

## THE IMMIGRANT PRESS AND ITS CONTROL

There is always a more or less strongly marked tendency among aliens speaking a foreign language to congregate in groups in the country or in certain wards of large towns and cities, and out of this tendency springs a sort of clannishness which cannot be avoided, and which is not peculiar to any class, for the immigrants naturally follow the lines of least resistance. They go to those whom they know, to those whose speech they can understand, to those from whose experience they may draw large drafts of suggestion and help. But this clannishness with the Swedes, Norwegians, and Danes has been but a stage in their evolution out of which, through the gates of the English language, public schools, naturalization, and increased prosperity, they have passed to broader relations.<sup>1</sup>

The reciprocal feeling of repulsion shows itself especially in the tendency of different nationalities to draw apart. The phenomenon is familiar enough in the tenement districts, but the same thing occurs, for instance, in a Texas country town, where I found that the Germans and Bohemians, who were the main inhabitants, seemed to mix as little as oil and water. Each of these two nationalities had its own separate public school; in the one, named Germania, both English and German were taught; in the Bohemian school, English only, Bohemian not being permitted by the authorities (county or state, I do not know which). The Americans who used to live in the place had, most of them, moved away. There seemed to be no friction, only a desire not to mingle. One constantly runs across this fact that the old settlers tend to withdraw as soon as they begin to be irked by a foreign atmosphere.<sup>2</sup>

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Our great cities, as we discover upon close examination, are mosaics of little language colonies, cultural enclaves,

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<sup>1</sup> C. H. Babcock, "The Scandinavian Element, Religious and Intellectual Standpoint," in *University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences*, 1914, p. 111.

<sup>2</sup> Emily G. Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, 1910, p. 410.

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each maintaining its separate communal existence within the wider circle of the city's cosmopolitan life. Each one of these little communities is certain to have some sort of co-operative or mutual aid society, very likely a church, a school, possibly a theater, but almost invariably a press. In the city of New York, at any rate, there is, so far as can be learned, no language group so insignificant that it does not maintain a printing press and publish some sort of periodical.

The Albanians, Armenians, Bulgarians, Chinese, Czechs, Croatians, Danes, Finns, French, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Japanese, Jews, Levantine Jews, Letts, Lithuanians, Magyars, Persians, Poles, Portuguese, Rumanians, Russians, Serbs, Slovaks, Slovenians, Spanish, the Swabians of Germany, the Swedes, Swiss, Syrians of New York City, all have a press. The Hindu and Turkish press have only gone out of existence since the war. There is the Hebrew press, which represents a class rather than a language group. There are also language colonies in New York like the Assyrians, Belgians, Dutch, Esthonians, Flemish, Norwegians, the Spanish of Catalonia, Uhro-Russians, Welsh, and Wends, which have a press outside the city.

Although there are not facts to justify a positive statement, it seems probable that more foreign-language newspapers and periodicals are published and read in the United States, in proportion to the foreign-born population, than are published in the home countries in proportion to the native-born. This is certainly true in some instances. The following article was based on data received from readers of *Russkoye Slovo*, who were asked to answer a questionnaire published in that paper:

Peasants and laborers constitute more than 90 per cent of all the Russian immigrants in the United States. According

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to the census of 1910, there are 38.4 per cent illiterate among the Russians above fourteen years of age. But even those who are able to read rarely saw newspapers in Russia, and theaters were out of their reach. The Russian village from which the majority of immigrants came had no press and no theater.

*Out of 312 correspondents only 16 have regularly read newspapers in Russia; 10 others used from time to time to read newspapers in the volost, the village administrative center; 12 were subscribers to weekly magazines.*

In America all of them are subscribers or readers of Russian newspapers. *Two hundred of them are theatergoers, and all are visiting the "movies."*

Twenty-five per cent of them read also the American newspapers published in the English language. But some mention the fact that they "understand only one word out of five." Others, buying an American daily, just glance over the headlines. "These are easy to understand, and you know all the news," writes one of the correspondents.

The question whether they like American newspapers or not is answered negatively by the majority of Russian readers. Some complain that the newspapers are *too local* in their character. A newspaper in some city like Willimantic is 90 per cent a local paper, and to it the affairs of Willimantic are of more importance than the all-American and the world problems. The Russian readers are used to seeing even in their provincial press an expression of the world's thought. . . . Generally, the responses to the questionnaire paint a picture of a cultural success of the Russians in America. Immigrants from the governments of Grodno, Minsk, and Volyn write that *at home they used newspapers as cigarette papers*, while here they became regular readers of periodicals. An interest in the press creates an interest in the book, in the theater, and the whole outlook of the Russian in America widens. Not only his own interests, the interests of his family and of his circle, become near and dear to him, but also the

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problems of his country, of the republic in which he resides, and, gradually, of the whole wide world.<sup>1</sup>

### POPULARITY BASED ON SENTIMENT AND NEED

The popularity of the foreign-language press is due to various causes. One reason why immigrants are eager to read their own language in this country is that they have not been permitted to do so in their own. Sometimes they have not learned to read before they come here; have not been permitted to do so. Sometimes the journals they might have read were not interesting or not intelligible. Frequently the "oppressed and dependent" peoples of Europe were not allowed to publish journals in their own languages. Immigrants who have struggled for the right to print and read their native languages at home are bound to have sentimental views in regard to the press which prints their language in America.

One reason why immigrant peoples read more in America than they do at home is because there is more going on that they need to know. There is more novelty and more news.

News is a kind of urgent information that men use in making adjustments to a new environment, in changing old habits, and in forming new opinions. The very helplessness of the immigrant, to which Miss Emily Balch refers in her study of the Slavic immigrant in America, is a measure of the novelty of the American environment and the immigrant's lack of adjustment to it.

His helplessness makes him sought for as prey by sharpers and grafters; it is all that the immigration officials can do to keep them off as he lands. As soon as he leaves the pater-

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Villchur, article in the *Russkoye Slovo*, New York City, June 10, 1919.