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Nils F:son Brown and the Decline of the Swedish-American Press, 1910-1940

Ulf Jonas Björk*

After its peak in the 1910s, the Swedish-language press in America began to decline rapidly. Between 1910 and 1940, the number of newspapers fell by 60 percent, from 51 to 20. Historians have thoroughly explored the reasons for the decline—the anti-immigrant sentiment produced by World War I, the Great Depression, and, above all, the end of unrestricted immigration to the United States—but little attention has so far been given to the response of the journalists who produced the newspapers.¹ This article attempts to provide such a perspective by focusing on the career of Nils F:son Brown (1886-1960), a journalist who entered the press at the height of its powers and left it in its twilight years.

In the course of a career that began in 1910 and ended in 1940, Brown gained extensive knowledge of Swedish-language journalism, working for seven newspapers in three states and one Canadian province. He saw, firsthand, the effects of World War I, the Depression, and the end of mass immigration. In the columns of his papers, Brown wrote often about the Swedish-American press, and after he left full-time work as a journalist, the veteran editor looked back on his career in an uncompromising autobiography. This insider's view thus reveals a great deal about how the Swedish-American press declined and how its editors reacted.

Nils F. Brown arrived in Minneapolis in the spring of 1910, and was fortunate enough to secure a position at the city's largest Swedish-language newspaper, *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, after waiting only a few weeks. He had chosen an auspicious moment to enter the Swedish-American press. According to the U.S. census taken that year, the number of Swedish-born immigrants stood at 660,000, more than ever before. These Swedish-Americans

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¹ *Ayer's Newspaper Directory*, 1910-50; Sture Lindmark, *Swedish America, 1914-1932* (Uppsala: Läromedelsförlagen, 1971), 227-28; Ulf Beijbom, "The Swedish Press," in Sally M. Miller, ed., *The Ethnic Press in the United States* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 385.

represented a huge potential readership for the Swedish-language newspapers, and it is no coincidence that the circulation these papers laid claim to was at a record level in 1910, totaling 500,000.²

Among the fifty-some weekly newspapers published in Swedish in America, Brown had chosen to come aboard one of the flagships. *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* claimed to reach 50,000 readers every week, and even if that figure may have been exaggerated, it is more than likely that *Posten* was one of the three largest papers, surpassed only by one or two of the Chicago weeklies. The Minneapolis paper was published by Swan J. Turnblad, a man whose keen sense of what appealed to readers had made *Posten* a financial success and its owner one of the few Swedish-American newspaper publishers to amass a fortune.³

The young immigrant hired by Turnblad was a new breed of Swedish-American journalist. Author and veteran journalist Ernst Skarstedt found himself forced to compete for newspaper positions with these newcomers a few years after Brown's arrival, and he disapprovingly characterized them as "a deluge of newly arrived students."⁴ The description certainly fit Brown, who had become a *student* in the then-Swedish sense of the word after graduating from *läroverk* (secondary school) in Uppsala in 1906, and the title summed up his life prior to coming to Minneapolis. The fall after he graduated from the *läroverk*, Nils Olof Fredrik Åhlén (the name Nils F:son Brown being an invention for life in America) had enrolled at Uppsala University with the intent of studying law, but after two semesters he interrupted his studies and went across the country to Göteborg to take courses at a business institute. After a year at the institute he was back at Uppsala for fall semester 1908, but again he lasted only two semesters before leaving again, this time to be conscripted into the army.⁵

Brown may have been lucky in securing a position on a Swedish-American newspaper, but such work did not necessarily result in personal prosperity and

² Nils F:son Brown autobiography, typewritten manuscript, Brown papers, University of Washington, 5; Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910. Vol. II: Population* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1913); *Ayer's*, 1910-50.

