Rákosi's *Budapesti Hírlap* took over the semi-governmental commercial newspaper *8 O'Clock*. These moves were fueled by the success these press owners had enjoyed during the Great War. Jenő Rákosi had transformed his daily, the *Budapesti Hírlap* – founded in the 'Golden Age' – with his sons into a limited company during WWI, capitalizing it with 1,600,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns.[42] During the conflict, prime minister István Tisza saved *Budapesti Hírlap* through his liberal-conservative party, the Party of Work which acquired or 'nationalized' Rákosi's shares to stabilize it financially.[43] This highlights how, in times of crisis, journalistic independence was often exchanged for government protection and political favors. Moreover, it sheds light on the often murky ownership structures behind these press companies. In the long run, Rákosi, who remained a liberal nationalist even in the 1920s, became uncomfortable with the authoritarian post-war regime and withdrew from active press management in the mid-1920s (to become the senior editor of the Légrádys' *Pesti Hírlap*). *Budapesti Hírlap R.T.* [Ltd.] then became a semi-official morning government publication, continuing until 1944. By the 1930s, it had ultimately aligned with the emerging Anglo-

41 Lengyel, *Vállalkozók, bankárok, kereskedők*, 108–109.

42 Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 121.

43 Sipos, „Magyarságócsárlás, liberalizmus, modernitás – Avagy Rákosi Jenő és a *Nyugat* találkozása a *Budapesti Hírlap*ban", 102.

phile circle around former conservative Prime Minister István Bethlen – much like *8 O'Clock*, which had become an evening tabloid closely linked to him.[44]

Andor Miklós emerged as a pioneering force in Hungary's press industry by establishing the first true major newspaper trust, unlike the Légrády family's more traditional printing-based venture.[45] In 1917, after a successful legal battle, Miklós acquired a controlling stake in the Athenaeum Printing Company, becoming president of the Athenaeum Literary and Printing Society.[46] This acquisition laid the groundwork for a powerful press empire and solidified his influence over Hungary's literary and cultural scene – mirroring the Ullstein publishing house in Weimar Germany. Like Ullstein, Miklós, who also published modern literature, came from an assimilated Jewish background.[47] Miklós pursued expansion with great intensity, disposing of and acquiring companies such as the Franklin Publishing and Printing Company, the Rigler Paper Linen Factory, and others, eventually holding stakes in eleven firms while owning extensive real estate in Budapest.[48] Founded around the same time as Britain's powerful media conglomerate Allied Newspapers, Az Est Publishing Company Ltd became the most prominent example of a centralized media group in interwar Hungary. It owned major titles such as *Pesti Napló* (morning), *Az Est* (afternoon), and *Magyarország* (evening), offering a full-day mix of sensational stories, serious journalism, sports coverage, and photography.[49] At its peak, the company employed 6,500 people – 6,100 of them in distribution. Importantly, this concentration of press ownership did not diminish content diversity. On the contrary, Miklós's media strategy deliberately avoided internal competition by targeting different audiences, with each outlet maintaining its own editorial voice.[50]

44 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 365.

45 Róna, *Harminc év*…, 499–500.

46 Ibid., 501.

47 Ibid.

48 Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 63.; Zalai, "Gombaszögi Frida drámája, kétfelvonásban. *Az Est*-lapok konszern felszámolása és utóélete", 190.

49 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 364.

50 Amid the political upheavals of 1918–1919, Miklós seized the opportunity to expand his media holdings by purchasing *Magyarország*, and later acquired *Pesti Napló* after its previous owner, Lajos Hatvany, was exiled during the Hungarian Soviet Republic – further solidifying his dominance in the Hungarian press landscape. Lajos Hatvany was the son of Baron Sándor Hatvany Deutsch, a sugar factory owner, member of the Upper House of the

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Despite leading Hungary's largest press empire by the late 1920s, Miklós's influence remained largely confined to Budapest and other major cities – constrained by a postwar decline in circulation and his lack of party affiliation or political partisanship. Miklós's press empire was profitable and self-sustaining, funded both by advertising revenue and by his other business ventures, so it never had to depend on outside investors – accepting only occasional bank support. In 1924, however, the far right accused the government of "elevating Andor Miklós's business interests to the supreme state resonance."[51] Meanwhile, the Légrádys' *Pesti Hírlap*, which was being transformed into a platform for revisionist ideas in the competition to be the most prominent nationalist voice, also became profitable.[52] This reflects a common European phenomenon: in general, the post-war popular press – not only in Hungary but throughout Europe – shifted to the right.[53]

From 1920 onwards, press concentration surged also on the political right, led by the Stádium Literary and Printing Company (1921–1944). Its explicit goal was to disseminate right-wing and far-right ideas primarily through the press, and later, through book publishing – ideas went beyond mere irredentism, which, although widely accepted in Hungarian society at the time, represented only one aspect of their agenda. Stádium Ltd. was founded in 1921 by far-right politician and WWI veteran Endre Zsilinszky, who became its main stakeholder through his far-right daily, *Szózat* [Anthem] Press Publishing (1919-1926). It was an example of a political movement founding a daily newspaper with multiple owners, including Endre Zsilinszky (author of *Nemzeti újjászületés és sajtó* [National rebirth and the press] in 1920); his brother, the economist Gábor Zsilinszky; and the far-right political leader Gyula Gömbös, founder of the first far-right political party in 20th century Hungary – figures who acquired stakes in far-right, initially anti-government press outlets. In the long run, despite occasional ideological and commercial differences, the Zsilinszkys and other far-right personalities retained their ownership of Stádium until 1944 (except Gömbös, who later became Hungary's

Hungarian Parliament, and founder of the National Confederation of Industrialists, which distributed subsidies to the press. A writer and publicist himself, Lajos Hatvany bought the daily *Pesti Napló* during World War I, using capital accumulated by his father.

51 "A sajtódiktátor", 3.

52 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 342.

53 See Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 46., 52.

Prime Minister and died in 1936).[54] Government support through state-run entreprises advertisements for Stádium increased throughout the entire interwar period and beyond, enabling it by the late 1920s to acquire the similarly far-right *Helios Press* company. State-owned enterprises such as the national railway company regularly placed orders, and when *Stádium* faced financial difficulties, the National Credit Institution, which was closely aligned with the government, provided secretly, or not so secretly, the necessary funding.[55] Nevertheless, Stádium never grew into an influential private media empire like Alfred Hugenberg's nationalist-conservative press group in Weimar Germany, which controlled over more than one hundred newspapers and magazines and owned news agencies, film companies (such as UFA), and printing plants.

Additionally, throughout the 1920s, István Bethlen's government consistently backed the right-wing Catholic press to block a leftward shift in the country, providing direct financial support until 1944. Established during World War I by the Jesuit publicist Béla Bangha with financial support from the episcopate the Central Press Office aimed to provide a Catholic voice in the media and to counter what he saw as the liberal "Jewish press".[56] In the 1920s it expanded by acquiring the Pallas Literary and Printing Company, once the leading liberal publishing house.[57] The Catholic Central Press Office's newspapers were also distributed by the state, and its printing company, Pallas, produced a large volume of government publications. When the Central Press Office faced financial difficulties, it received significant support – through the press funds of the government – from 1928 onwards to cover its losses.[58] This was an example of the political instrumentalization of press support. The concentration of press ownership continued, so that between 1933 and 1936 the Catholic publisher Pallas gradually

54 In 1944, Endre Bajcsy-Zsilinszky – who had gradually moved from far-right to democratic ideals – opposed the Nazi occupiers and their allies, the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party, which executed him at the end of that year. He died as an emblematic, multifaceted hero, representing the spirit of progress in 20th-century Hungary.

55 Pogány, "A Stádium sajtóvállalat rt. története és kiadványai (1921–1944)", 40.; Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 361. Csánk, "Újabb fordulat a Stádium–nyomda ügyében", 7.

56 Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944,* 38.

57 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 342.

58 Pogány, "A Stádium sajtóvállalat rt. története és kiadványai (1921–1944)", 41.; Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 342.

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aligned with Stádium Ltd., the publishing house of the far-right movement, culminating in their merger in 1936. Despite this alignment, by the late 1930s, most of the Catholic press had grown increasingly critical of the pro-German stance and racial politics.[59]

In the 1920s, the dynamics of the Hungarian press were shaped by diverse financial and political influences. While many Catholic, conservative and far-right newspapers received support from the government and from various political parties, liberal or independent press outlets like *Az Est* were mostly backed by banks and the National Confederation of Industrialists (GYOSZ, founded in 1902).[60] The leading members of these institutions were not, however, part of the board of directors or the supervisory board of these press joint-stock companies; instead, they maintained an informal press list, and newspapers included on this list were able to receive support based on large amounts of advertising.[61] This example brings an interest in financial aspect of press ownership, described by media critic Gilbert Seldes as the following: "The real publishers are the advertisers, since their financial support of a publication is, in most cases, all that keeps it alive."[62] While advertising generally "frees the press from direct political control,"[63] in Hungary, major economic players and successive governments still shaped the press through their advertising choices. This was not unique to Hungary; the commercial press in interwar France also benefited from the support of industrialists, while being similarly beholden to them.[64]

In addition, while *Az Est* maintained its financial independence, it still benefited from the backing of a bank. Besides the Anglo-Hungarian Bank, which had helped launch the newspaper by its president, Pál Elek offering 100,000 Austro-Hungarian crowns[65] Simon Krausz, a key figure in Hungarian banking and stock exchange circles, also occasionally supported Miklós. Krausz, known for his expertise and good relations with the press, came from a modest background, embodying the 'self-made man' ideal in

59 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 361.

60 Ibid., 364.

61 Ibid.

62 Quoted by Innis in *The Press: A Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century*, London, Oxford University Press, 1949, 11–12.

63 Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 45.

64 Ibid., 51.

65 Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 65.

Hungary much like Miklós himself.[66] Additionally, the Athenaeum secured a $525,000 loan from the Industrial Mortgage Institute, further solidifying its financial standing.[67]

While some contemporaries speculated that industrial companies funded the press to avoid negative coverage, the economic elite's support for *Az Est* reflected its desire for a medium that represented broader liberal-conservative values.[68] Notably, over half of the individuals in key financial institutions had Jewish origins. Many of them, having faced discrimination since the 1920 *numerus clausus* law – the first racially discriminatory law against Jews in Europe, which was progressively repealed by 1928[69]– sought to maintain a balance in public discourse.[70] These individuals aimed to navigate Hungary's authoritarian system by supporting an independent, liberal or heterogenous press during the interwar period.

Another interesting aspect was that the lines between press empires were sometimes blurred, especially as right-wing conservative Prime Minister Bethlen's push for consolidation gained steam after 1921. During this period, the Catholic Central Press Office, which sought to restore the Habsburg monarchy for a while, adopted a more moderate stance and even recruited staff from the liberal *Az Est* group, such as József Cavallier and László Tápay Szabó, to work for the daily *Uj Nemzedék* [New Generation].[71] This collaboration included staff exchanges and joint advertising campaigns. Notably, in 1921, Athenaeum published Béla Bangha's *Prayer Book* – Bangha being the founder of the Central Press Office and a leading advocate of the struggle between

66 Andor Miklós climbed the professional ladder from the bottom: a former delivery boy, he first became an advertising sales agent and later an economics columnist for the national daily *Pesti Napló*, just before he launched his successful tabloid named *Az Est*. On Krausz see Lengyel, *Vállalkozók, bankárok, kereskedők*, 80., 133.; Krausz, *Életem*, 149.

67 Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 89.

68 See on this Kőrözsy, *Sajtóviszonyok Magyarországon*, 16–17.

69 This legislation was designed to restrict the number of Jewish students in higher education institutions, specifically in universities, based on their proportion in the population. This law is considered a significant early step in the institutionalization of anti-Semitic policies in Europe, preceding the more widespread racial laws that emerged in Nazi Germany in the 1930s.

70 The proportion of Hungarians of Jewish origin in the management of larger banks, the stock exchange, and GYOSZ was only slightly higher around 1900 (55%). As a result, they were able to maintain their previous role. However, in the 1920s–1930s, a significantly greater number of them converted to Catholicism or Protestantism. (György Lengyel, *Vállalkozók, bankárok, kereskedők*, 44., 77.)

