

The rise and fall of the German press in Australia and the United States

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Abstract

The German press has a long history in both Australia and the United States. Because German immigration was much greater and more diverse in the United States than in Australia, the German press there has always been more vigorous. Anti-German chauvinism during World War I marked the beginning of the decline of the German-language press in both countries, and today the German-language press has little influence in either country.

オーストラリアとアメリカ合衆国には、ドイツ語新聞発行の長い歴史がある。その両国の歴史を比較すると、アメリカ合衆国の方が、ドイツ系移民の数も多く、その背景も多様であったため、常時、活発である。しかし、ドイツ語新聞の発行部数は、両国において共に、第1次世界大戦中の反独主義を契機として減少し始め、現在では、その勢力をほとんど失っている。

In both Australia and the United States, the Germans are one of the oldest European ethnic groups, with histories in both countries dating back to the earliest period of European free settlement. As a result, both the United States and Australia have enjoyed an active German press for almost as long as they have an English-language press. The reasons for the establishment and support of this press are obvious — because German speakers found it convenient to conduct much of their business and social life together, a written means of communication was necessary. In addition, the German press acted as an initial introduction to the customs and ways of the host country for the new immigrants and was for many the only written communication they could use.

Although both German presses served a similar purpose — communication with and among a German minority in a newly colonised Anglo-Saxon land — there were several differences between the two presses that can be traced from their early development. These were primarily due to the differences in the two German communities. The most noticeable difference was the size of the two populations. Whereas German settlement in the United States was so massive that even today about one-third of all Americans are of German descent, in Australia the German and non-British settlement in general was much smaller. The highest pre-World War II total percentage of non-Anglo-Saxon

Australian residents was recorded in 1891, when only 2.5% of the non-indigenous population was neither Australian nor United Kingdom born.

Another important difference was the type of persons who emigrated to each country. Although both countries received many religious settlers, most Australian Germans were Lutheran, whereas the American German settlers were divided among a number of Christian and Jewish sects. In addition, Australia received few political refugees from the abortive revolution of 1848 and even fewer socialist exiles in the latter part of the nineteenth century, while the United States received large numbers of both types of political immigrants.

The first German publication in either country was *Der Hoch-Deutsche Pennsylvanische Gesucht-Schreiber*, begun by Christopher Sauer in 1739 as the first non-English newspaper in what was soon to become the United States. In spite of the establishment of a rival German newspaper in Philadelphia in 1743, the circulation rose quickly to 4000 and the *Gesucht-Schreiber* became a unifying influence among German speakers in all the thirteen colonies. By 1815 there were fifteen German newspapers in Pennsylvania alone. Many were published in Pennsylvania Dutch, so that in the old newspapers sentences with many English loanwords are common, i.e., *Wir sind determt, Bisneß zu tun* or *Wir trihten Sie wie ein Gentleman*.

The first daily in German in the United States was the *New York Staats-Zeitung und Harold*, begun in 1834. Shortly afterward in 1848, *Die Deutsche Post für die Australischen Colonien* was begun by Johann Menge, a South Australian geologist. This was the first German, or indeed non-English, newspaper in Australia. This first effort at German journalism in Australia had many difficulties and did not appear regularly until 1849. In that same year a second and financially more sound newspaper was founded in Tanunda, South Australia, *Die Südaustralische Zeitung*, which became the leading German-Australian newspaper of the nineteenth century.

By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the German press was firmly established in both countries. This is surprising in view of the high mortality rate of foreign language newspapers in general. Only a small number of other non-English newspapers lasted more than a few years, and even they were in a constant state of merging and absorbing.

In Australia most of the German press, as the German community as a whole, was dominated by the Lutheran church. One of the reasons this church was such an influential centre of German activity was its strong belief in non-contamination by other, usually non-German denominations. Not only did the church have an important influence in the German press at large, it produced a number of church newspapers itself. These newspapers, the first of which was the *Pilger in Viktoria*, established in 1853, tended to be much more stable than the secular press, with one newspaper, the *Australischer Christenbote*, lasting 57 years. One stimulant to the religious press was the rivalry between the two

major Lutheran synods represented in Australia.

Although there were many German church organs in the United States, they did not play the important role in the German community there that they did in Australia. Instead, the most influential newspapers were political newspapers. Whereas Australia had only one vehicle in German for liberal thinkers, the *Deutsche Monatschrift für Australien* (published from 1858 to 1862), the United States produced a wide variety of liberal newsletters. It also produced a large number of socialist newspapers, the first of which was the *Republik der Arbeiter*, begun in 1851 in New York. By 1876, when there were only eight socialist newspapers in the United States published in English, there were fourteen published in German. The German newspapers tended to be more radical than the other socialist newspapers and they were the only ones to be strongly Marxist. As the German community produced most of the leaders of the radical workers' movement of the late nineteenth century, it was in the German press that the leading leftist statements of the day were to be found. Many of these socialist newspapers survived well into the twentieth century, when they were revitalised by émigré authors and used as vehicles of anti-Nazi thought during World War II.

The first World War, with its accompanying wave of anti-German hysteria, struck a major blow to the German press in both Australia and the United States. In Australia the war coincided with a decline from the peak of German immigration around 1900. The decline in the size of the German community as a result of assimilation had already resulted in only two German secular newspapers being left in Australia in 1914. Because of the opposition of the government to a German press during the war, these newspapers ceased publication in the early years of the war. In 1917 the government forbade all publication in German, so that even the Lutheran church organs had to switch to English.

In the United States, where Germans had always insisted on being considered as co-founders of the republic rather than as an immigrant community, and where in 1917 they numbered twenty million, the government could not go as far as banning the German press entirely. It did, however, restrict the right to use the federal postal system. Under the Espionage Bill of June 1917, all "foreign language" (i.e., non-English) publications had to file copies with the federal government, which could require translations at its discretion. As a result of this act, most German socialist and radical newspapers were barred from using the postal system, and many other German newspapers experienced delays in publication. Only 74 newspapers were released from having to provide translations with every issue.

These restrictions marked the beginning of the decline of the German press in both countries. After World War I Australia did not even have a German newspaper again until 1924, when the *Queenslander Herald* began publication for another decade. This newspaper was alone in the field during the inter-war years except for a church newsletter that switched back to German in 1925 and

the Nazi mouthpiece *Die Brücke*. All German publication ceased with the outbreak of World War II and no Australian post-war German-language publication seems to have any tie with a pre-1939 journal.

Although some German newspapers did survive World War I in the United States, few had the courage to become as politically involved as they had been previously. Many even refused to write editorials, especially during the Nazi period in Germany. This meant that German-Americans were required to turn to English-language journals for political reporting. This resulted in the disappearance of the German-speaking community as an identifiable and coherent political force in the United States. The arrival of refugee writers from Hitler's New Germany might have halted this tendency to some extent, but few of these émigré writers considered themselves American, so that they were unable to rally the German-American community around them.

The state of the German-language press today at the end of the twentieth century in both the United States and Australia is a pale reflection of the situation at the beginning of this century. Since World War II the number of German newspapers in the United States has continued to decline, so much so that there is only one daily newspaper left, the *Chicago Abendpost*. In Australia the atrophy has progressed to the point where there is no German-language daily anywhere in the country. It is true that in contrast to their contemporary Australian counterparts, most of the remaining German-language publications in the United States do have their roots in the German press of the past and many are, indeed, direct descendants of newspapers founded in the nineteenth century. They are, however, no longer political, just as the Australian German press is no longer religious. And in neither country can the German press make any claim to be able to influence thought in the national community as a whole. For the American German-language press in particular, this is in sharp contrast to the important role it played in the past.

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