³ A. E. Strand, *A History of the Swedish-Americans of Minnesota*, Vol. I (Chicago: The Lewis Publishing Company, 1910), 302-04; Lawrence Hammerstrom, "The Swedish American Publishing Company Stockholders' Lawsuit Against Swan J. Turnblad," *Swedish Pioneer Historical Quarterly* (hereafter, SPHQ) 35 (1, 1984), 39-42; *Ayer's*, 1910.

⁴ Skarstedt to Conrad Skarstedt, 13 January 1915, Conrad Skarstedt papers, Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt, Göteborg, Sweden.

⁵ *Uppsala Universitets Katalog*, 1906-09; *Göteborgs Handelsinstituts Katalog*, 1907-08; "Tankar och reflexioner," *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* (hereafter, SAP), 9 October 1912, 9; *Svensk-amerikanska pressen och Svenska Journalistförbundet i Amerika* (Rock Island: Augustana Book Concern, 1923), 18.

prestige, as the new junior editor at *Posten* would find out. Looking back, Brown claimed that he soon felt "profound contempt" for *Posten* and its publisher. Some of the resentment undoubtedly stemmed from the fact that Turnblad, who was not a journalist himself and did not write for his paper, treated his staff as salaried employees rather than intellectual professionals. According to Brown, the publisher frequently dismissed the viewpoints of his editors with the remark that journalists were easy to replace, and the threat of dismissal also enabled the publisher to require long hours at low pay. The *Posten* staff worked every day of the week for a weekly total of 63 hours, and their salaries started at \$12 and ended, at least in Brown's case, at \$15.⁶

Still, for a young man starting out in Swedish-American journalism, *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* was an excellent training ground, for on its staff were two of Swedish-America's best and most experienced editors, Emil Meurling and Johan Person. While Meurling taught Brown the basics of newspaper work, Person, considered by Brown "the greatest of all Swedish-American journalists," instilled in the young editor the idea that Swedish-American journalism had a "mission" to enlighten and guide its readers.⁷

Eventually, not even the friendship and guidance of Meurling and Person were enough to keep Brown at *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*. In early 1913, he had decided to get married and asked Turnblad for a raise, but the publisher turned him down. Unbeknownst to Turnblad, however, Brown had been offered the editorship of *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* in Winnipeg, a position that would pay a weekly salary of \$25, \$10 more than at *Posten*; and, after Turnblad's refusal, he swiftly accepted that offer.⁸

The move to Canada changed Nils F. Brown's working conditions significantly, exposing him, for the first time, to the challenges and difficulties facing the majority of editors in the Swedish immigrant press. As he soon found out, the five-editor staff, huge circulation and excellent finances of *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* were all exceptional, and the ever-present economic problems, sole editor and barely 5,000 readers of *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* were far more typical of Swedish-language publishing in North America.⁹

⁶ Brown autobiography, 6-7.

⁷ Brown, "Tidningsveteranen Emil Meurling 70 år," *Svenska Amerikanaren Tribunen* (hereafter, *SAT*), 29 September 1938, 2; Brown autobiography, 11; Brown, "Svensk-amerikansk tidningspress," *Svea*, 5 November 1953, 4, 5.

⁸ Brown autobiography, 8-9; "Ur svensk-amerikansk press-historia," *Canada-Tidningen*; (hereafter, *CT*), 3 October 1940, 3.

⁹ *Forum*, 15 November 1919, 6; "En återblick," *SCT*, 20 November 1919, 2.

Since its start in 1894, the Winnipeg paper had led a tenuous life and gone through several owners and various names. True to that tradition, Brown's first six months as editor proved trying. The finances of the paper were dismal, and by summer 1913 *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* was more than \$6,000 in debt. The paper was saved by the appearance of P. M. Dahl, publisher of *Norrøna*, the Norwegian-language weekly in Winnipeg. He took over *Canada-Tidningen* in the summer of 1913 and set about to "reconstruct the business from the bottom up," issuing \$10,000 worth of new shares. Brown later credited Dahl with extricating the paper from a "financial swamp."¹⁰