71 Veszprémy, *1921. A Horthy rendszer megszilárdulásának története*, 51.

"Christian Hungary" and a perceived "other (Jewish) Hungary." The move underscored the shifting and often temporary alliances within Hungary's press scene.[72] In the long run, however, the National Confederation of Industrialists also backed anti-Nazi liberal-conservatives – like those linked to the daily *Magyar Nemzet* [Hungarian Nation] launched in 1938 – as well as the Catholic press during World War II.[73]

The involvement of press owners in politics, in particular their loyalty to right-wing conservative governments in interwar Hungary, remains a key area of study.[74] This loyalty, rooted in the media's alignment with the previous governments during the 'Golden Age,' continued post-war, with the renewed commercial press supporting the consolidation of right-wing conservative power.[75] While aligning with the broader trend of media depoliticization, Miklós's political independence, as noted by journalist Sándor Róna in 1930, allowed him some editorial freedom but also exposed him to scrutiny.[76] Miklós's empire thrived by balancing depoliticization with a mix of ideologies, promoting both right-wing conservative and liberal values in various organs to attract a wide readership.[77] This strategy unfolded in a context of limited competition, with the concentration of media ownership remaining a significant feature of Hungary's press landscape.

The Private Ownership of the Press Under Challenge in the 1930s

The Great Depression of 1929–1931, much like World War I, reinforced the push for centralization in Hungary as a strategy to ensure stabilization. The economic crisis

72 Ibid., 52. See also Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944*, 54–55.

73 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 364.

74 See Stetka et al., "From multinationals to business tycoons: press ownership and journalistic autonomy in Central and Eastern Europe", 17.

75 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 109. By the early 1920s, the *Pesti Hírlap* of the Légrádys, once liberal, had reverted to the strong patriotism it had shown during WWI, and *Az Est* – also marked by the same patriotic fervour during the conflict – was described by contemporary witnesses in the aftermath of WW1 as "becoming whiter by the day." (*Bécsi Magyar Ujság*, October 7, 1921).

76 Róna, *Harminc év*, 502.

77 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 365.

weakened the Bethlen government's position, and following the resignation of Prime Minister István Bethlen in 1932, an increasingly authoritarian right-wing administration, led by Gyula Gömbös, took power (1932–1936). This shift marked a turning point in press ownership, as political authorities expanded their direct control over the printed media, intensified ownership battles, and increased efforts to centralize and intervene in the press.

Gömbös, a former far-right politician and admirer of Mussolini, had previously served as Defence Minister in Bethlen's last government. Upon becoming Prime Minister in autumn 1932, he sought to reshape public opinion by tightening state control over the media. His experience as a board member of the Stádium Printing Company gave him insight into the press industry, which he used to counter what he saw as the dominance of the 'independent' and 'opposition' press.[78] Convinced that the independent commercial press wielded excessive power over Hungarian public life, he promoted centralization by strategically granting subsidies and otherwise controlling newspaper funding in order to align the printed media more closely with government interests.[79] From 1932 onwards, he oversaw the government's press funds for launching new pro-government outlets, including low-cost dailies such as *Függetlenség* [Independence] and its tabloid counterpart, the *Esti Újság* [Evening Journal], which were needed for their circulation.[80] Both newspapers, government-backed and owned by the far-right Stádium Company, shared the same editor-in-chief, Kálmán Hubay, and managing editor, János Báthory-Hüttner.[81] This stood in contrast to many Western European countries, where government influence was much more limited – typically confined to libel laws and industry self-regulation.

The third important publication, *Uj Magyarság* [literally, "New Hungarianness"], was probably launched with financing from Nazi Germany to promote a pro-German

78 Pogány, "A Stádium Sajtóvállalat rt. története és kiadványai (1921–1944)", 42.

79 Gergely, "Adatok az Antal–Gömbös–féle 'dömpingsajtó' megteremtéshez (Részletek Antal István emlékirataiból)", 250.

80 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 343. Nevertheless, from another press fund of the Foreign Ministry, the newspaper *Magyarság* criticised PM Gömbös's foreign policy.

81 In 1938, after Anschluss, Horthy tried to weaken the pro–German line in the press, so Hubay was removed from both papers and the *Esti Ujság* was aligned less far–right under the editorship of Tibor Törs and János Makkai.

orientation and militarism in the country among the middle-classes[82] – similar attempts to influence local public opinion by Nazi Germany through financing of the press were known throughout Europe.[83] Thanks to these different mouthpieces of the government, Prime Minister Gömbös aimed to monopolize the flow of news in Hungary.[84] All these newspapers were dubbed the 'dumping press' by contemporaries.[85] The rise of the 'dumping press' – a subsided and controlled press conglomerate – marked a new phase in the expansion of Hungarian government and state control over the press while shifting the ever reducing range of press pluralism further to the right. This explicit political instrumentalization of the press, only used to exert political influence rather than to generate profit, also mirrors a shift in press ownership patterns, with the government seeking to diminish the influence of individual press owners in Hungary. The strongly nationalist *Függetlenség* was published with direct subsidies, reaching a daily circulation of 150,000 copies – precisely matching the circulation of the independent daily *Az Est,* which had achieved previously this record circulation, suggesting a deliberate attempt to counterbalance its influence. Similarly, the previously right-wing Catholic daily *Uj Nemzedék*, turned into a typical tabloid, saw its circulation rise to over 100,000 copies per day thanks to government backing, establishing itself as a significant player in the press market by 1934.[86] In 1935, the far-right *Virradat* [Dawn] was also launched to counterbalance the supposed liberal predominance in the Monday papers market.[87] This support for the press and even investment in it by Prime Minister Gömbös served to further consolidate government control over the news market, despite the absence of any formal regulation of press ownership.

By the early 1930s, increasing government control over the press was placing severe limits on the emergence of alternative channels of communication and had marginalized

82 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 363.

83 See on the weekly *Notre Temps*. (Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 50.)

84 See on Gömbös's press empire: Klestenitz, "'A rendes mederben javul a miniszterelnök állapota.", 87–95.

85 Elekes, *Budapest szerepe Magyarország szellemi életében*,141.

86 Stressed by Tibor Klestenitz in his paper in the present volume.

87 However, these papers were not significantly supported by 'Christian' business actors – at least the famous anti–Semite Zoltán Bosnyák missed the 'Hungarian Christian economic power factors' behind this press. (Zoltán Bosnyák, *Harc a zsidó sajtó ellen*!, 1937, no page.)

the already existing independent hard news outlets. In the capital, only pro-government newspapers managed to expand their circulation through coordinated distribution efforts, while Liberal Democrat representation increased by just 1%, the Social Democrat presence stagnated, and the non-partisan press declined sharply.[88] Although ideological diversity persisted, liberal outlets remained far more limited in their reach.

This rightward shift, driven by the state-supported concentration of press ownership, promoted pro-government narratives and undermined press pluralism in general. Its effects were even more pronounced in the provinces, where increased control and subsidies further reinforced this trend, and where the commercial press had little to no tradition.[89] By the 1930s, pro-government newspapers accounted for 73.1% of the total in rural areas – a growth driven by a right-wing government strategy to counter the influence of the metropolitan commercial press in provincial towns, where an originally local political orientation had also always been the norm.[90] The conservative rural press was seen as more manageable because it was dependent on state aid due to its smaller market size.[91] An increasing number of readers were exposed to state-sponsored hard news. The anti-Semitic writer Zoltán Bosnyák listed numerous nationalist dailies from major cities which, by the 1930s, had gained influence and which increasingly embraced far-right ideologies, often adopting a violent tone.[92]

As a result, Hungarian journalists saw their professional and social rights steadily eroded during this period – both in urban centers and rural areas – leading to a sharp drop in the diversity of content. An independent journalist, Béla Kőrözsy made a harshly critical observation in 1937 regarding subsidies: "The press that fully and intensively serves the government is not supported by the government's political party, but by the

88 Sipos, A médiarendszer és az "irányított demokrácia", 442.; Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy-korszakban*, 109.

89 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 242., 354.

90 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 109. Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 242.

91 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 109.

92 For example: *Szegedi Uj Nemzedék, Körösvidék* (Békéscsaba)*, Felsőmagyarország* (Miskolc)*, Dunántul* (Pécs)*, Hír* (Szombathely)*, Debreceni Ujság, Nemzeti Hírlap* (Győr)*, Kecskeméti Közlöny, Soproni Hírlap, Somogyi Ujság* (Kaposvár)*,* and Tiszavidék*).* See Zoltán Bosnyák, *Harc a zsidó sajtó ellen*!, no page.

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government itself using state funds."[93] He also observed that "the situation is reversed in such a way that politicians exerted influence on public opinion through the press, rather than the public influencing the politicians" as "the entire press, including the opposition press, is loyal to the government".[94]

In the 1930s, Prime Minister Gömbös also moved to extend political control over a substantial part of the independent, privately owned press. After the sudden death of the 53-year-old Andor Miklós in December 1933, the *Az Est* press concern, still the largest in the country with the circulation of the daily *Az Est* newspaper reaching 150,000 copies per day, was inherited by his wife, former actress Frida Gombaszögi. The operative director of the group became the editor-in-chief of the *Az Est* concern, Imre Salusinszky. While Miklós was alive, he himself had been the intellectual and economic leader of his press empire; after his death, ownership and control were split. However, the widow and the manager cooperated, and the new arrangement avoided a victory of management over ownership.[95] This was even more necessary in the case of the late Miklós's concern, as the Gömbös government put an exceptional amount of pressure on the company. As a result of an informal compromise with Gömbös, an important shift occurred in the hard news segment of the concern. One of the three dailies, *Magyarország*, shifted its support from the former Bethlen government – whose brand of right-wing conservatism was distinct from Fascism – to backing the very conservative right-wing Gömbös administration, which was sympathetic to Fascism, even though a Bethlen loyalist still sat on the paper's board of directors.[96] As a result of the compromise, Lajos Zilahy – a renowned middlebrow writer, publicist, and fellow World War I veteran – was appointed head of the paper's editorial leadership in 1934, enabling Gömbös to exert influence through him without offending sensibilities too much. This former writer for *Pesti Napló* – another politically diverse daily owned by the *Az Est* group – was respected both by Gömbös and by various literary circles that included liberal and left-wing figures.[97] Comparing *Magyarország*'s content before and after the

93 Kőrözsy, *Sajtóviszonyok Magyarországon*, 11.

94 Ibid., 9–10.

95 In fact, during the interwar period, economic management became more professionalized across all sectors. (Lengyel, "A magyar gazdasági vezetés professzionalizációjának két hulláma", 6.)

96 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 365–366.

97 Lackó, "Az Uj Szellemi Front történetéhez », 81. Zalai, "Gombaszögi Frida drámája, két-felvonásban Az Est–lapok konszern felszámolása és utóélete", 194–95.

compromise shows that the paper began to present a double-faced stance, reflecting conflicting loyalties: it aligned with the government in both its agenda and framing on nationalist social reforms, while remaining largely anti-German and non-radical. This semi-cooptation pressured Lajos Zilahy to strive to balance the interests of prime minister Gömbös and those of editorial autonomy, while the journal supported Hungarian 'cultural superiority' without embracing chauvinism.[98] According to Zilahy's recollections, until 1935, Gömbös was content with balancing the more openly pro-German government press with the anti-German hard news *Magyarország*, aiming to show Nazi Germany – a potentially dangerous ally – the ongoing strength of Hungary's diverse public opinion.[99] According to Zilahy, until Gömbös's death in 1936, the newspaper served as a means of reinforcing the political status quo by limiting all the alternative viewpoints to the government's in the commercial press realm, while also acting as a balancing tool for him in foreign political combat. As for the other two newspapers published by the *Az Est* company, the daily *Az Est* remained sensationalist, while the *Pesti Napló* developed into a leading bourgeois opposition newspaper, with the participation of former liberal members of the pre-1918 political elites. The fact that the *Pesti Napló* was able to maintain its previous liberal-conservative political direction shows that Gömbös was unsuccessful in exerting pressure on the entire hard news segment of the *Az Est* concern and that *Pesti Napló* remained linked to conservative-liberal elites, including former prime minister Bethlen.

Further research is needed to examine the effects of ownership changes and mergers on media content and their implications for freedom of speech – such as whether they encouraged editorial independence or not – both within and beyond the *Az Est* concern. As contemporary studies of the current era have demonstrated, media concentration in an increasingly authoritarian regime will have more transformative consequences than in a democracy. The Gömbös era can be characterised as an authoritarian period when pressure on the oppositional or neutral press hardened and press concentration on the right accelerated. The Stádium private press company, backed by the right-wing governments since the start in the 1920s, overtook the *Az Est* firm as the market leader in the 1930s, a feat it achieved through a quiet shift that involved replacing "Jewish" journalists with "Christian" ones in its hard news press.[100] The government supported the development of Stádium to such a degree that it even considered merging it with the

98 Lackó, "Az Uj Szellemi Front történetéhez", 81–82., 84.

99 Ibid., 88.

100 Pogány, "A Stádium sajtóvállalat rt. története és kiadványai (1921–1944)", 39–53.

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Az Est group – underscoring its intent to expand control by intervening in the ownership of the leading commercial (liberal) press.[101] This situation also demonstrates how, over time, even the media concentration on the liberal side of the political spectrum made the press vulnerable to external pressure, as evidenced by the threat to its autonomy that emerged immediately after Andor Miklós's death. It also highlights the increasing intertwinement of the systems of media and politics in the 1930s. The Gömbös era between 1932 and 1936 saw a sharp decline in media pluralism, with the press shifting almost exclusively to the right.[102] A few years later, with the outbreak of World War II, Hungary's media landscape shifted within just a few months in the spring of 1939 from authoritarian to openly dictatorial, posing an unprecedented threat to press freedom and media ownership. Among other consequences, this shift led to the banning of numerous liberal and opposition newspapers, effectively silencing many outlets for critical opinion in the public sphere.

Perceptions of the 'Press Baron' within Hungary

This final section will analyse how Hungarian publications have portrayed press owners as 'press barons', figures presumed to shape public opinion.[103] Their representation ties into broader policy debates on the press, highlighting the role of 'press barons' in shaping mass media and society.

The terms 'press baron' or 'press king' (sajtó/ujságmágnás, sajtócézár, ujságkirály) were already familiar to Hungarian readers before World War I.[104] The expression, introduced in the 1890s to describe American – and to a lesser extent, British – press

101 Ibid., 42.

102 Gömbös had even planned to set up a German-style propaganda ministry to tighten the government's grip on public discourse, but his death in 1936 and pushback from democratic forces ultimately kept the idea from ever becoming a reality.

103 For the definition: Lengyel, *Magyar újságmágnások*, 7.

104 Instead of judging whether Hungarian press owners in the interwar period truly deserved this label, this analysis looks at how their highly commercialized ownership was viewed by journalists, politicians, intellectuals, and other figures of the time. In Hungary, former journalist Géza Lengyel and historian Géza Buzinkay identified Miklós and the Légrády family. (Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 235.)

phenomena,[105] referred to the wealthy owners of press empires and those who rose to lordship within the press industry. It gained traction in 1912 when an American publication, translated into Hungarian, used 'press baron' to refer to an American press magnate of Hungarian origin, Joseph Pulitzer.[106] The first continental press owner to be dubbed a 'press king" – a title referring specifically to wealth gained through newspaper publishing – mentioned in the Hungarian press was the Berlin-based Agost Scherl in 1909.[107]

However, 'press baron' also carried a negative connotation, often synonymous with 'press speculator'. It was frequently used as a label for owners accused of prioritizing profit over journalistic ethics.[108] In the early 1900s, liberal journalist and press owner József Vészi, founder of the pro-Habsburg *Budapesti Napló*, was criticized for his political influence and branded a 'press baron'. By 1912, others faced similar condemnation for "intrusive violence" and distorting public information, earning the same dubious label.[109] During World War I, the term was extended to Hungarian press owners accused of exploiting war censorship for profit, publishing deliberately unprintable content (thus leaving empty pages) to attract attention and increase sales.[110] These figures were seen as greedy and unpatriotic. In any event, between 1914 and 1918, accusations levelled at press magnates were frequently intertwined with wartime patriotism. British press mogul Lord Northcliffe (born Alfred Harmsworth), founder of the cheap, high-circulation *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror*, and later purchaser of *The Times*, where he introduced American mass-press techniques, was known for his anti-German propaganda and was vilified in Hungary as a manipulative warmonger.[111] The entire Hungarian press denounced him, ranging from the conservative nationalist *Budapesti Hírlap* (which

105 Around 1900 British press magnates, such as Harmsworth, were early to be referred to as 'press kings'.

106 See for ex. Borostyáni, "A Gedrey és Parkins cég. Novella", 376.; "Bennet ur kutyái,", 5.; *Amerika koronázatlan királyai: Carnegie, Rockefeller, Morgan, Astor, Hearst, Vanderbilt, Pulitzer, Baruum, Karrierek.*

107 "Levél Berlinből", 6.

108 Hungarian press historians didn't begin engaging with this term – or applying it to pre–WWI developments until 1963, with Géza Lengyel's *Magyar újságmágnások*. (Ibid., 235.)

109 J. Gy. [?], "Legfontosabb ügyünk érdekében" 1.

110 Editorial messages, 12.

111 "Két angol arcképe", 317.

dubbed him "one of the most dangerous figures of the war"[112]) to the liberal *Pesti Napló* which attacked Northcliff's press empire as a tool of British war politics.[113] As Tibor Kleinstenitz emphasizes, the authors of the Catholic journal *Magyar Kultúra* saw Lord Northcliffe as their chief adversary.[114] In reality, Hungarian newspapers were hardly exaggerating: Northcliffe – often described as 'a master of mass suggestion' – indeed led the British Ministry of Information and its Propaganda Department, and was known for his authoritarian, command-driven style.[115] He used his newspapers to influence politics, prioritizing sensationalism and political partisanship – an approach that was, in fact, a relatively new phenomenon in Europe at the time. Thanks to Northcliffe, the figure of the 'press magnate' also entered popular culture during the war years – most notably through the wartime staging of the play *The Press Magnate* (1917) in Budapest. Harold Innis's observation that World War I might be regarded as a clash between the newspaper and the book[116] is echoed in the animosity that surrounded Lord Northcliffe in Austria-Hungary that was lagging behind in propaganda – alongside Germany – in contrast to the Entente, and more particularly Great Britain.

Post -WWI Hungarian Debates on the Press Magnate Phenomenon

In 1920, Hungary's far-right media blurred the line between "press magnate" and "propaganda minister," largely blaming Northcliffe and the British press for the Central Powers' defeat.[117] His death in 1922 sparked further debate across the Hungarian press spectrum.[118] *Pesti Hírlap*, which had become in the meantime a platform for revisionism, accused him of "soul poisoning through the press,"[119] while leftist critics denounced in

112 "Northcliff Lord emlékkönyvébe", 9.; "Spanyolország és az entente," 6.

113 Pethő, "Az 'edwardi' örökség", 2.

114 Klestenitz, „Hódító katolicizmus", 343.

115 Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 46. See on Northcliffe: Innis, *The Press: A Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century* ,35.

116 Innis, *The Press: A Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century*, 36.

117 "Lord Northcliffe a repülésről," 10.

118 "Northcliffe Lord meghalt", 3.; "Northcliffe Lord," 1.

119 "Northcliffe meghalt", 2.

general the concentration of the media in the hands of a wealthy few. The banned Communist Party of Hungary, working underground, was especially vocal, and even the Social Democratic daily, *Népszava* described the *Az Est* merger as a "dictatorship of press barons."[120] Even some newspaper owners voiced concern over concentrated press ownership, criticizing the British model for prioritizing profit over intellectual integrity. In 1928, Miklós Lázár – a liberal journalist, former editor of the independent *Déli Hírlap*, and, since 1921, founding editor-in-chief and owner of the political weekly *A Reggel* and since 1925, a member of the municipal governing committee of the capital on the Democratic Bloc's list – argued at a Cobden Association forum in Budapest (founded in 1917) that British press barons, despite their democratic appearance, hindered progress by commercializing journalism.[121] He warned that competition, advertising, and concentrated ownership were diminishing newspapers' political influence, while threatening democratic discourse and media pluralism. Lázár emphasized the press's democratic duty to inform the public truthfully and comprehensively.

Despite of the early 20s criticism – including from far-right, antisemitic circles – Hungarian press owners, even those with concentrated ownership, did not face significant criticism until the late 1930s, largely due to political and economic conditions that hindered the rise of many more press oligarchs. While certain influential families and entrepreneurs held sway over some parts of the press, Géza Buzinkay argues that, aside from Andor Miklós, labelling them as press magnates is an exaggeration, especially given Hungary's comparatively small media market.[122] Miklós stood out as the only true press tycoon, though even his empire never reached the scale of British-style monopolies.[123] Nonetheless, figures like Miklós and Otto Légrády were referred to as 'press magnates' by contemporaries, with Légrády famously likened in 1933 to a "Hungarian Rothermere" for his wealth and lifestyle.[124]

120 Kardos, "Az angol ujság keresztmetszete", 173.

121 Lázár, "Lázár Miklós előadása a Cobden Szövetségben", 3.

122 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 235. Given the small size of the press market and other circumstances, Hungary did not see the emergence of a press empire as large as, for instance, the Hugenberg's in the Weimar Republic.

123 Chalaby, "Twenty Years of Contrast: The French and British Press During the Interwar Period," 147.

124 "Vasárnapi portyázások", 7.

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Lord Rothermere: A Positive Press Baron

In the 1930s, Hungarian perceptions of press magnates were reshaped by the growing popularity of an old-new British press lord figure: Lord Rothermere (born Harold Harmsworth), the brother of Northcliffe.[125] Like his brother, Rothermere was a press baron during World War I, owning the *Daily Mirror* (which, at the time, was considered the highest-circulation newspaper in the world[126]). However, unlike Northcliffe, he did not face criticism in wartime Hungary between 1914 and 1918. As the heir to his brother's empire, he had become the world's wealthiest press baron by the early 1920s. On 24 June, 1927, he published an article entitled "Hungary's Place in the Sun – Safety for Central Europe" in his tabloid, which represented the viewpoint of the lower middle class,[127] calling for a revision of the Treaty of Trianon and highlighting its injustices,[128] which earned him widespread celebration in Hungary. The article, reprinted in Vienna's *Neue Freie Presse*, was met with enthusiasm across the Hungarian-speaking communities in the Carpathian Basin.[129] *Kassai Lapok* hailed him as "Britain's most powerful press magnate lobbying for revision of Central European peace treaties",[130] – highlighting the belief that a central figure of the British Empire might influence global public opinion. Other newspapers emphasized his concern for European peace and his criticism of the victors' postwar decisions.[131] In 1928, the *Pesti Hírlap*, edited by the liberal nationalist, Jenő Rákosi, issued a special volume chronicling the first year of Rothermere's campaign, including exclusive interviews.[132] The *Az Est* group also contributed to promoting his image following Andor Miklós's visit to London, where he met Lord Rothermere in person. Across the political spectrum – from liberals to the

125 "A kassai demonstrációs népgyűlésen", 1.

126 Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 29.

127 Ibid., 46.

128 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 366.

129 The *Manchester Guardian* also published Lord Rothermere's article and a map of Hungary's losses to the Trianon.

130 "A leghatalmasabb angol sajtómágnás pálcát tör a közép–európai békeszerződések revíziója mellett" 10.

131 "A kassai demonstrációs népgyűlésen", 1.

132 Bán D., Radormi király, *2000*, 56.

far right – the late 1920s Hungarian press embraced Rothermere in a spirit of fervent irredentism. A Revision League was formed on his initiative, and for a while, Hungarian legitimists even considered crowning him king. His influence was even celebrated in poetry, including a verse in a 1929 commemorative calendar that praised him for restoring hope in post-war Hungary:

"Oh, noble lord, it was you,
You gave us back our faith in our hearts,
You proclaimed with a brave word,
This world is a cruel punishment."