Unfortunately, the tightening national economy, in the wake of the outbreak of World War I, dealt a blow to whatever hopes *Canada-Tidningen* had of getting its finances in order. Advertisers canceled ads or neglected to pay for them, and by early 1915, Brown told readers that the paper would have to "rely almost exclusively on subscription revenues."¹¹ Compounding the problem of falling revenue was a wartime-related rise in the costs of newsprint and production. In late 1917, increasing expenses forced Dahl to raise the price of the paper from \$1 to \$1.50, and the following summer he again resorted to issuing new shares to raise revenue. That step, and the end of the war a few months later, brightened *Canada-Tidningen's* financial prospects, and at the end of 1918, revenues were growing "slowly but surely," according to Dahl.¹²

Economic difficulties were but one consequence of the world war. Equally problematic were wartime restrictions on the press in general and foreign-language newspapers in particular. In early 1916, Brown responded to the repressive wartime atmosphere by dismissing, indignantly, accusations by a reader that his paper was pro-German, declaring it essentially neutral but with its sympathies on the Allied side. Soon Brown was having problems with the articles of one of his main contributors, Rudolf Einhardt, whose staunchly pro-German attitude gained the paper the attention of the government censors in Ottawa and resulted in a formal warning that the articles could put Brown in prison. Facing that threat, the editor on at least one occasion felt compelled to censor letters to the editor before publishing them, and in early 1918 he cautioned readers "not to touch on the current war at all." He also was shaken by a personal visit from the chief censor.¹³

¹⁰ "En återblick"; *SCT*, 10 December 1913, 4; Brown autobiography, 17; "Norsk är svensk tidningsveteran," *SAT*, 19 January 1939, 1, 2; Konstantin Fleming, "Från pionjärtiden," *SCT*, 19 December 1917, 1.

¹¹ *SCT*, 7 October 1914, 4; "Till våra prenumeranter," *SCT*, 24 February 1915, 4.

¹² "En återblick"; "Norsk är svensk"; "De som vilja smita," *SCT*, 19 July 1916, 4; *SCT*, 28 November 1917, 4; "Till våra landsmän i Canada!" *SCT*, 25 July 1918, 4.

¹³ "En egendomlig och oväntad anklagelse," *SCT*, 5 January 1916; "Hugget och stucket," *SCT*, 14 November 1918, 4; Brown autobiography, 20; Brown, "Nu kan det förtäljas!" *CT*, 23 February 1939,

On balance, however, the war had a much greater impact on the Swedish-American press than on its counterpart north of the border. Swedish-Canadian papers emerged from the war years relatively unaffected, but over the Swedish-language press in the United States the conflict was to cast a long shadow. In the wake of the war, the number of papers fell by almost 30 percent, from 50 to 35, the first substantial drop in the history of the press.¹⁴

In the fall of 1919, Brown and *Canada-Tidningen* parted ways. The editor had moved increasingly to the left politically during the war, and he claimed in his farewell editorial that his political differences with Dahl made it impossible for him to continue at the paper. The editor would later admit, however, that the claim about clashing with his publisher over politics was not true, and Brown's real reason for leaving was his desire to start his own publication. Two months after resigning as the editor of *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, he brought out *Forum*, "a radical intellectual organ for farmers and workers."¹⁵

Brown's eighteen months with that publication were an unhappy experience, showing that he had little aptitude for the business side of publishing. His magazine lost money almost from the start, and Brown's solution to that problem was disastrous. He used funds from an immigrant bank established by him and his partner to cover *Forum's* losses, and when the transactions were discovered in 1921, Brown was arrested on charges of embezzlement. The editor was saved only by the intervention of Dahl, who paid his bail and allowed Brown to use *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* for a successful appeal to his countrymen for money to repay his creditors. Brown himself had to sell everything he owned to contribute to the settling of *Forum's* debts, and he was also dismissed from the editorship of the magazine.¹⁶ Penniless and without full-time employment, Brown chose to leave Winnipeg in the late spring of 1921, moving back to Minneapolis in hopes of resuming his newspaper career.