Attempts by leftist exiles to undermine his reputation, such as an anonymous Hungarian-language booklet published in Czechoslovakia entitled *The English Lords and the Hungarian Magnates Went on Another Attack on the Hungarian People*, had little impact.[133]

Known for his Hungarian and Fascist sympathies – including admiration for Oswald Mosley's British Union of Fascists – Lord Rothermere maintained close ties with Hungary's interwar elite by making frequent visits to Budapest. Some Hungarians even hoped – unsuccessfully – that American media mogul William Randolph Hearst, also noted for his German sympathies, might follow Rothermere's example in influencing world public opinion in favour of the Hungarian cause.[134] In 1938, following Hitler's return of part of the former 'Highlands' (now in Slovakia) to Hungary, Rothermere visited Budapest, where he was treated as if he had played a role in the event. He was awarded Hungary's highest decoration, and Prime Minister Béla Imrédy hosted a banquet in his honour – mirroring Hitler's 1935 reception – acknowledging Rothermere's enduring Fascist and authoritarian leanings, although he had distanced himself from these by the outbreak of World War II.[135]

In addition to Rothermere's positive reputation in Hungary, the 1930s witnessed a growing fascination with press tycoons worldwide, fuelled by major transnational

133 Ibid., 57.

134 "Budapestre jön Hearst, az amerikai ujságfejedelem", 5.

135 "Lord Rothemere Budapesten", 1.

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news events and debates over who was shaping world public opinion. This Hungarian interest paralleled the American press's growing scrutiny of its own industry, notably reflected in the 1938 publication *Lords of the Press* by Gilbert Seldes, which critiqued press barons for introducing bias into their media to serve their business, political, or personal interests – highlighting how they shaped public opinion not only through the stories they published, but also through the ones they chose to suppress, particularly those related to the New Deal and trade unions.[136] However, in the 1930s, when it came to foreign press barons, the Hungarian press – which was considerably less investigative than Seldes' critical examination – viewed them primarily as celebrities. As a precursor, the progressive newspaper *Világ* (one of the few Hungarian outlets to do so) acknowledged Northcliffe's power without criticizing him, calling him "more influential than the crown prince."[137] Similarly, the *Budapesti Hírlap* and other outlets offered a more balanced perspective, attributing the success of Berlin's press magnates to personal effort rather than financial capital.[138] In the 1930s Anglo-Saxon media moguls like Lord Beaverbrook (born Max Aitken), owner of the *Daily Express*, and M. J. Patterson, founder of the American *New York Daily News* – who was famous for introducing a new order of presenting news in his tabloid, leading with love and sex, followed by money, murder, and health[139]– were treated as celebrities during their visits to Budapest. The Hungarian press reported that they stayed at the prestigious Dunapalota Hotel, described by one Hungarian daily as "the place where the newspaper king lives in the rooms once occupied by the King of Siam."[140] Hungarian readers even took interest in similar figures like Japan's Seiji Noma, admired for his American-style rise to success.[141] These tycoons, among the wealthiest in their respective countries, were celebrated for building vast media empires. In contrast, Central European wealthy press owners drew less attention – except occasionally Polish ones. In the summer of 1939, just before the outbreak of World War II, a Romanian–Hungarian outlet interviewed Jr. Wolowski, son of *Kurrier Polski*'s owner Pane Wolowski, while he was in Brasov.

136 Bertho Lavenir, *A demokrácia és a média a 20. században*, 197.

137 "Gyászol az egész világ…", 3.

138 V. [?], "A berlini ujságkirályok", 3.

139 Innis, *The Press: A Neglected Factor in the Economic History of the Twentieth Century*,18–19.

140 "Lord Beaverbrook jól mulat", 5.; "Két ujságkirály repült Budapestre", ?; "Beaverbrook, az angol ujságkirály Budapesten", 5.

141 "A japán ujságkirály", 25.; "Csodálkozom, hogy mennyire tulbecsülnek az emberek." Kiadta emlékiratait Seiji Noma, a japán „ujságkirály, 15.

Titled *The Son of the Polish Press Magnate*, the piece highlighted both his lineage and his expectations on the escalating political tensions in Europe.[142]

The Anti-Semitic Campaign Targeting 'Jewish' Journalism and Press Ownership

Beginning around 1900, Hungarian anti-Semitic narratives increasingly linked Jews to journalism and finance, accusing them of having a 'materialistic outlook' and seeking influence through the press.[143] Jesuit publicist Béla Bangha, who would soon go on to found the Central Press Office, was influenced by the German thinker Hans Rost.[144] He claimed that Jews controlled the media through advertising and news agencies, accusing them of 'inventing objectivity' as a manipulative tool – a view rooted in the fear that the press could distort facts while maintaining a facade of honesty. Bangha's arguments also drew on pseudo-statistical studies by Kálmán Veszprémy of Debrecen, who, around 1900, labeled the Hungarian press a 'Jewish institution' on the basis of his statistical calculations.[145] By 1916, as anti-Semitic sentiment in Hungary grew – echoing a wider trend across the Central Powers – Béla Bangha linked the dominance of the Jewish press to banking monopolies and even falsely branded the British newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe as Jewish, portraying him as a destabilizing influence. This mirrored the broader antisemitic habit of tagging any unpopular capitalist as a Jew, especially in journalistic circles.[146] He believed that a Christian press should be established to counter the power of the 'Jewish media' – as part of the anti-democratic ideology of 'Christian nationalism' that emerged in Hungary in 1918.[147]

142 Dénes, "A lengyel ujságkirály fia", 4.

143 Bangha, *A kereszténység és a zsidók*, 11–12, 21.

144 Ibid., 24–25. Later Rost was notably involved in Germany in the establishment and operation of media outlets that supported the Nazi ideology.

145 Veszprémy Jr., *A magyarországi zsidóságról. 1., A magyarországi zsidók statisztikája*, 7.

146 Bangha, "Ki a felelős a háboruért?", 491, 493.; On Lord Northcliff: *Magyar Kultura*, 1918, 48.; Mihály Kmoskó, "Lord Northcliffe és a modern 'sajtószabadság',"; "Stern Jákob bünhődése", 3. See also Major, *25 év ellenforradalmi sajtó 1919–1944*, 16.

147 Hanebrink, *In Defense of Christian Hungary. Religion, Nationalism, and Antisemitism, 1890-1944*, 56., 59.

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In the early interwar period (until 1921–1922), when highly assimilated Jewish communities made up less than 5% of Hungary's population, right-wing and far-right movements continued to portray them as the "inner enemy" rather than calling for social reforms. By late 1919, after the collapse of the Hungarian Soviet Republic, the notion of Jewish world domination had taken hold, driving claims that Jewish ownership had turned journalism into a commercial enterprise and weakened the nation's press freedom.[148] One pamphlet, titled *Keresztények! Magyarország pusztulását nagyrészt a kizárólag zsidó kézben levő sajtó idézte elő!* [The Destruction of Hungary Was Largely Brought About by an Exclusively Jewish Press!] (1919) exemplified this rhetoric. During the early Horthy era, Andor Miklós, aiming to reflect liberal bourgeois opinion, faced intense hostility, including physical and verbal attacks by counter-revolutionary paramilitaries.[149] As his press empire grew, the far right targeted him as a "Jew," associating his wealth with greed, echoing later Nazi rhetoric by Goebbels.[150] His newspapers were labelled unpatriotic and "destructive," and his Athenaeum printing house was repeatedly attacked.[151] Despite the right-wing consolidation of power by 1921–1922, Miklós continued to be branded a "dictator of the press" and blamed for everything from the Great War to Bolshevism.[152] Ironically, while he was attacked by the far right, his *Az Est* newspaper became a useful ally for the conservative right-wing government, "representing" and forming the opinion of the liberal bourgeoisie.[153] Meanwhile, Miklós also faced criticism from the Marxist left and other outlets, with Social Democrats decrying his corporate ties as a "dictatorship of press barons".[154] In 1922, the Jesuit publicist Béla Bangha contrasted Christian ownership with the non-Christian variety: "A shocking, humiliating, and terrible realization: that today, the vast masses of Europe's Christian peoples are being dragged through the mud by non-Christian press tycoons, and that the everyday thinking of these Christian masses is being shaped by those who stand in eter-

148 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 257.; "Lélekvásár", 1.

149 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 364.

150 Vásárhelyi, "Az Est–lapok", 96.

151 See for ex. "Kétféle mértékkel", 6.; See Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 121.

152 "A sajtódiktátor", 3.

153 Vásárhelyi, "Az Est–lapok", 95.

154 Ibid.

nal hatred toward the most beautiful and greatest idea in world history – Christianity."[155] In 1928, a Hungarian Transylvanian magazine article even referred to Andor Miklós as "the Jewish press king of the boulevard."[156]

Nevertheless, this was already a declining trend after 1921, although it saw a sharp resurgence on the eve of World War II. Zoltán Bosnyák's 1937 book *Magyarország elzsidósodása* [The Jewification of Hungary] and his 1938 pamphlet *Harc a zsidó sajtó ellen! Sajtópolitikai tanulmány* [Fight Against the Jewish Press! A Study of Press Politics] portrayed the press as a battleground for cultural and political struggle between 'Jewishness' and Hungarian 'race defence,' mirroring contemporary Nazi ideology.[157] After Prime Minister Ignác Darányi's 1938 speech in Győr, where he tied the 'Jewish question' to militarization – including the notion of 'fighting on two fronts' – and echoed Bosnyák's rhetoric, some Hungarian deputies adopted a hardline stance, targeting liberal and opposition newspapers and journalists. With the passage of the first Jewish law in May 1938, Hungary media entered a new – and much more severe – authoritarian phase that profoundly reshaped both the press structure and press ownership. The state banned 410 magazines, 'nationalizing' some – including *Az Est*, which was eventually shut down. Before these measures, Hungary had 1,934 periodicals in circulation; within three years, that number had fallen to just 1,379 – a decrease of 37.3%, with the Budapest press being the hardest hit.[158] These actions further curtailed the already limited pluralism and diversity in press ownership, while also undermining editorial independence.[159] On 27 September 1939, just weeks after the outbreak of the new global conflict, Miklós's widow transferred her shares to the state while retaining

155 "A Katolikus Sajtóhölgybizottság hangversenye", 7. Over time, with the rise of Nazism, Bangha, however, rejected racial theory.

156 "Miklós Andor fizeti Pesten a legtöbb katholikus kultuszadót. *Az Est, Pesti Napló* és *Magyarország* című ujságok tulajdonosa – katolizált", 22.

157 According to this theory, the so-called "Jewish press" had undermined the German population's morale behind the front lines. While the idea was widely popular in Germany in 1918 and after, it found few supporters in Hungary. By late 1918, Hungarian soldiers were more inclined to blame the country's political leaders for the defeat. On the German myth, see: Zoltán Bosnyák, *Harc a zsidó sajtó ellen!: sajtópolitikai tanulmány*, no page. Bosnyák also accused the so called Jewish-owned media of dominating Hungarian literature – traditionally seen as an important representation of Hungarian identity. (Bosnyák, *Fővárosunk elzsidósodása*, 61.)

158 Ibid.

159 See Huber, "Media Markets in Central and Eastern Europe. A Network Analytic Investigation", 11.

her private assets.[160] The *ad hominem* attack was clear: legal action was taken against the *Az Est* concern for tax evasion, but when Miklós's widow waived her rights, the case was dropped.[161] The state also applied to pressure to allow it to acquire the Athenaeum printing house.[162] By comparison in nazi Germany in 1934 the publishing house Ullstein was also taken from its Jewish owners, but it was handed over to non-Jewish management as part of the Nazis' anti-Semitic policies.

While the *Az Est* concern was effectively shut down, *Stádium* emerged as Hungary's most important and profitable state-controlled press holding during the Second World War. Serving as a hub for right-wing ideology, it was officially designated a "war factory," generating an average annual turnover of 4,000,000 Hungarian *pengő* between 1940 and 1944.[163] As a contemporary journalist stressed, during World War II "contra-selection, protectionism and monopolism" dominated the Hungarian press.[164] A new Press Chamber was established in August 1938 by the state – under the auspices of the Press Office of the Prime Minister – to legally exclude both Jewish and opposition journalists. This marked a turning point, as press outlets that had once operated as private companies now faced significantly tighter state regulation of the media sector.[165] This measure effectively imposed censorship by encouraging self-censorship within press outlets, while the government's control over licensing for all newspapers – except dailies – further underscored the shift.[166] Launching a newspaper required government approval – a rule in place since 1919.[167] Also, prior censorship was introduced in 1939 following the outbreak of the WWII. At the same time, far-right papers – most notably *Magyarság* [Hungariannes] under Ferenc Fiala – intensified their attacks on press owners, with press magnates as their primary targets.[168] Party-aligned right-wing and far-

160 Magyar, "Az Est–lapok születése és halála. Westerplatte a Rákóczi uton", 23.

161 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 382.