After a few months of freelance work for *Svenska Canada-Tidningen* and *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*, Brown was presented with an opportunity for full-time employment in August, when *Svenska Kuriren* in Chicago offered him a

2, 5-6; *SCT*, 18 April 1917, 4; "Varen försikning!" *SCT*, 27 February 1918, 4; *SCT*, 17 October 1918, 4; "Norsk är svensk"; "En återblick."

¹⁴ Ayer's, 1918-26.

¹⁵ Brown autobiography, 25; *Forum*, 31 October 1919; "Tack och Farväl," *SCT*, 28 August 1919, 2.

¹⁶ Brown autobiography, 25-27; *Forum*, 15 November 1919, 1; *Forum*, 29 November 1919, 1; *Forum*, 1 February 1920, 3; *Forum*, 15 February 1920, 3; "En förklaring och ett bemötande," *SCT*, 5 May 1921, 4; "Till den svenska allmänheten," *SCT*, 7 April 1921, 4; "The Forum Publishing Co. Ltd's Cirkulär," *SCT*, 21 April 1921, 4; "En omtvistad insamling och en appell," *SCT*, 5 May 1921, 1.

position as assistant editor. Accepting, Brown once again found himself working for one of the large newspapers in Swedish-America, and he seemed to enjoy it thoroughly. Smaller than its hometown rivals, *Svenska Amerikanaren* and *Svenska Tribunen-Nyheter*, *Svenska Kuriren* circulated 40,000 copies in the 1920s. That was, essentially, as many as before the world war, and *Kuriren's* fortunes were typical of the major papers in the Swedish-language press, whose main experience of the war had been a slight drop in circulation. The failures during and immediately after the war years had overwhelmingly occurred among minor papers in communities with small Swedish populations. Not surprisingly, these papers were the least able to deal with rising production costs.¹⁷

Published by seventy-one-year-old Alexander J. Johnson, *Kuriren* was a feisty paper, with an editorial page respected and feared for its sharpness and wit. The new staff member admired Johnson's journalistic skills and liked his delight in controversy, expressed in Johnson's assurance to Brown that the paper's editors could "yell as much as you like, particularly at ministers and good templars, as long as you can prove what you have written is true."¹⁸ Beside Brown and Johnson, the *Kuriren* staff consisted of one other editor, Erik G. Westman, and the duty of filling most of the paper's columns fell on Westman and Brown. Often finding it hard to compete with the more numerous editors of *Svenska Amerikanaren* and *Tribunen-Nyheter*, the two *Kuriren* journalists at times resorted to bribing one of their colleagues at *Amerikanaren* with speakeasy drinks to obtain local news items.¹⁹

In the spring of 1923, Brown left Chicago to return once again to Minneapolis, where he had been offered to rejoin the staff of *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*. His new employer, Magnus Martinson, had bought *Posten* from Swan Turnblad in 1920, and Brown would always speak of him as "a decent man" in comparison with the paper's former publisher. Above all, Brown seemed to like that Martinson rarely interfered with editorial decisions and mostly delegated the responsibility to Emil Meurling. Working with his old friend as de facto chief suited Brown well, and he claimed that work at *Posten* "proceeded in the best atmosphere imaginable."²⁰

¹⁷ "Från Utsiktstornet," *SAP*, 15 June 1921, 9; "En ny medarbetare," *SCT*, 7 April 1921, 2; *Svenska Kuriren* (hereafter, *SK*), 4 August 1921, 10; Brown autobiography, 30, 15; *Ayer's*, 1915-26; Oliver Linder, "Svensk-amerikanska tidningspressen," in Karl Hildebrand and Axel Fredenholm, eds., *Svenskarna i Amerika* (Stockholm: Historiska förlaget, 1925), 187.

¹⁸ J. Oscar Backlund, *A Century of the Swedish-American Press* (Chicago: Swedish-American Newspaper Company, 1951), 34; Brown autobiography, 30.