162 Sípos, "Az Est–lapok 'államosítása' 1939–ben", 16–19.; Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 111.

163 Pogány, "A Stádium sajtóvállalat rt. története és kiadványai (1921–1944)", 43.

164 Major, *25 év ellenforradalmi sajtó*, 67.

165 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 381.

166 Ibid., 382.

167 Sipos, *Sajtó és hatalom a Horthy–korszakban*, 121.

168 Fiala, "Az ő eszmevédelmük", 1.

right newspapers gained ground over independent press barons, although some liberal and left-wing publications survived until the Nazi occupation in March 1944.

Prelude: Press Barons Under Fire during the Nazi Occupation and in the Early Communist Era

These developments occurred alongside broader economic changes: between 1937 and 1943, over half of Hungary's economic elite was replaced.[169] By early 1944, under Nazi occupation, the country had developed a dictatorial media system that scapegoated liberal, left-wing, and Jewish journalists. Although some anti-fascist newspapers had managed to survive amid mounting repression, they were shut down entirely after the German takeover in March 1944. From March to December 1944, Mihály Kolozsváry-Borcsa – head of the Press Chamber, chief censor, and a prominent anti-Semitic figure – oversaw the Nazi-style eradication of Hungary's so-called Jewish press and literature. During this period, many journalists, editors, and press owners were directly persecuted.

In 1945, anti-Semite censor Kolozsváry-Borcsa was sentenced to death in Hungary, with the democratic press occasionally labelling him a "beaten fascist press czar," conflating press tycoons with despotic pro-Nazi state officers.[170] However, as Géza Buzinkay stresses, "the division within the press that deepened in the 1930s persisted even after the Second World War,"[171] and when Hungary fell under Soviet control, press tycoons were once again scapegoated – albeit in a new context. Between 1945 and 1948, the Hungarian Communists, gaining power, coined the term "prostitute yellow press barons" to describe the capitalist press and its world, marking the beginning of the Cold War era. American press, particularly William Randolph Hearst, was criticized as an enemy of press freedom, as the Communists claimed that only they could ensure true press freedom.[172] Just as in 1917, theatre once again served to spread the labelling of press owners – this time through a Soviet play staged in Budapest that

169 Lengyel, *Vállalkozók, bankárok, kereskedők*, 135.

170 "Kivégezték Sztójayt és bűntársait", 2.

171 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és újságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 355.

172 The conflict was noted, for example, by *Szabad Magyarság*, April 1, 1945, no. 4, 117–118.

vilified the ruthless tactics of American press moguls.[173] However, under Communist rule, press freedom was redefined to cover only those media that were controlled by the Communists. Despite this, press magnates were still vilified in the early 1950s. For example, H. Mühlen's short story *The Press Magnate's Anniversary*, published in the *Dolgozók Világlapja* [World Journal of Workers], used both Communist and anti-Semitic stereotypes.[174] Even in the 1960s, although attention to the U.S. press magnates had diminished, a communist review of British Communist George Matthews' anti-capitalist thesis *Press Lords vs. Press Freedom* was translated by the Hungarian state press.[175] Throughout the communist era, press ownership was a sensitive and largely taboo subject, as the party-state owned and controlled all media and had no interest in revisiting the issue – even from a historical perspective. Press ownership was seen as a relic of the past. An exception to this silence was a 1963 work by a former journalist of *Az Est*, Géza Lengyel entitled *Magyar ujságmágnások* [Hungarian Press Magnates], which introduced the term 'press magnate' into post-WWII Hungarian press historiography. Lengyel referenced pre-1945 press ownership – mainly that of the 'Golden Age' – but only partially challenged the prevailing binary narrative of the time.[176] Nevertheless, even in this book, Andor Miklós, the owner of the *Az Est* concern, was still portrayed in a rather negative light – often described as a 'greedy press magnate' or a parvenu by Lengyel.[177] Up until the political transition of 1989–1990, conversations about press ownership were rare and usually focused on the pre–World War I era, often sidestepping the ideologically sensitive interwar years examined in this paper.

Conclusion

The increasing concentration of press ownership in interwar Hungary raised growing concerns about control over the media – a pattern that became particularly pronounced during the late 1930s, as state interference intensified. Throughout this period, editorial independence was constrained by a combination of political pressure and economic

173 Hárs, "Szomonov: Az orosz kérdés", 2.

174 "Az ujságfejedelem", 10.

175 Ulagi,"Sajtómágnások a sajtószabadság ellen".

176 Buzinkay, *A magyar sajtó és ujságírás története a kezdetektől a rendszerváltásig*, 235.

177 Dersi, *A rejtélyes doctor*.

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dependency. Although party-affiliated newspapers became common across Central Europe after World War I, Hungary followed a slower trajectory, with traditional private owners continuing to play a significant role. The rise of the press magnate – both celebrated and condemned – reflected broader anxieties about journalism's transformation into a commercialized enterprise. However, in contrast to the UK, where market forces tended to shape the media landscape, Hungary's press system became increasingly influenced by political elites, state and bank patronage, and direct regime censorship. By the close of the interwar period, political imperatives outweighed economic considerations in structuring the press, underscoring the distinctive character of Hungary's media ownership regime.

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Budapest, 1940. Source: Fortepan / Kádár Anna

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Under the control of political parties:

Ownership of the Press in Czechoslovakia in the Interwar Period with Emphasis on the Situation in Slovakia

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Abstract

The article examines press ownership in interwar Czechoslovakia, focusing on Slovakia, where most newspapers and magazines were owned or controlled by political parties through affiliated publishing houses. This model, inherited from the Austrian part of the monarchy, also shaped the Czech press. In the Czech lands, only four formally independent dailies existed, yet all were linked to political groups or subsidized by the government or the president's office. The daily press served as the key instrument of political communication and competition, making party dominance in media ownership almost inevitable. In Slovakia, the entire press was under party control, and no major independent papers like Lidové noviny existed. The sole attempt to create one, Slovenský hlas (1938), was also financed by Agrarian Party leader and Prime Minister Milan Hodža.

Keywords

Keywords: press, Czechoslovakia, Slovakia, political parties, democracy

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Under the control of political parties:[1]

Ownership of the Press in Czechoslovakia during the Interwar Period

The interwar period in Czechoslovakia, was considered – especially in the 1990s in the Czech Republic and to a lesser extent in Slovakia – to have been a golden age of press freedom due to Czechoslovakia's democratic political system, which allowed dozens of daily newspapers and political and cultural magazines to be published. The new state founded after World War I was a liberal economy that promoted the free market, and so the large number of newspapers published gives the impression that the country's periodicals were competing with each other for readers. However, a closer and more critical examination of the Czechoslovak and Slovak daily press between the world wars reveals a less rosy picture. The vast majority of the national and Slovak provincial dailies and magazines in this period were published by publishing houses controlled by political parties. Another group of newspapers were linked to various political parties by the personal ties of the owners or by their ideological orientation. This was a significant difference from the situation in Western Europe (especially in Great Britain), where

1 Article was researched and written with the support of the Slovak Research and Development Agency under Agreement No. APVV-20-0526 entitled Political Socialization in the Territory of Slovakia during the Years 1848 – 1993. The research was supported by the project VEGA No. 2/0020/23 Political mobilisation, politicisation and political indifference of the Slovak population, 1848–1938, researched at the Institute of History of SAS.

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most newspapers and magazines were owned by media entrepreneurs, although even in France, the dailies were not completely independent of the orientation of a particular political camp.[2] The two major publishing houses that operated in interwar Czechoslovakia which published a wide range of different newspapers, magazines and books were also linked to political parties. If newspapers are supposed to play the role of the proverbial watchdog of democracy in a democratic political system, this was largely not the case in interwar Czechoslovakia, and the most widely circulated newspapers instead watched over the interests of the political parties that owned them.[3] Newspapers were the most common means for political parties to communicate with potential sympathisers and voters. Thus, their publication was very important for the parties. Interwar Czechoslovakia was a liberal parliamentary democracy with a multi-party-political system. It was the only country in Central and Southeastern Europe where even the Communist Party could legally operate. Political pluralism was manifested in a multiplicity of different newspapers, which were, however, tied to particular political parties and proclaimed mainly their views. In theory, if a citizen of Czechoslovakia wished to cultivate an objective opinion about the situation in the country, he or she had to read the newspapers of all the major political parties in the republic. Another option was to turn to the daily *Lidové noviny* [People's Newspaper], which presented itself as non-partisan. However, as I will show, even this newspaper was also at one time, albeit briefly, linked to a particular political party through the person of its owner. Even the liberal economic environment of the First Republic did not topple the adopted model of a party-aligned press from the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy. Although several party-controlled publishing houses often published non-political newspapers alongside their central party organs, these tended to be of a tabloid nature and therefore focused more on curiosities and sensations than politics and public life. This combination of party and tabloid commercial press is best illustrated by the Czechoslovak National Socialist Party-controlled Melantrich publishing house.[4]

2 Jean K. Chalby, "Twenty years of contrast".

3 Hájková and Horák (eds.), *Republika československá 1918 – 1939*, 293.

4 The party was founded in 1897 as the Czech National Social Party (ČSNS; no relation to German National Socialism) after a split within the Czechoslavonic Social Democratic Workers' Party.

Press as a key tool of political parties

The vast majority of newspapers in interwar Czechoslovakia were published by publishing houses owned by political parties. In Slovakia, until 1938, this was the case for almost one hundred percent of the country's daily newspapers. The Slovak part of the state was a real exception in this respect, even by Central European standards, because unlike in other countries, where the aforementioned tabloids existed alongside the party press, the small market and the underdeveloped business environment in the press sector in Slovakia prevented the emergence of this second group of newspapers. This was largely the result of adopting the concept of the party press that had already developed in the Czech lands during the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. From the Cisleithanian part of the Monarchy, the new Czechoslovak republican state adopted the institutional concept of ownership of the press and its basic legislative rules. This situation was somewhat paradoxical, as Czechoslovak legislation did not officially recognise political parties as legal entities. The country had no law on political parties, nor did the state constitution define them. In practice, the new state adopted the Austrian approach, which placed political parties outside the legal framework, and thus political parties were not legally regulated. They were only mentioned in electoral legislation, which gave them certain rights and obligations in the election period. In 1933, however, the Czechoslovak Parliament passed Law No. 201/1933,[5] which gave the government the right to stop activities of a political party or to dissolve a political party.[6] The law was a reaction to the spread of Nazi influences among some Czech Germans and was the basis for the suspension of the Nazi party (Deutsche nationalsozialistische Arbeiterpartei, DNSAP) in the Sudetenland in the same year. However, parties did not have legal personality in the Czechoslovak Republic and therefore could not be official owners of property.[7] The consequence of this situation was that even the party newspapers were not directly owned by the political parties, but were published by publishing houses close to the parties. These were usually joint-stock companies or cooperatives, in which the majority of the shares were owned by influential members of the individual political parties, or in the case of smaller parties, the press was published by individuals directly

5 ″Zákon č. 201/1933 Zb z. a nar“. [Act No. 201/1933 of Coll. and Reg.].

6 Švedová, ″Právne postavenie, činnosť a vnútorná organizácia Verejnosti proti násiliu”, 27.

7 Ibid, 28.

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linked to the party.[8] If the reader was in any doubt as to the political leanings of a newspaper, its content and the tone of its editorials and commentaries clearly indicated which political party the periodical was sympathetic to.