¹⁹ Brown autobiography, 32-34.

²⁰ Brown autobiography, 36-40; Brown, "En tidnings saga," *Arbetaren*, 22 September 1927, 1; Brown, "Ur svensk-amerikansk press-historia"; *SAP*, 23 May 1923, 6; *SK*, 17 May 1923, 7; Marie-Louise Sallnäs, "Emil Meurling and Svenska Amerikanska Posten," *SPHQ* 32 (1, 1981): 53-55.

Unfortunately, it became clear after a few years that Magnuson lacked his predecessor's business acumen. By 1927 he had driven *Svenska Amerikanska Posten* close to bankruptcy and was forced to step down as publisher. His successor turned out to be Turnblad, which had immediate consequences for Brown, who found himself without employment. Although Brown claimed he left *Posten* rather than accept the salary reductions mandated by Turnblad, others associated with the paper maintained that Turnblad refused to keep Brown on the staff. It is difficult to believe that Brown voluntarily would have chosen unemployment, because no other openings for Swedish-American journalists were in evidence in Minneapolis at the time.²¹

Brown now felt the effects of the falling number of Swedish-American papers first hand, for by the late 1920s, larger papers began to join the ranks of failing publications. *Svenska Amerikanska Posten's* main Minneapolis rival, *Svenska Folkets Tidning*, folded the year Brown left Turnblad's paper. Two years later, the same fate befell Brown's former employer in Chicago, *Svenska Kuriren*. After holding relatively steady during the mid-20s, the number of weekly newspapers in Swedish was beginning to drop again toward the end of the decade.²²

Without prospects for a full-time position, Brown went through a difficult year. He secured a temporary editorship at *Arbetaren*, a New York Socialist weekly to which he had contributed freelance work since the early 1920s, but his tenure there only lasted a few weeks, and by the end of October 1927 he was back in Minneapolis. His source of income for the next several months was likely the publicity work he did for Svenska Amerika-Linjen, a Swedish steamship line.²³

In July 1929, Brown finally returned to full-time work in the Swedish-American press, when he accepted the position as editor of *Svenska Pressen*, a small weekly in Spokane, Washington. The northwest corner of the United States had a thriving Swedish community, concentrated to Spokane in the east and Seattle and Tacoma in the west, and it supported no less than four

²¹ SAP, 7 September 1927, 6; Sallnäs, 51; Brown, "En tidnings saga"; Brown autobiography, 34, 41, 53; Karl Hellberg to Ernst Skarstedt, 3 September 1927, Skarstedt papers, University of Washington; L. Gustafsson to Skarstedt, 15 October 1927; Ernst Skarstedt papers, Riksföreningen Sverigekontakt.

²² Oliver Linder, "The Swedish-American Press," in Erik G. Westman and E. Gustav Johnson, eds., *The Swedish Element in America* (Chicago, Swedish-American Biographical Society, 1931), 338; *Ayer's*, 1927-32.

²³ Brown autobiography, 28-29, 57-59; Thor Borg to Anna Lenah Elgström, 14 November 1927; Brown to Elgström, 13 December 1927, Elgström papers, Royal Library, Stockholm; Arvid Skoglund to J.G.R. Banér, 8 August 1928, Banér papers, University of Michigan; *Svenska Tribunen-Nyheter* (hereafter, *STN*), 1 April 1936, 1.

newspapers in Swedish. *Svenska Journalen* and *Svenska Pacific-Tribunen* in Seattle were the largest, circulating about 9,000 copies each, followed by *Svenska Pressen* with 3,000 and *Puget Sound Posten* in Tacoma with 1,600.²⁴

Brown was soon to find out, however, that the newspaper business had grown precarious as the 1920s were coming to an end. The 1931 New Year's greeting in *Pressen* mentioned that "the difficulties have been numerous" during 1930, and his autobiography characterized the newspaper as a "hopeless" business venture. Allan Nelson, the publisher who had hired Brown, soon gave up, and the printing firm that took over the paper sold it to Brown and *Pressen's* advertising manager, Gustaf Karlstén. The new owners had no greater success than Nelson, and Brown began to look for employment elsewhere.²⁵ In January 1931, he moved on to Seattle and *Svenska Journalen*.

It was in Seattle that Brown was to feel the full impact of the Great Depression on the Swedish-American press. As he looked back at 1931 he thought it had been "the hardest year we have ever lived through" due to the effect of the economic crisis on business.²⁶ Although he claimed in 1932 that *Journalen* was in fact gaining in circulation, his autobiography acknowledges that widespread unemployment made it hard for subscribers to pay for the paper.²⁷ Under these circumstances and with his dismal experience as a publisher of *Forum* and *Svenska Pressen*, it is puzzling why Brown and a partner in early 1934 decided to lease *Journalen* from the publishing company that owned it. Not surprisingly, Brown had no better luck the third time he tried his hand at Swedish-language publishing, and by August 1934 he was forced to admit that he did not know how things would turn out. The owners decided the matter for him when they terminated the leasing arrangement in early 1935, noting that "the grim times and the resulting economic pressure" called for a change. As the lease ended, so did Brown's connection with *Svenska Journalen*.²⁸

He had grown to like Seattle, however, and wanted to stay, and he was given that opportunity when *Svenska Tribunen-Nyheter* in Chicago offered him a position as its Seattle representative. His new position required him not only to write a weekly column and contribute items from Seattle and the West Coast but

²⁴ *Ayer's*, 1929-33; Brown autobiography, 64; *Svenska Pressen* (hereafter, *SP*), 31 July 1929, 4.

²⁵ Brown autobiography, 62-65; *SP*, 31 December 1930, 4; *SP*, 7 May 1930, 4; *SP*, 4 February 1931, 4; *Ayer's*, 1929-30.

²⁶ "Vid årsskiftet," *Svenska Journalen* (hereafter, *SJ*), 31 December 1931, 8.

²⁷ *SJ*, 29 December 1932, 4; Brown autobiography, 70.

²⁸ Brown to Harry Fabbe, 16 August 1834, Fabbe papers, University of Washington; *SJ*, 7 February 1835, 2; Brown autobiography, 70.

also to solicit subscriptions and advertising, but that apparently did not bother him.²⁹

Although Brown himself had found employment, the impact of the Depression on the Swedish-American press continued to be felt in Seattle. By the end of 1935, *Svenska Journalen* had absorbed first *Oregon-Posten* in Portland and then *Puget Sound Posten*, changing its name to *Svenska Posten* in the process and making Seattle and Spokane the only cities in the Pacific Northwest with Swedish-American newspapers. A merger on the national level was more worrisome to Brown, for it entailed the absorption of *Svenska Tribunen-Nyheter* by *Svenska Amerikanaren* in the spring of 1936. His relationship with the new *Svenska Amerikanaren Tribunen* was never good, and it soured for good after a change of editors in the spring of 1939. The new management published fewer and fewer of Brown's pieces, and after a few months it abolished its Seattle position altogether.³⁰

The disappearance of *Tribunen-Nyheter* meant that Chicago had only one large Swedish-language newspaper left in the late 1930s, and as the decade came to an end, a final blow was dealt to the press in another of Swedish-America's major cities. Within two years, Minneapolis lost its last two weekly newspapers in Swedish. The smaller, *Minnesota Stats Tidning*, ceased publication in 1939, and the following year saw the demise of the paper that had figured so prominently in Brown's career, *Svenska Amerikanska Posten*.³¹