The fact that the overwhelming majority of the news providers and the influential cultural and political press in the Republic were owned by political parties was due to several factors. The Republic inherited the traditions of the party press from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as well as suffering – especially in Slovakia – from poorly developed market relations in the press business. Moreover, it was necessary for political parties to publish their own newspapers in order to disseminate their programmes and to attract potential voters. Political pluralism did not guarantee the existence of independent newspapers, but on the contrary, it encouraged the proliferation of a multiplicity of newspapers, each of which was clearly biased towards a particular political grouping. Without their own press organs, political parties had no hope of success in interwar Czechoslovakia, where the press was still the most widespread and accessible means of mass communication, alongside the fledgling radio industry. The various political groups were in constant competition with each other, and it was in the pages of the press that they could most easily criticise their opponents while highlighting the merits of their own political programmes. The pluralist character of the Czechoslovak political system intensified this almost constant duel in the pages of the press even more; at times, even those parties that were part of the current governing coalition attacked each other in the newspapers. The parties competed with each other practically all the time, and this invariably intensified a few months before parliamentary, regional or municipal elections when they pursued their campaigns in their newspapers even more than usual. In order to succeed in this constant battle, most parties did not hesitate to publish a number of dailies or regional weeklies. They did so despite the fact that publishing was a loss-making business for most of them, which had to be financed from other party income.

It would not be very helpful to write about the ownership of the press in Slovakia in isolation, without first considering the situation in the Czech lands. On the basis of the Czechoslovak constitution adopted in February 1920, which was not changed until 1938, Czechoslovakia was a centralised state in which most of the major political forces were active in both the western and eastern parts of the country alike. Just as Slovakia

8 Bednařík, Jirák and Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií : od počátku do současnosti*, 168.

largely adopted the party system from the Czech lands after 1918, it also adopted the concept of a party news daily press. Whereas in the Czech Lands there were several formally independent dailies, the most important of which was the aforementioned Lidové noviny, in Slovakia, until 1938, all the major national daily newspapers were owned and published exclusively by political parties.

In interwar Czechoslovakia, there were two competing principles concerning the publication of the press. On the one hand, there was the pre-1918 tradition and the continuing need for political parties to publish their own newspapers in order to communicate with their supporters. This trend remained clearly dominant until the end of the First Czechoslovak Republic in 1938. Some newspaper publishers, on the other hand, were aware that if their titles were to be commercially successful, they should appeal to as wide a readership as possible and thus be politically neutral, at least formally. A good example of this is Melantrich, which published popular press magazines alongside the party organs, although even these occasionally contained praise for the leaders of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party which indirectly owned the publishing house. Melantrich was founded as a cooperative of the party and before 1918 it had already grown into one of the most successful publishing houses in the country. The Austrian authors Josef Seethaler and Gabriele Melischek aptly summed up the ambiguity of the role of the average Central European journalist between the wars in an example that, to some extent, also applies to Czechoslovakia. According to them, there were two types of journalists in the region: "advocates who promoted a view of a specific group" and, on the other hand, "journalists of the mass media who were willing to (re)package information in a way that suits the audiences (shifting) demands and expectations".[9]

Press owned by political parties in the Czech Lands

Apart from a few mergers, when smaller parties merged with larger parties of the same ideological orientation, the party system in the Czech Lands was transferred into the new state with practically no significant changes. The pre-existing dominant political groupings thus brought their own publishing houses into the Republic, and most of

9 Seethaler and Melischek, "Opinion-leading media as indicators of a democracy at risk: The press and the rise of National Socialism between 1927 and 1932.", 77–94.

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the main party newspapers of the various political camps had already been published under the same name during the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.

At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Czech political landscape was already quite well developed and differentiated. Even then, party dailies were a characteristic phenomenon of Czech journalism. As in the First Republic, there were both national daily newspapers and, at the same time, regional periodicals published by the parties themselves. The National Party, also known as the Old Czech Party, published the daily newspapers *Národní politika* [National Politics] and *Hlas národa* [Voice of the Nation]. The National Liberal Party, also known as the Young Czech Party took over the daily *Národní listy* [National Letters] in 1911, which had been published since the 1860s. The Social Democrats had published their party organ under the name *Právo lidu* [People's Justice] since 1897. At the turn of the century an influential agrarian party emerged as a remarkable Czech phenomenon, which began publishing its main party newspaper, *Venkov* [Countryside], from 1906. The Czech Socialist Party first published the daily *Česká demokracie* [Czech Democracy] and from 1907 onwards, under the wings of Melantrich, a new daily called *České slovo* [Czech Word]. All these party titles, together with the party publishing houses, were seamlessly incorporated into the new Czechoslovak state after 1918. The only exception was Národní politika, which became an officially independent newspaper only after the de facto demise of the Old Czech Party in the republic.[10]

The political parties of interwar Czechoslovakia had a major influence not only on its politics, but also on the economic and, to some extent, the cultural life of the country. Most of the main political camps did not concentrate on politics alone, but also incorporated important economic, cultural, sport defence, and other affiliate organizations into their party structures, ensuring that they were truly mass political parties. The majority of the parties in interwar Czechoslovakia had multiple sources of revenue. An important part of their official income came from membership fees. Another, unofficial source of their income came from payments from various business groups with an interest in a particular political party. In the case of the Agrarian Party, for example, these were sugar beet growers and sugar producers, and in the case of the right-wing parties, big banking. In addition, the governing parties were able to use various ministerial funds in their hands to their advantage.

10 Beránková, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky. I. díl, Český periodický tisk do roku 1918,* 209–218.

The most influential and electorally strongest party in the Republic was the Agrarian Party (officially named The Republican Party of Farmers and Peasants). It was something of a paradox that in the most industrially developed country in Central Europe, it was this party that held such a strong position. Similar parties emerged in virtually all the countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe, but with the exception of a brief period in Bulgaria, nowhere were they as successful as in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period. The reason for the success of the Agrarians in the Czech Lands may have been, among other things, due to the low popularity of Catholic parties in the Czech countryside (apart from in Moravia) for historical reasons, which enabled the Agrarians to attract the majority of the rural population into their ranks. This fact, combined with the great fragmentation of both right-wing and socialist parties, enabled the Agrarians to become the most successful party of the republic. Under the leadership of its chairman, Antonín Švehla, the Agrarians became a mass political party, supported in the countryside by all property classes – from small peasants to large landowners and agrarian big businessmen. In addition to the party organisations, a number of economic, educational and cultural organisations also played important roles in the life of the Czech and Slovak countryside. The party was also clearly the most successful centralist party in Slovakia.

A member of the Agrarian Party held the post of Prime Minister from 1922 until the dissolution of the state in 1939. As early as 1917, it established a publishing house for the publication of its printed matter under the name of Českomoravské podniky vydavatelské a tiskařské [Czech-Moravian Publishing and Printing House], which was renamed the Novina Publishing House in 1930. Its shares were owned by large food producers who were close to people in the party leadership and by prominent party officials.[11] The party's main press organ in the western part of the country was the daily newspaper Venkov, along with a number of more tabloid-type evening newspapers and a special daily, also published in the Moravian capital, Brno. The party's speciality was the publication of a large number of regional weeklies, which mostly picked up news from the national dailies. In the early 1930s, the party published a total of six dailies, 33 weeklies, three monthly magazines and two cultural and political journals in the republic. In addition, a number of agrarian trade union, economic and educational organisations published their own magazines using party funds.[12] The Novina publishing house was unprofitable and the party made up the shortfall from the party's coffers, which

11 Dolejší, *Noviny a novináři z poznámek a vzpomínek*, 12.

12 Harna, "Republikánská strana," 577.

were filled from various sources, including money from sugar growers, for example. They were, as previously stated, one of the traditional sponsors of the party.[13]

The right-wing National Democrat party, the successors of the influential pre-1918 Young Czech Party, which advocated a settlement with Vienna along the lines of the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, published its main press organ, Národní listy in Prague, a newspaper it had acquired in 1911. Its publishing house, *Pražská akciová tiskárna* [The Prague Stock Printing Press], was a joint-stock company co-owned by various party functionaries and headed by party chairman Karel Kramář.[14] In practice, however, it was controlled by the largest Czechoslovak bank, Živnobanka, whose interests the party protected in its economic programme.[15] The company also published the evening newspaper *Večerní list* [Evening Paper] in Prague, along with regional party newspapers published in Plzeň and Moravská Ostrava.

The Catholic Czechoslovak People's Party published several daily newspapers, not only in Prague, but also in the regional centres of Brno and Olomouc, where it also had its own publishing houses. Shares in these firms were owned by leading party officials. In addition to daily and weekly newspapers, these also published various religious magazines and religious literature. However, its main daily newspaper, *Lidové listy* [People's Letters] did not have the same influence and readership as the most important titles of the other major parties.

The publishing cooperative of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party[16] became one of the largest publishing houses in the Czech lands and later in Czechoslovakia, called Melantrich. This was achieved under the leadership of the talented entrepreneur Jaroslav Šalda. Before the outbreak of World War I, the company moved its headquarters to a newly constructed building in Prague's Wenceslas Square. After the establishment of the Republic, it published České slovo as its main party newspaper, along with a number of successful commercial mass evening newspapers. Only České slovo was classed as an official party newspaper; the others did not claim to be directly affiliated with the

13 Ibid.

14 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky. III. díl, Český a slovenský tisk v letech 1918 – 1944*, 172.

15 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938). Zv. 1. Vznik, budování a zlatá léta republiky (1918 – 1929)*, 336.

16 The new name of the party since 1919 reflecting the foundation of the republic. Since 1926 the official name of the party was Czechoslovak National Socialist party and its members were usually referred to as National Socialists in the press.

Czechoslovak Socialist Party and Melantrich presented them instead as popular, even tabloid periodicals aimed at citizens of all political persuasions.[17] The group was based on business money, which also benefited the party's finances. During the 1920s, Melantrich added other successful titles, including illustrated magazines and magazines for women and young people.[18] Thus, in contrast to the other political parties in the country, the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, thanks to Šalda, had a commercially successful publishing house, which the party did not have to fund from other sources, but instead its publishing house brought money into the party's coffers.[19] Melantrich, however, was an exception among party-controlled publishers. What was originally a party publishing house became a successful commercial venture that was profitable while continuing to publish mainstream party periodicals alongside commercial titles.

The traditional left, the Social Democrats, also had their own publishing house. It was called *Lidová kníhtiskárna Antonín Němec* [People's Printing House Antonín Němec]. It bore the name of a long-time leading party member who, in accordance with contemporary practice, had been its official owner since the beginning of the 20th century. The publishing house published two main party newspapers in Prague, dailies in Ostrava and Plzeň and several magazines. Commercially, however, it was nowhere near as successful as the Melantrich publishing house and, like most of its political rivals, the party had to subsidise its newspapers from other party sources.[20]

The Communist Party, whose main organ became *Rudé Právo* [Red Justice] shortly after its split from the Social Democrats in 1921, did not have a large publishing house. The official publishers of its newspapers were individuals – party members who were also the official owners of the company. In addition to their main organ, the Communists also published a daily newspaper in the Hungarian (*Munkás*) and German languages (*Vorwärts*). The Communists' efforts in the regional press were characterised by a series of short-lived titles which disappeared due to lack of funding or because they were banned by the authorities, only to reappear later, usually under a new name.[21]

The periodicals close to Jiří Stříbrný's nationalist National League, which he founded after his expulsion from the Czechoslovak Socialist Party in 1926, had an unusual

17 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938),* 329.

18 Šalda, *Budováni tisku za Rakouska*, 97.

19 Harna, "Český národní socialismus", 775.

20 Bednařík, Jirák and Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií: od počátku do současnosti*, 173.

21 Marek, "Komunistická strana Československa," 724.

background. In that year, the ambitious politician came into conflict with the pro-Castle[22] wing of the party. In the period that followed he became the most vocal critic of the political establishment led by President Masaryk and Minister Edvard Beneš, alongside the Communists. His political party published a series of tabloid newspapers in which he sharply attacked his political opponents. These papers were published by the Tempo publishing house that was founded with a registered capital of 2 million crowns provided by Štříbrný's brother, the successful businessman František Stříbrný.[23] A peculiar feature of Stříbrný's daily was that it solicited advertisements from large companies by threatening to publish negative articles about them if they failed to do so.[24] In practice, this amounted to blackmail.

The political parties of the German minority in the Czech Lands followed the same model as their Czech political rivals. Party periodicals were published by publishing houses that were personally connected to the parties through their leaders. The Bund der Landwirte, i.e. the German Agrarian Party, published the Deutsche Landpost. Supporters of the German Christian Social Party had the newspaper Deutsche Presse at their disposal. The organ of the radical nationalist Deutsche National Partei was the Sudetendeutsche Tageszeitung. The Nazi DNSAP, inspired by its counterpart in the German Reich, was the cause of the above-mentioned law on the dissolution of political parties from 1933. Until it was banned in 1933, it published Der Tag as its main newspaper.[25]

Until 1935, that is, until the rise of Konrad Henlein's Sudeten German Party, the most successful German party in Czechoslovakia was the German Social Democratic Party. After the establishment of the Czechoslovak state, it first published periodicals in the individual German-speaking regions of the border area, and later the newspaper Sozialdemokrat became its main organ. The Sudeten German Party became the most successful ethnic German party in Czechoslovakia from 1935 until the state's demise, mainly thanks to the financial and organizational support from Nazi Germany. The party published the weekly Rundschau as its main political organ and the daily Die Zeit in Prague.

22 Castle: an informal group consisting of President Masaryk and his advisors and supporters, the most important of whom was the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Edvard Beneš. They were formed mainly from the ranks of the intelligentsia active in Prague. Its political supporters were mainly active in the socialist parties, but its sympathizers were also to be found among individuals in the Agrarian Party, the National Democrats and other political movements.

23 Vykoupil, "Národní liga ", 785.

24 Šalda, *Budováni tisku za Rakouska*, 133.

25 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938)*, 333.

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Two independent German newspapers, Deutsche Zeitung Bohemia and the less nationalist Prager Tagblatt, which were closer to the activists who were more inclined to cooperate with the governing coalition, were also published in the western part of the country.[26] A separate chapter was the German-language daily Prager Presse, published by Orbis, a publishing house with personal and financial ties to the Czechoslovak Foreign Ministry. This paper effectively served as the Prague government's official source of information on Czechoslovakia for foreigners.[27]

It can be stated that the main political parties operating in the western part of the country all published their own central party organs, and the largest parties produced several of them. They also had a network of regional periodicals covering the whole country. They were published by publishing houses with personal and proprietary links to leading party officials. Of all these publishers, however, only the Czechoslovak Socialist Melantrich publishing house could claim to be a commercially successful enterprise, and this was thanks to its officially non-political mass press.

"Non-political" owners of newspapers in the Czech lands

In addition to the newspapers owned by the political parties, a total of four major news dailies were published in the Czech provinces that were not officially affiliated with any political party. This was clearly a much smaller group among the influential national Czech-language dailies. However, even these papers were not entirely politically independent. They either had links with business circles close to a particular political movement, or they were sympathetic to a particular political camp. The first was the oldest continuously published Czech newspaper, Národní politika, which had traditions dating back to the mid-19th century. It was originally the newspaper of the oldest Czech political party – The Old Czech Party (National Party). After 1918, it became an officially non-partisan daily. It was published by Politika, a publishing house owned by several influential business families. Like the aforementioned Melantrich, the headquarters of this publishing house was located in a large four-storey building on Wenceslas Square in central Prague. In its functioning, Národní politika can be described as a conservative newspaper with a strong advertising supplement, while in terms of opinion, it was closest to the National Democrats. Formally, however, it pre-

26 Ibid, 334.

27 Bednařík, Jirák and Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií : od počátku do současnosti,* 162.

sented itself as politically independent. It was financed, especially through advertising,[28] by large industrial and banking capital linked to the largest bank in Czechoslovakia, Živnobanka.[29] This big business was the direct link between the newspapers and the National Democrats. The newspaper was one of the best-selling dailies in the Czech lands. The Sunday edition was particularly popular, as it regularly contained extensive small advertisements.[30] After the Munich Agreement in 1938, the paper quickly became radicalised and, in keeping with the ethos of the times, it began to show open sympathy for fascism.[31]

The second formally independent daily was *Národní Osvobození* [National Liberation]. This newspaper was published by a publishing house affiliated to the Legionnaires' Association, an organisation representing the interests of veterans of the Czechoslovak foreign troops who fought in the ranks of the Entente forces during World War I.[32] The newspaper was owned by a legionary organization that was politically inclined to the Castle[33] and therefore it logically had political sympathies with the Castle circles and defended the interests of teachers and civil servants. Its circulation was rather limited and it did not have a wide social reach. The daily was published with the help of financial subsidies it received from the Ministry of Defence,[34] which was another reason for its journalists not to criticise the government.

The first attempt to establish a truly politically independent newspaper in Czechoslovakia was the launch of the *Tribuna* [Tribune] journal in 1919. Its first editor-in-chief

28 An important part of the income of all the country's major dailies, whether party or non-party newspapers, was advertising revenue. Advertising in virtually all of them, with the exception of the communist ones, was regularly commissioned by large firms, such as the shoe giant Bata. The example of this company may serve as a demonstration that large firms could have a significant influence on the content of newspapers. In a dispute with the Social Democratic Unions, the company refused to commission Christmas advertising for their main daily newspaper, Právo lidu, in 1933. (Dolejší, *Noviny a novináři z poznámek a vzpomínek*, 185.)

29 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky*, III. díl, 177.

30 Cebe, "Národní politika jako příklad úspěšného denníku první republiky," 62–63.

31 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938),* 331.

32 Ibid.

33 There were several legionary associations in Czechoslovakia. Most, but not all of them, were politically aligned with the Castle and the government parties.

34 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938),* 337.

was a future legend of independent Czechoslovak journalism, Ferdinand Peroutka.[35] At the time of the newspaper's founding, however, he was still only a young aspiring journalist, although he had already demonstrated great journalistic and editorial talent in its pages. It was initially published by a publishing house close to some organisations of Czech liberal Jews which advocated assimilation into the Czech nation. It had more than 5,000 shareholders, with a capital of more than three million crowns.[36] As early as 1921, business circles close to the Agrarian Party acquired shares in the publishing house. This happened as part of their efforts to acquire their own printing works, which required an increase in capital. In 1926, these circles acquired the majority of the shares, allowing them to take control of the newspaper, and two years later, presumably in order to avoid competing with the agrarian periodicals, they stopped publishing it. The newspaper was particularly popular among intellectuals from the big cities and the upper middle class, who were sympathetic to parties across the political spectrum. Overall, the newspaper had a liberal tone, and the fact that it had Jewish owners could only be identified by the articles it published condemning anti-Semitism.[37] This was a rare feature for newspapers at the time. Especially in the first years after the establishment of the state, anti-Semitic displays were quite frequent, especially among right-wing sympathisers.

Lidové noviny is generally regarded as the pinnacle of Czechoslovak non-party journalism during the inter-war period. Like the vast majority of the most important national newspapers, it was also founded during the period of Austro-Hungarian monarchy, but was based in Brno rather than Prague. From 1920 onwards, it had its own editorial office in Prague in addition to the headquarters in the Moravian capital. The publishing house was founded by Adolf Stránský, who was of Jewish origin and had been active in the liberal camp of Czech nationalist politics before 1918. After the establishment of the Republic, his son Jaroslav took over the publishing house in 1921.[38] The newspaper was politically close to the opinions of the Castle circle and, according to testimonies, received subsidies from President Masaryk's personal fund in the mid-1920s. Several notable journalists worked in the Prague office as editors or contributors to the newspaper, including, apart from the aforementioned Peroutka, the writers Karel Čapek and

35 Ibid, 332.

36 Chmela, "Vznik a vývoj deníku Tribuna v letech 1919 – 1921", 25.

37 Ibid, 26–32.

38 Pernes, "Politik novinář a právník. Jaroslav Stránský," 106.

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Eduard Bass.[39] However, even Lidové noviny was not completely independent. Apart from its barely concealed sympathy for the Castle group, it was also a party journal, at least for a few months before the 1925 parliamentary elections. Its owner, Jaroslav Stránský, ran for parliament with his own political party, but he was defeated in the elections and the party practically ceased to exist within two years.[40] During this period, the newspaper had a regular column reporting on events in Stranský's party and publishing invitations to party meetings.[41] At the end of the 1920s, Stránský joined the Czechoslovak Socialist Party, became a member of its wider leadership and, starting in 1929, was a member of the Prague Parliament.[42] Nevertheless, the paper retained a considerable degree of independence, although its sympathies with the Castle and with the government coalitions with Czechoslovak Socialist participation could not be overlooked. In no way, however, did it become the daily newspaper of the Czechoslovak Socialist Party. In the early 1930s, moreover, Stránský rejected an offer from Jaroslav Šalda of Melantrich to bring the paper into the portfolio of that large Czechoslovak Socialist publishing house.[43]

From 1924, Stránský's publishing house also published the cultural and political journal Přítomnost. Compared to similar titles published by political parties, it maintained a high quality and a broad diversity of opinion in its contributions. Its editor-in-chief was Ferdinand Peroutka, who became a respected figure in Czechoslovak journalism thanks to the high quality and influence of the magazine. When it was founded, the magazine was granted one million crowns directly by President Masaryk. Nevertheless, Peroutka did not hold back from expressing criticism even of some of Masaryk's activities in his commentaries.[44]

Non-partisan news and non-tabloid newspapers made up only a small proportion of the national dailies in interwar Czechoslovakia. Only two of them, Národní politika and Lidové noviny, were truly influential, and even these two dailies were close to one part of the political spectrum. Národní politika was clearly linked to the Czech right in terms

39 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918-1938)*, 337.

40 Dvořák, "Národní strana práce (1925 – 1930)," [National Labour Party (1925-1930), 624.

41 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky*, *III. díl,* 178.

42 Pernes, "Politik novinář a právník. Jaroslav Stránský", 107.

43 Šalda, *Budováni tisku za Rakouska,* 73.

44 Kárník, *České země v éře první republiky (1918 – 1938)*, 341.

of ownership and opinion, while Lidové noviny, apart from the brief political extempore of its owner Stránský, made its liberal values and sympathy for President Masaryk and his entourage clear.

Newspapers owned by political parties published in Slovakia

The Slovak press, thanks to its historical roots in Transleithania, entered the republic from a very different starting point than the Czech press. Before 1918, no daily newspaper was published in Slovak in Upper Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.[45] Most of the Slovak periodicals had been weeklies, including the nationalist Martin-based *Narodné noviny* [National Newspaper], and regularly struggled with financial problems together with a lack of interest on the part of the Slovak-speaking population. Compared to the Czech Lands, reading newspapers was not a tradition in Slovakia. Apart from a small group of Slovak intellectuals and a small number of better-educated workers, there was no tradition of reading the news press. It can be noted that this trend continued into the First Republic, not only among the religious rural population, but also among members of the Communist Party. While in the Czech Lands in the mid-1920s, only 25 per cent of party members did not subscribe to a party magazine, in Slovakia the proportion of members who did not subscribe was more than half (52 per cent).[46] The ethnically Slovak population lived mostly in the countryside, and there was not a large Slovak urban middle class demanding news titles in Slovak. The majority of this group was saturated with the press published in Hungarian or German. Traditionally, the Slovak rural population of Upper Hungary mainly read various religious publications or popular Catholic and Protestant calendars. Much of the older rural population, especially in the more remote mountainous regions and in the north-east of the country, was still illiterate, which was in sharp contrast to the western part of Czechoslovakia, where illiteracy was virtually non-existent.[47] Moreover, in the first years after

45 In 1900, Milan Hodža started publishing a daily newspaper in Budapest called Slovenský denník, but the periodical was only published for a few months. It was only a periodical called Slovenský týždenník, which was also published weekly in the Hungarian capital from 1903 until the collapse of the monarchy that became Hodža's successful project.

46 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky*, *III. díl,* 140.

47 According to official figures, illiteracy among the Slovak population in 1910 was almost 35 per cent. (Jakešová, "Spoločnosť," 69.)

the Czechoslovak state was established, the structure of the Slovak political parties was practically rebuilt.

The Czech concept of the party press, which had clearly dominated the entire interwar period, was gradually transferred to the Slovak part of the country in the first years after the establishment of the Czechoslovak state. However, between 1918 and 1919, the first periodicals published in Slovak were founded by government bodies. Unlike in the Slovak Lands, this practice did not have to be applied by the government in the Czech Lands because, as described earlier, the vast majority of party newspapers there had already been published before the establishment of the Czechoslovak state. After 1918, the new state was clearly supported by the Czech press, so that the government did not need to establish new periodicals to promote its actions among the population, which was precisely the main task of the aforementioned new periodicals in Slovakia.