For Brown, the loss of his position with *Svenska Amerikanaren Tribunen* spelled the end of his full-time career in the Swedish-American press. Once again, he turned to freelance work, primarily for his old friend P. M. Dahl at *Canada-Tidningen*, and he also sent articles to newspapers in Sweden. Dahl did, in fact, offer him the editorship of *Canada-Tidningen*, but Brown declined to move back to Canada. Instead, he decided to look outside the press for employment, and in December 1940 he moved to Los Angeles and enrolled at an institute for "drugless healing" that a former newspaper colleague had started. After a few months of study earned him a physiotherapist's degree, the ex-editor began working as a masseur in Hollywood. It was not a job that Brown liked, but he claimed it paid better than Swedish-American journalism, and his new career lasted until the early 1950s. After living off his savings for a few years,

²⁹ *STN*, 6 February 1935, 1; Brown autobiography, 71.

³⁰ *Puget Sound Posten*, 13 December 1835, 1; Brown autobiography, 73; *SAT*, 23 March 1938, 1.

³¹ Lilly Setterdahl, *Swedish-American Newspapers* (Rock Island, Ill.: Augustana College, 1981); *SAT*, 28 May 1936, 1; "Ur svensk-amerikansk presshistoria."

Brown left California and the United States in the spring of 1953 and returned to Sweden, where he died in October 1960.³²

As Brown spent the last 20 years of his life away from the newspaper offices of the Swedish-American press, that press continued to decline. Between 1940 and 1950, the number of weekly newspapers in Swedish sank to 15, and the year of Brown's death, that figure was down to seven. Only *Svenska Amerikanaren Tribunen* in Chicago and *Svea* in Worcester, Massachusetts, remained among the giants of the past, circulating 27,000 and 30,000 copies, respectively. In New York City, *Nordstjernan* claimed a circulation of 8,000, and in Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Austin, Texas, dedicated veterans of the press were putting out four more Swedish-language papers, varying in size between 3,000 and 1,500.³³

Not surprisingly, the decline of the Swedish-American press affected not only Nils F. Brown's career but also his view of that press. When Brown first discussed the Swedish-language press he was at *Svenska Canada-Tidningen*, and the Swedish-language newspapers of North America were vital and growing, nourished by a continuing influx of new immigrants. To Brown, the main goal of this prosperous press should be preserving Swedish culture in America, engaging, in the case of *Canada-Tidningen*, in "a serious and sincere attempt to spread Swedish culture and maintain the language of our fathers."³⁴ Characteristic of these years of vitality of the immigrant group and its press was a stress on the newspaper as a voice for the Swedish immigrants in a multiethnic society. In 1916 Brown claimed that the obligation of the newspapers was to "fight fearlessly for the Swedish cause," and he noted that the welfare of the immigrant community depended on its press "speaking its mind, where it thinks there is something which harms our countrymen or impedes their progress in the new country."³⁵

Brown's view of the Swedish immigrant press was, not surprisingly, changed by his gradual move to the political left in the late 1910s. In 1918, he described the ideal newspaper as "independent," "liberal and democratic," "fearless," and open to opposing views. Moreover, it should "speak for the people against capitalism" and be "sympathetic to all popular movements," such

³² "Red. Nils F:son Brown avlägger läkarexamen," *CT*, 22 May 1941, 1; "Hört och hänt," *Svenska Posten*, 12 October 1960, 4; Brown autobiography, 28, 77-78; Brown to Elgström, 15 August 1950; "Vår medarbetare," *CT*, 25 January 1940, 2; Brown to Vilhelm Moberg, 11 November 1951, Moberg Papers, Royal Library; *Göteborgs-Posten*, 2 April 1953; *Dagens Nyheter*, 5 October 1960, 23; "Nils F:son Brown avliden," *CT*, 13 October 1960.

³³ *Ayer's*, 1940-60.

³⁴ "Allvarets ord," *SCT*, 1 October 1913, 4.