At the end of 1918, the first nationwide daily was launched under the name of *Slovenský denník* [Slovak Daily], which in turn had evolved from the pre-1918 *Slovenský týždenník* [Slovak Weekly]. In addition to receiving subsidies from the Prague government, it was able to begin publication thanks to the financial support of prominent Slovak businessmen Ondrej Žuffa and Ján Pálka.[48] Gradually, the new state authorities established several weeklies in individual Slovak counties with their own resources and direct subsidies from Prague.[49] After the definitive incorporation of the Slovak provinces into the new state following the first parliamentary elections in 1920, most of these state-funded newspapers either disappeared or became party titles. The latter was the case with the Slovenský denník, which became one of the two main newspapers of the Agrarian Party in the Slovak provinces.

The Prague publishing house of the Agrarian Party, mentioned in the previous section, set up a branch in Bratislava in the early 1920s. There, in addition to the Slovenský denník, the party also published its second national daily, Slovenská politika [Slovak Politics]. Compared to the first periodical, this was more of a popular daily with shorter news items and less expert journalism, and was aimed mainly at the countryside. In addition, in the mid-1920s the party also took over the publication of Slovenský východ [Slovak East] in Košice, which focused on regional events in the east of the country.[50]

48 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky, III. díl,* 180.

49 Ďžujko, "Slovenská tlač v Prešove v 20. rokoch 20. Storočia," 168.

50 Národní Archiv (NA) [National Archives of the Czech Republic, Prague], f. Předsednictvo ministerské rady (PMR), ka. 585, sign. 1580.

The party also published a regional weekly in virtually every centre of the former county of Upper Hungary. Periodicals were also published by the party's trade union and affiliated organisations.

The second most important centralist party, the nationally active Social Democrats, published its main daily newspaper, called the *Robotnícke noviny* [Workers' Newspaper] in Bratislava. It continued the tradition of a newspaper of the same name which had been published as a weekly in Bratislava before 1918. The party also had a weekly newspaper titled *Bojovník* [Warrior][51] and several regional weeklies, but their circulation figures were much lower than those of the Agrarians.

Two other centralist parties published party newspapers in Bratislava and Slovakia, but they were not very successful in Slovakia. These were the National Democrats and the Czechoslovak Socialists, who had to be content with one or at most two seats in the parliamentary elections in Slovakia. After its success in the Czech Lands, the Czechoslovak Socialist Melantrich started to publish one of its ostensibly non-political periodicals in Slovakia, the daily A-zet, which was printed in Žilina.[52]

Of course, the Communist Party also published its own newspapers in Slovakia, but its titles came and went over time, so that during the Republic a total of five different dailies fulfilled the function of the Communist party organ for Slovakia at various times.

A relatively successful publishing house by the name of Lev was aligned with the main force pursuing the autonomy of the Slovak part of the state, the Slovak People's Party, which was closely linked to the Catholic Church. The firm was established on the foundations of the Ružomberok printing house, which the future party leader Andrej Hlinka had bought during the World War I. The publishing house began publishing its flagship publication *Slovák* [Slovak] in 1919 in Hlinka's residence in Ružomberok, where he had been working as a priest since 1905. In 1922, the editorial office was moved to the new Slovak capital, Bratislava to improve its efficiency. The former bishop of Košice, Augustín Fischer-Colbrie, who had been deposed by the Czechoslovak government, is said to have provided the party with two million crowns for its construction. In Prešov, the party published the daily *Slovenská Pravda* [Slovak Truth], as well as a number of regional weeklies and even humorous titles and children's magazines.[53]

51 Zmátlo, "Dobová slovenská regionálna tlač na východnom Slovensku v období prvej Československej republiky z pohľadu historika," 171.

52 Bednařík, Jirák and Köpplová, *Dějiny českých médií : od počátku do současnosti,* 168.

53 Beránková, Křivánková and Ruttkay, *Dějiny československé žurnalistiky, III. díl,* 189–192.

It was a major blow to the Slovak People's Party press when, before the 1925 elections, the editor-in-chief of Slovák, Jur Koza-Matejov, left its ranks to found his own, "independent autonomist daily", the *Slovenský národ* [Slovak Nation]. It later emerged that he was motivated to do so by one of the main Slovak centralists and, after 1918, the first minister with full powers to administer Slovakia, the agrarian Vavro Šrobár. As one of the pillars of the regime in Slovakia, he was close to the Castle grouping, and he persuaded President Masaryk to give Koza money from his personal fund to publish the newspaper. The aim of this move was to weaken the growing position of the People's Party in Slovakia.[54] However, the action did not have the expected effect. On the contrary, in 1925, the People's Party became the most popular party in the Slovak part of the state in the parliamentary elections. A year later, Koza's newspaper, *Slovenský národ*, ceased publication.

The second autonomist party in Slovakia was the Slovak National Party, whose leadership was dominated by supporters of autonomy from the ranks of the Slovak Lutheran Protestants (Evangelicals of the Augsburg Confession). Although it was based on the old brand of Slovak nationalist politics from the Hungarian period, it played only a marginal role in the interwar period. In the parliamentary elections from 1925 onwards, the ceiling for it was usually limited to winning a single parliamentary seat. From 1922 onwards, its press organ was Národné noviny, the name of which followed the tradition of a periodical founded in the 1860s. A newspaper by this name had been the main press organ of Slovak nationalist politics in Hungary within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, until the end of the 19th century.

After 1918, however, the newspaper did not regain its position in Slovak politics. As early as 1921, the newspaper, which had debts of over 300,000 crowns, had to be rescued by a subsidy from the Prague government. The Slovak nationalists from Martin, who published their views in the journal at the time, justified the request for a subsidy by arguing that it would be a disgrace to the republic if this traditional Slovak title was to disappear after only three years of its existence in the Republic. They argued that if a newspaper that had been published for decades was to disappear so quickly in the new state, the enemies of the state would use it as further evidence of Czech imperialism against Slovakia.[55]

54 Holák, "Vznik denníka Slovenský národ – jeden z pokusov Vavra Šrobára o rozloženie ľudovej strany,", 436–444.

55 NA, f. PMR, ka. 406, sign. 977.

The periodical was not immune to problems in the 1930s either. After the two autonomist parties agreed to cooperate in 1932, the Minister of Agriculture, Milan Hodža, tried to sway the disgruntled wing of the Slovak National Party, which was against cooperating with the People's Party, to the government's side by arranging a monthly subsidy of 15,000 crowns for the paper. He promised to initiate a gradual shift of the party away from the People's Party, which he finally achieved as prime minister in 1936. The newspaper's editorial office moved from Martin to Bratislava and the party came to be dominated by a wing that favoured cooperation with the government. Not surprisingly, the paper continued to receive a financial injection from the Prague government.[56]

National minority parties also had their own newspapers in Slovakia. They used the same model as other political parties to launch them. Their newspapers were also published by publishing enterprises or cooperatives owned by leading party officials. Two significant Hungarian-minority parties were active in the Slovak part of the state. From 1919 until 1925 the country's Christian Socialist Party published a newspaper called *Népakarat* as its main organ; from 1925 this role was taken over by the daily *Magyar Hírlap*. The Prague-based *Prágai Magyar Hírlap* also served as the party 's newspaper and a means of communication with the government. It also published several regional periodicals.[57] The Hungarian Small Peasants' Party, renamed the Hungarian National Party in 1925, also published regional newspapers. After the establishment of the Republic, the weekly *Barázda* served as its main party periodical in the Slovak part of the state. In 1925 the party began publishing its own daily called *Magyar Újság*.[58] The party of the German minority in Slovakia, the Carpatho-German Party also began publishing a daily newspaper with the title *Deutsche Stimmen*, in Bratislava in 1934. This was largely thanks to funding from Henlein's Sudeten German Party.[59]

The daily press in the Slovak part of the Republic was completely dominated by newspapers published by political parties. Numerous titles were published by all sections of the country's political spectrum – centralists, autonomists and the minority political parties. In contrast to the Czech lands, no nation-wide popular mass newspapers were printed. Attempts by a few small entrepreneurs to launch popular papers

56 Roguľová, *Slovenská národná strana 1918 – 1938*, 205–212.

57 Zelenák, ″Krajinská kreťansko socialistická strana,", 150.

58 Zelenák, ″Maďarská národná strana,", 159.

59 Pöss, "Politické strany karpatských Nemcov," 920.

were of a regional nature and, due to a lack of interest on the part of the readership their lifespan was usually very short.

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The first non-partisan daily in Slovakia

Slovakia had to wait until 1938 for its first non-partisan daily newspaper. This was the daily *Slovenský hlas* [Slovak Voice], which began publication on 1 January 1938. However, the impetus for its publication came once again from politics, this time from Milan Hodža, the leader of the Slovak agrarian movement and the first Slovak to hold the post of Czechoslovak Prime Minister since 1935. It was published by the publishing house of the same name, founded in August 1934. At that time, Hodža obtained the capital required to publish the newspaper from the Prague Legiobanka. However, that financial institution sought to use the newspaper to push through a merger with the Slovak Tatrabanka, which Hodža's agrarians did not want. The project was only realised four years later. Hodža provided 300,000 crowns for the newspaper from his office as prime minister, and the rest of the money was raised from leading Slovak businessmen. For example, the Association of Slovak Sugar Mills, which was close to the Agrarian Party, donated 1500,000 crowns to the newspaper. In his position as prime minister, Hodža also tried to secure government support from Slovak autonomists. The goal was to improve Prague's international position, which was being threatened by Nazi Germany. The newspaper was critical of both the Centralists and the Autonomists, tried to promote Slovakia's economic interests within a centralist state, and did not directly call for a revision of the constitution.[60] Its end came in early 1939, when the new Slovak government, which was building a dictatorship that would be a puppet state of Nazi Germany, no longer needed it. Slovenský hlas is regarded by many today as the pinnacle of inter-war Slovak journalism.

60 Letz, "Jozef Rudinský a denník Slovenský hlas v rokoch 1938–1939," 51–63.

Conclusion

The vast majority of the newspapers and cultural and political magazines in Czechoslovakia during the interwar period were published by or were indirectly associated with political parties. The Republic adopted the model that had emerged in the Austrian part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy before 1918 and which was further developed over the next two decades. In the Czech part of the state, only four formally non-partisan national daily newspapers were published during this period, but they were staffed, owned or subsidised by the state and were associated with particular camps of interwar politics. In Slovakia, almost 100% of the national dailies were linked to political parties. The daily press was the most effective tool of the political parties in this period for disseminating their agendas and for fighting their political rivals, so this state of affairs was to a large extent also natural. The only formally independent country-wide daily newspaper in Slovakia only commenced publication at the beginning of 1938. Even this newspaper was linked to politics, because the man behind the scenes who was most responsible for its creation was the most influential Slovak politician of the time, Prime Minister Milan Hodža of the Agrarian Party.

The Munich Agreement in September 1938 marked the end of Czechoslovak democracy. Authoritarian regimes emerged in both the Czech Lands and in Slovakia, and this inevitably affected the structure of the published press. Slovakia first gained its autonomy and then seceded from Czechoslovakia in March 1939. The ruling People's Party there established a dictatorial regime with the support of Nazi Germany. As early as the autumn of 1938, it stopped the activities and the publication of newspapers of all the left-wing parties, including the Communists. All other parties were subsequently forced to merge with it. The new rulers also took over the Agrarian Party's press enterprise, but the publication of all its newspapers, with the exception of Slovenská politika (as an organ of the People's Party), was stopped. From 1939 onwards, only the official newspapers of the new ruling party were published in Slovakia.

In the Czech lands, the political parties merged into two political entities – a right-wing grouping and a left-wing one. As in Slovakia, the activities of the Communist Party were banned there, from as early as the autumn of 1938. Most of the major dailies in the big cities continued to be published, but they became official non-party newspapers. Several government-sponsored newspapers, such as the Prager Presse, were immedi-

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ately shut down under the new conditions, and the Legionnaires' *Národní osvobození* suffered the same fate. In the Protectorate, the two previously permitted parties were also dissolved, and the number of daily newspapers continued to decline. In 1941 Národní politika ceased publication, probably because it had been the main organ of the Czech nationalists before 1939. However, České slovo or Venkov continued as non-partisan organs. Lidové noviny continued to appear under new ownership. All of these publications, however, of course, already supported the occupation regime.[61]

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