³⁵ "Till våra prenumeranter," *SCT*, 23 February 1916, 4.

as labor, peace, and temperance. Still, he retained the stress on its function within the immigrant community, noting that the paper must maintain “the Swedish mentality” and be the “best friend” of Swedish community organizations.³⁶

In the 1920s, Brown's political leanings made his opinion of the Swedish-American press largely critical. Discussing the lot of the editors in *Canada-Tidningen* in 1921, Brown characterized the members of his profession as a “proletariat” who enjoyed little prestige and were badly paid. Brown went on to accuse readers of being indifferent and newspaper publishers of caring only about revenues.³⁷ Brown's criticism was even sharper in *Arbetaren*, not surprising in light of that paper's socialist perspective. In an essay in *Landkänning*, *Arbetaren's* annual, Brown accused the Swedish-American newspapers of being political reactionaries, and a comment on the 1924 election made the charge that many papers were venal, selling their editorial viewpoints for political advertising. Moreover, the press was “Americanizing” the immigrants by supplying readers with “the worst kind of spiritual muck” rather than seeking to preserve Swedish culture by promoting Swedish-American literature.³⁸

Still, the press criticized by Brown during the 1920s was seen, for all its fault, as a prosperous immigrant institution. When that prosperity waned during the economic crisis of the 1930s, Brown's views changed once again. In editorials in *Svenska Journalen* in 1931, Brown reiterated, essentially, what he had written in *Canada-Tidningen* almost 20 years earlier: the press was “not only to function as a connecting link between the Swedish-born out here, but also to preserve Swedishness in America . . . [and] be a link between the culture which we once left behind and the one in which we now live.”³⁹ What threatened this basic purpose was that newspapers pressed by hard economic times were introducing English in their columns in an attempt to attract the children of the original immigrants, but that, to Brown, was a “betrayal,” because preserving the Swedish language was essential to preserving Swedishness.⁴⁰

By 1938 he had grown pessimistic, noting in articles in *Canada-Tidningen* that Swedish-language newspapers “no longer could expect days of glory but in many cases are fighting a difficult and evidently hopeless battle” because of the world war, rising production costs, decreasing immigration to America, and

³⁶ Brown, “Pressens uppgift,” *SCT*, 17 April 1918, 1, 6.

³⁷ Brown, “Min egen spalt,” *SCT*, 12 May 1921, 2; Brown, “Min egen spalt,” *SCT*, 9 June 1921, 2.

³⁸ Brown, “Svensk-amerikansk litteratur: Hvarför den ej kunnat blomstra,” *Landkänning*, 1923, 18;

“Valet och svensk-amerikanska prässen,” *Arbetaren*, 4 December 1924, 4.

³⁹ *SJ*, 12 February 1931, 4.

⁴⁰ *SJ*, 26 March 1931, 9.

“general Americanization and a wilting interest in things Swedish.”⁴¹ Defining the function of the press in these somber circumstances, Brown considered the maintenance of ties with Sweden the most important part because a cultural heritage could not be preserved without contact with the old homeland. Next to it was the function as a link between Swedish immigrants across the nation, vital to the survival of the immigrant community. Brown thought that the Swedish-American press had realized the importance of this function by taking a wider perspective and increasingly defining the community as national rather than local. Although the series urged immigrant newspapers to adapt to changing times, Brown reiterated his opposition to compromising on the issue of language.⁴²

The old editor took one last look at the Swedish immigrant press in a lecture broadcast by the Swedish radio corporation in 1953. Blending historical statistics with personal anecdotes, Brown listed the surviving papers and credited them with preserving Swedish in America, in contrast to Swedish-American churches and organizations, which long ago had made the change to English. Concluding, he was still unwilling to admit that the days of the press were numbered. Although he had long since retired from the Swedish-American press, the veteran journalist remained one of its staunchest supporters.⁴³

⁴¹ Brown, “Skall den svenska pressen i Amerika leva?” *CT*, 24 February 1938, 1.

⁴² Brown, “Skall den svenska pressen i Amerika leva?” (articles in *CT*, 3 March 1938, 1; 10 March 1938, 1; 17 March 1938, 1, 4.)

⁴³ Brown, “Svensk-amerikansk tidningspress.”